

The book cover features a woman with dark hair and a black choker, looking upwards with her arms raised. She is wearing a dark, patterned corset. Swirling blue smoke or mist surrounds her, and a full moon is visible in the top right corner against a dark, cloudy night sky.

T.L. MITCHELL

DARK  
OF  
KNIGHT



KNIGHT SERIES

# *Dark of kNight*

By  
T.L Mitchell

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"I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who overcomes his enemies."  
*Aristotle, In Stobaeus, Florilegium*

## *PREFACE*

I knew one day I would reach this place in my life; I just didn't realize it would be so soon. Love, I suppose, has no rules and yields to no boundaries. Never knowing when it will strike.

Never before would I have imagined I could love someone as deeply as I love him. I would fight for him. I would die for him. This is what I believe. This is the Lycan way. Yes, I could say I love this man more than my own life. It was odd that I would fall in love with someone who needed me as much as I needed him.

My world as I knew it stopped when my father died. I wasn't ready to lose anyone else again. I couldn't bear the loss of the one who is so dear to my heart. He is my angel and my love. If I were to lose him, then my life would end. I knew I would die.

I stood in the rose garden, admiring a beautiful pure white rose who stood out among the rest. Her name was Peace. Never before had I seen such a delicate rose. Her scent was by far more fragrant than her neighboring roses, drawing me in like the scent of my lover.

The fog settled down upon the ground, flowing silently through the rose garden. I reached my hand through the fog to collect my prize. To collect my peace.

## *ONE*

*Grief* is an intense sorrow and immense sadness especially because of a death. Was this the feeling I was having this very minute? Still holding the cell phone to my head, I was breathless. The dull feeling that ran down my spine into every nerve ending within my body demanded total control. My body, mind and emotions yielded to the control of this numbing power. A solid brick wall blocked the waves of nerves and emotions in my body. My heart pounded loudly, commanding respect from this new rush of control my mind demanded.

“Julie? Julie?” I couldn’t speak, fearing the control of the numbing power. My eyes blankly stared at the television, watching the colors and images, but I had no comprehension of the subject.

“Julie!” The voice drew me back to the reluctant reality I dared not accept. The reality, which told me that my father had just died, and I needed to return home immediately. My choice would have been to hear something familiar like, “*Your father is doing just great. He would love to see you.*” The *true* reality was I would never hear those words again. “Yes, I’m here.”

“Look, dear, I have made all the arrangements for you. The next flight is in three hours. I will have someone to pick you up at the airport when you land. Do not worry about a thing. Everything is going to be all right.” The voice of Thomas Maxwell firmly stated.

My father’s best friend and business partner for over twenty-five years had no emotion in his voice. Thomas stood beside my father through thick and thin. For my own reasons, I never trusted him. Thomas was a man of great influence and stature. I guess since he was one of the best attorneys money could buy, proving his worth when he walked into a courtroom appeared effortless to him. His mere presence changed the atmosphere in the courtroom, primarily showing he was the epitome of power and control. His air of arrogance made me wince whenever I was in the same room with him.

“I... I understand. I will be there. Thomas,” I took a deep breath, “what happened?”

“This is not the proper time to go over it, Jewels.” The strain in his voice unnerved me.

“I want to know,” I replied sharply.

“We were on a hunting trip. It was an animal attack. I am not going to cover the details at this time, but by the time we reached him it was too late.” His voice broke off in a soft sound of remorse. *Animal attack*, the words lingered through my mind.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can.” I flipped the phone closed and sat motionless until the sickness in the pit of my stomach was calm. Slowly standing, I forced myself to the closet. I grabbed the suitcase from the top shelf and started throwing clothes into it. At that point, I didn’t care if it was neatly packed. I grabbed anything I may need and tried to place it in the one large bag.

My thoughts ran wild, haunting and terrifying images clouded my mind. The heart inside me pulled in different directions as I thought of my father. The only choice that remained was to go back home to Spring Place. The old saying is there is no place like home. I wasn’t sure the statement held true for me anymore.

Spring Place is a small little town about eight miles from Dalton, Georgia and approximately thirty miles from Chattanooga, Tennessee. The backdrop of this small town is the beautiful Appalachian Mountains and lush woodlands of the Chattahoochee National Forest. The main attraction has always been the Fort Mountain located in the Chattahoochee National Forest close to the Cohutta Wilderness area. The legends and myths surrounding the mysterious 855-foot long rock wall attracted a fair share of visitors over the years.

My father, the renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Martin Knight, was my world and the best father that a girl could have. He was always supportive, even when I decided to attend college in Virginia rather than Georgia. I needed the change. The change I needed wasn’t from my father, but from his shadow. Living a life as Dr. Martin Knight’s daughter had its challenges. Growing up in wealth wasn’t as easy as most people believed. All I ever wanted was to be normal. Moving to another state where no one knew me gave me the chance to be just another girl. I wanted to make my way through life without the favors, which were due to my father.

In my heart, I couldn’t accept the truth that my father was dead. He couldn’t die, not my father. He was the only person I had. Fear and emotions ran spasms through my heart. Tears welled into my eyes as I slammed the suitcase shut. I took a deep breath and pulled the pain back, forcing it into my own little “Pandora’s Box”, where it could be controlled and managed.

Surprisingly, our relationship had always been close. I was probably the only girl in high school whose girlfriends would rather come over and visit her father rather than her. All my friends thought he was cool and ever so handsome, in a Harrison Ford type of way. They were all in awe of his appearance, despite the fact he was twenty years their senior. Dad loved it. He had become a regular ladies’ man in his own eyes, senior idol as I called it.

Martin’s popularity wasn’t only with the women. His biggest prize came when he discovered a new technique that reduced scar tissue to a minimum. Several years ago, a family brought their daughter to my father seeking help. A wild animal attacked her while she was biking in the Chattahoochee National Forest. The attack left her disfigured. After a few surgeries, the girl’s face had returned to normal. There was no visible scarring left. Dad’s career as a plastic surgeon exploded. He became the most sought after plastic surgeon in the southeastern part of the United States. People from all over came to him for different reasons. Some people had severe disfigurements and others for their own vanity. No matter what the case, each person was satisfied with the results.

Still lost in my thoughts, I made my way through the crowded Atlanta airport. My thoughts kept me preoccupied most of the trip, vaguely remembering if the plane ride was smooth or not. In some small way, happiness filled my heart to see my friends and extended family.

Returning home to Spring Place would normally be a nice retreat from the college life in Virginia. It was nice in Virginia. The mountains and the view of the Blue Ridge Parkway in the fall are exceptionally pleasant. The beautiful kaleidoscopes of fall colors in the mountains are as breathtaking as the ones back home. City smog or even salty sea air of the beaches is no match for the smell of the fresh clean mountainous air. No, it’s not bad in Virginia, but there is no place like home.

“Julie! Julie!” I heard a voice through the crowd of people walking through the airport.

Looking in the direction of the voice, I saw a familiar face. Casey Maxwell, her hand raised and waving in the air. She looked great. Her long blond hair accented her tall slender and tanned body well. I waved back and headed toward her through the crowd. Casey had always been my best friend. We grew up together here. It was good to see her.

“Hey.” I embraced her welcoming arms.

“Hey...” Her arms wrapped around me tightly. “Dad arranged for a limo to pick you up.”

“Casey...” When I sighed, her perky voice cut me off before I had the chance to protest.

“I know, I told him you would be pissed. So I convinced him I’d pick you up.”

“How’d you do that? You know how Thomas does everything.”

“Yeah, I told him I’d join you in Virginia this fall for my last semester in college. He threw a fit and told me which plane you were on, and what time to pick you up.”

“Ha!” I found that very amusing. “The only attorney I know that has never lost a case except to his own daughter.” We both laughed as I managed to find my suitcase.

July and Georgia hot summer days go hand in hand. The temperature hovered close to ninety-eight degrees. I’d forgotten how warm it could be in Atlanta in the middle of July. I heard the *beep-beep* of a car alarm and noticed the new set of keys in Casey’s hand. Nice, I thought. What did she have to do to get this one? A brand new black Mercedes Benz AMG55 two-door convertible, just Casey’s style, waited for us in the parking garage. I looked at her and rolled my eyes.

“So when did you get this?” I rested back into the fresh smelling leather seat.

“Last week. Dad bought it as an early graduation present. Like it?”

“Yes, it’s nice.”

“Jewels, I’m really sorry about your Dad. You know...”

I cut her off in mid-sentence.

“Thanks, Casey, but I really can’t talk about this right now. Okay?” I preferred not let my hopes go. Not just yet. “How’s Charlotte?”

“Mom’s doing fine.” Her eyebrows drew together in a frown. “She says you’ll stay with us.”

It sounded like more of a dictate than a request. I glanced at her and tried to smile. I loved them dearly, but I really wanted to be by myself.

“No, I want to stay at the house,” I pleaded. My eyes traveled down then I looked toward the front of the car.

“But, Dad said...”

“Casey, I really want to stay at the house.”

“Then, I’ll stay with you.” Her pink shiny lips parted in a smile showing off her perfectly beautiful white teeth. She reached over and patted me on my knee. “You are my best friend and the closest thing I have to a sister. You are family, remember?”

“Yes, I know.” Our families were close and we had always been together. The Maxwell family became my father’s largest supporter when my mother died in childbirth.

Charlotte spent as much time helping my Dad with me as she did with her own newborn Casey. Throughout the years, Casey and I were inseparable. The statement held very true especially when our fathers decided to go on their trips. For the most part, I would spend a few weeks with Casey, being spoiled by her mother and abused by her obnoxious older brother.

“How’s Daniel?”

Casey smiled. “Well, he’s doing great. He is totally involved in some project that he’s been working on for over a year.”

“Is he still in Scotland?”

“Yeah, it seems that business venture he and Martin went into is paying off.”

“Didn’t he major in Bio something?”

“Bio-genetic engineering.”

“Yeah. Does he still...”

“Look like a rich nerd?” She glanced toward me with humor filled eyes.

I wrinkled up my nose, indicating my remembrance of her gangly brother.

Casey laughed at my expression and shook her head.

“No, actually he looks pretty good. I guess something changed about him between graduating college and taking on this business venture.”

Daniel Maxwell, I wondered how much he had changed. It had been over four years since I last had seen him. He was always the tall gangly dark haired boy, who never fit in with the rest of his family. His sister, the flamboyance of beauty, his mother absolutely gorgeous and Dad, well, as arrogant as Thomas was, he was somewhat handsome in his rugged way. I remembered Daniel as the boy who was very tall and clumsy. I couldn’t help but wonder what this ugly duckling had become. My thoughts drifted out of place when we turned off the main road, and headed down the long wooded driveway toward what I recognized as Casey’s home.

“Hey, I ...” I began.

“It’s okay. I thought I would stop by the house first so I could pick up a few things.” She smiled. “Besides, Mom would be disappointed. I should tell you she is expecting you for dinner. She has worked all day on your favorite dish.”

My eyes widened glancing at Casey in disbelief. The shock of Charlotte cooking was almost as big of a surprise as Daniel escaping his ugly duckling stage. Everyone knew Charlotte’s expertise in the kitchen, but Thomas demanded the best life for his family. Maybe a little too much; hiring a cook wasn’t on Charlotte’s top list of life’s benefits.

“Lasagna?” I guessed. Only Charlotte could make my favorite dish to perfection. Humorous images flashed before my eyes of Charlotte slaving over the dish in a hot kitchen.

Casey’s smile broadened into a laugh. “I know. She has been fussing over it all day. She wants it to be perfect.”

I nodded and laughed with her. “It always is.”

Pulling up to the house, we rounded the driveway toward the garage. Casey pulled her car behind Charlotte’s white Lexus. We got out the car and walked through the open garage to the side door entrance into the house. I had almost forgotten the size of the house. The serenity of the wooded area elegantly hid the large two-story home. The dark wood trim accented the expensive paintings that hung on the white walls. I inhaled deeply, savoring the familiar smell. The rich aroma of the lasagna sauce, which included tomatoes, garlic and oregano, filled the air. Casey grabbed my hand, distracting me from the pleasant aroma and pulled me through the house.

“Mom?” She called out as we walked around the corner of the wall.

A tall glass window overlooked a beautiful rose garden. Leaning closer to window, I looked down on the brilliant mixture of rich reds, yellows, pinks and white foliage. It had to be the most breathtaking sight I had ever seen.

“Mom did that.” Casey took notice and stepped back toward me. “She said she had to find something to do. It makes her happy, so Dad doesn’t say too much. It’s her project.

Did you know she has started a rose and garden club?”

“No.” I said surprised.

Casey smiled again and we walked down the two steps to the open living room. The spacious home was exactly as I remembered. The large open living room was decorated with light creams and browns which complemented the leather sectional sofa against the dark hard wood floors.

Charlotte walked around the corner, coming from the kitchen, her face brightened to a smile when she saw me. It was good to be home, I thought.

“Julie!” she exclaimed with opened arms.

I walked toward her and into her embrace. Charlotte’s beauty still remained youthful. Her blond-colored, shoulder length hair framed her oval face. The brown eyes showed the sorrow of the news I refused to accept. Her slim body embraced mine and held me tight, allowing her motherly love to wash over me. She pushed me back to have a better look.

“How are you doing?” Her motherly tone brought waves of warmth to my heart. Her face showed the concern that I didn’t want to admit. Her eyes pierced mine for the truth, knowing the pain I felt inside. I had always considered Charlotte to be like a mother to me, and this was one of those times I did need her.

“I’m all right.” Determined not to let anything break my hold on my emotions, I had no choice but to lie. Telling her the truth would open up the pain I didn’t want to share.

“It’s okay.” Her motherly arms wrapped around me again. “I understand. We will talk later. I have made your favorite.” The bright excitement in her voice brought a smile to my lips.

“I can smell it.” I returned the hug, enjoying the warmth of her embrace.

“Did you have a good flight?”

“I guess so.” Funny, I thought, I don’t even remember the flight.

“Good. Well, get cleaned up and we will have dinner in an hour. Everyone should be here. Casey can show you to your room.” She placed kiss on my forehead and then turned back toward the kitchen.

“Mom,” Casey called out. “Jewels wanted to stay at the house and I said I would stay with her.”

Charlotte turned around to face Casey. Her eyes met mine momentarily then returned to Casey’s with a crease on her forehead. “I...” she paused as if carefully considering, then deciding it was not a good idea. The expression on her face softened and then she reached out, taking my hand into hers. “I would rather you stayed here. It ...” she paused again, and cautiously chose her words. “It would be better for you, I think. You don’t need to be in that house all alone.”

“I won’t,” I insisted. “I have Casey.” I forced out a reassuring smile.

“Yes, but...” she stopped, staring more intently. “Okay. But you promise me you both will be back here for dinner every evening. I mean it.” Her glance was stern, much like the one I often had witnessed on Thomas’s face.

A smile crossed my lips, nodding to Casey whose excitement flooded the room. Her excitement resulted from spending time away from the watchful eyes of her parents. Anyone could tell she was bored to death.

“Great!” her high pitched voice cheered. Charlotte glanced at Casey, and the stern look returned.

“I mean it!” Charlotte snapped.

“Okay, Mom. Don’t worry. Geesh! I promise we’ll be here.”

Charlotte’s eyes traveled from Casey back to me. With a sigh, she turned and walked toward the kitchen.

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Charlotte cooked the lasagna to perfection, simmering the sauce for hours before she baked it. The end result was a mouthwatering melody of delight. The calm feelings of being surround by family swept over me. Charlotte’s expression turned to relief when she noticed how I had slouched in my chair. Although, I knew she had been watching me, it was funny when she tried to hide her glances. My appetite had faded earlier, but once the taste of the food hit my tongue, the rest of my body agreed. A few quizzical smiles passed across the quiet dinner. Her face softened into a smile when she returned to her plate. Of course, it was Casey who brought on the onslaught of chatter about boyfriends and college life. With an occasional glance toward Charlotte, Thomas otherwise remained silent and listened to the girl talk.

Through with the inquiries, Thomas cleared his throat and we all looked up from our plates. When Thomas Maxwell speaks, everyone listens. His eyes shifted to Charlotte whose hand immediately went to her husband’s arm. Her gentle eyes pleaded with him. Thomas’s black eyebrows drew together when he looked into the beautiful eyes of his wife. Looking down into his plate, he cleared his throat once again. My heart dropped to the pit of my stomach when his eyes met mine. I no longer felt the need to continue to eat. The room fell silent, primarily because everyone knew the next words that would come from his mouth. When he opened his mouth, I heard a soft, “Thomas?” escape from Charlotte’s barely moving lips. The words came out in a breathless whisper. After being sorely corrected, Thomas frowned slightly and then gently patted her hand.

“I cannot imagine why my son is late. He should have been here by now.” He finally retorted.

“He called and said he would be a little late. There had been a flight delay.” Charlotte imposed. “He should be here any time.”

The words no sooner escaped her mouth than we heard the door open. Everyone looked up in surprise as Casey jumped and looked toward her parents. Her eyes widened with excitement. She hadn’t seen her brother in almost three years. She bolted from the table, sliding the chair against the fine polished wooden floor. I could hear the gasp in her parents’ breath when she sprang from the table and dashed out the large formal dining room. The sound of her footsteps running through the hall suddenly stopped short.

“Daniel!” her voice shrilled.

Low murmurings of voices came from the next room, babbling Casey and a deeper voiced individual. Casey appeared first as every eye focused on the entranceway waiting patiently for the expected quest. Bright eyed and full of joy, she dragged her brother into everyone’s view.

My eyes widened when he came into full sight. I hadn't seen Daniel since I left for college four years ago. After finishing his four-year degree, he moved to Scotland to finish his studies and begin research, working intently on a project he and my father had begun. His head remained down when he walked into the room, but anyone could see the change without even looking into his face. The first thing I noticed was his dark black hair. He had let it grow a little, trimmed neat and clean on the sides. Charlotte stood to embrace her long lost son. When he looked up to greet his mother, my breath froze. Casey was right. Daniel did *look* different. His smile broadened when he reached for the arms of his mother to embrace her. Stepping back, he gave a glance to his father who sat rigid in his chair. An odd static filled the air when father and son passed a greeting nod. His eyes fell upon me.

The gangly boy that I once knew had disappeared. I stared in disbelief. His long dark eyelashes accented dark brown eyes. His eyebrows were heavier than I remembered. Nevertheless, the difference was very distinct. Daniel had a certain mystery about him. The smooth and defined facial structures were only complemented by the tightened jaw line. My eyes drifted from his jaw line to his perfectly smooth lips. I couldn't help but notice the taut and well-built body that strained the threads of his blue polo shirt "Jewels?"

Warm blood rushed to my cheeks. Standing before me was a person who I had known all my life, yet I barely recognized this beautiful creation. Daniel was, without a doubt in my mind, utterly gorgeous. My mouth opened, but no words escaped.

"I told you he looked good." Casey shot in.

My face grew hotter when I realized everyone's eyes settled on me. Breaking free from my humiliation, I forced myself to clear my throat.

"Daniel?"

"Jewels, look at you." Daniel moved toward me.

My heart raced and my hands trembled. His outstretched arms invited a hug. I tried to stand up and had to reach quickly to catch my glass when I clumsily tipped it over. He reached for me all the same and folded his arms around me. Daniel's arms held me in a tight embrace making it almost difficult to breathe. I could have almost killed myself when I trembled in his arms. Daniel felt the slight tremor running through me. Pulling me closer, he tightened his muscular arms around me. I nearly fainted from the feel of his hard body so close to mine.

"You look great. Really, I mean beautiful."

White teeth gleamed through his seductive smile. I realized when the little specks of stars danced in front of my eyes, I wasn't breathing. I inhaled a quick breath.

"You too." It was all I could manage to say.

I wanted to reach over to the table, pick up the knife and stab myself from the way I sounded. My embarrassment rose to a new level when laughter erupted around the table. Even Thomas spared me no pain when he laughed.

"I mean," I tried to salvage a bit of pride in the situation. "You really have changed." Still the tone in my voice couldn't hide my obvious attraction to Daniel.

"Thanks. I am sorry to hear about your Dad. I can only imagine how..." he stopped short when Charlotte and Casey both inhaled a loud quick breath. Looking toward Charlotte, her expression turned into a very hard "*don't do that*" motherly glare. His eyes met mine again, seeing the painful expression cloud my face, he left the sentence unfinished. "It is good to see you, really."

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After dinner, Casey drove me back to my house. With a stomach full of lasagna, not to mention a long and very emotionally exhausting day, I was tired. Even the gorgeous new Daniel couldn't hold my attention very long. The invisible box remained tightly closed while I reflected on the previous hours.

We entered the house and it was as I remembered. The high dark wood beam ceilings of the home complemented the large glass wall on the south side of the house. The smell of my Dad's cologne still lingered in the air. The huge rock electric fireplace complemented the wood interior.

The memories flooded my mind of the Christmas tree many years ago. The presents, my friends and me, laughing while we sat around the tree and opened presents. I recalled the beauty of the fire that once burned in the fireplace that now sat empty and quiet. No crackling flames and sparks. No quiet hum while the fire blazed upward.

Casey brushed against my side, taking my hand in hers. Her eyes carried a slight twinkle. But, hidden behind those eyes, I knew were conflicting thoughts. Casey never could keep her emotions from showing on her face.

"Come with me. I have something to show you." She directed me toward the garage. My curiosity had the best of me before she even turned on the lights. Suddenly she stopped and turned to me. She smirked a grin like the cat that ate the canary. She pressed her hands together in a prayer-like fashion. "Please don't get upset, okay?" I nodded and she stepped aside.

My father's silver Jaguar was first in view. It really wasn't until my eyes fell upon a silver sportier car beside his daunting one, a big red bow on the hood, that my mouth fell open.

"Martin bought this a few weeks ago. It appeared he and my father planned on a shopping trip for cars. It's your graduation present. He said something about he was tired of you driving around that tatty old Mustang." That tatty old Mustang was my favorite. My father knew how I felt about the extravagance of money. All I ever wanted was a normal life with a normal career, something with purpose. Not necessarily to be the best plastic surgeon, but do something meaningful to help people or save lives. I wanted to find my purpose in this life. The smooth paint cooled my fingertips. Well, it was a nice looking car. Besides being a sports car, it was a convertible sports car, much to my satisfaction.

"What is it?" I opened the door and claimed the driver's seat.

"It's a Mitsubishi Eclipse Spyder. He knew that you would be upset if he bought you what *he* wanted." I could tell by the way she stressed the word he, my father probably had a more expensive car in mind. "He knew you loved sporty cars, so he kind of compromised with himself. Do you like it?"

"Yes." My eyes dropped and so did my heart. Dad always spoiled me when he shouldn't.

"Hey, it's late. Let's get some rest. We have plenty of time to talk tomorrow." Casey knew that I was weakening. She knew my box would unravel soon enough, exploding like a volcano. So away we went upstairs.

Nestled in my bed, I closed my eyes closed while waiting for sleep to follow. I heard only hear the silence when my body drifted deeper into the slumber of the night. Quietly I drifted until no more sounds were heard.

## TWO

My breaths came in quick gasps while my body trembled violently. My eyes opened, but still in the world of my dream, I couldn't yet focus. My heart pounded so loudly it was deafening. Slowly, Casey's face came into focus. Her horror filled wide eyes added to my current fear, especially since I couldn't hear a word coming from her moving mouth. Her hands gripped my arms, shaking me until my senses came back in line with reality. Her voice came in and out of the deafness. "Jew... J... Jewels!" The voice matched the moving lips.

"What..."

"Jewels!" she shrieked.

My ears stung, feeling the impact of the high shrill in her voice. I swear, Casey's voice had the same effect as fingernails running down a chalkboard. "Shush!" I commanded.

"You were screaming!"

"I had a bad dream. A horrible nightmare."

"Your screams, you scared me half to death!" she shot out with the same excitement filled voice. "What happened?"

My breathing slowed to normal, allowing my mind to comprehend all the nightmarish images from my dream. Inhaling a deep breath, I sat up in the bed and positioned myself against the head board. I locked my fingers around my knees, pulling them closer to my chest. Reluctantly, my eyes lifted to Casey's eager eyes.

It didn't matter if my eyes closed or not, the nightmarish monsters stood out clearly. The dream was more than just a dream. I blinked again. "*It was so real.*" I whispered.

"The fog," I began. "It settled into a fine mist upon a little country road. The smell of the fresh country air lingered about me. I walked slowly down the one lane dirt road, smelling the beautiful flowers along the way. The noise of rustling leaves came from the dark and dreary forest to my right. To my left, a beautiful meadow came into view, with its abundance of pink blossoms and clover grass. A wooden fence separated the meadow from the road. On the hill, I saw an old tree; it looked like a maple tree. A gentle breeze blew, causing the rope that hung from the tree to swing.

“In the distance, a dark shadow of a man stood. Still too far ahead of me, I couldn’t determine who he was. My eyes couldn’t focus on the person in front of me. Suddenly, a branch cracked, making me turn toward the forest where a man appeared from out of the woods.

“I’m sorry. Did I frighten you?” the man asked. *‘It was truly not my intention.’* The mysterious man had a mysterious and dark appearance, looking into his eyes was like looking into the heart of death. His German accent caught my attention, although he spoke clear English, it was difficult to understand him.

“*“May I walk with you?”* he asked.”

Casey’s lips pressed together, preparing for the rest of the horrifying story. She looked nervous as I continued with the dream.

“Yes. *Do you know who the man is up ahead?*” I pointed to the figure still in the road.

“*I am terribly sorry; I don’t believe I do. I can’t see that far ahead.’* I looked into the stranger’s face, contemplating the fact he might be able to read my mind.

“*“Many years ago, as legend has it, a young man was traveling down this road and the devil appeared to him from the woods. The young man inquired as to the devil’s intentions. The devil wished to make a bargain with the young man. The young man had just lost his young bride. She was found hanging in that tree over there.’* He pointed a finger toward the tree where the rope was dangling. *‘She was hanged for being a witch.’* He continued. *‘A powerful woman who was married to one of the local townsmen despised the girl. She claimed the girl was a witch and put a spell on her husband to make him lust after her. She became so jealous with rage; she called a town meeting and declared the young woman a witch. The townspeople were enraged. A few followers gathered together, took the girl that night, and hanged her in that tree. They then burned her body. The young man, now blinded with grief over the loss of his new bride, in his heart sought revenge. He made a pact with the devil so that he might avenge his wife’s death. In doing so, his own soul was cursed for eternity, as well as his bloodline, to walk upon the face of the earth as not only a man, but also a beast. Taking the curse upon himself, he murdered all that took his bride from him.’”*

I inhaled a deep breath and continued the dream. “My eyes returned to the stranger ahead, moving closer I realized it was my father. I bolted into a run toward him, flinging my arms around his neck. He caught me, returned the embrace and then took a step back from me. The expression on his face told me that something was wrong. Something was terribly wrong. I tried to search his eyes for the answer, but only saw the shimmer of moonlight as if reflected into his eyes. Chills ran up my back, fear gripped my heart and I took a step backwards.

“Suddenly, the day turned into night, and the moon was above us. My father had a look of fear on his face. He opened his mouth and carefully spoke one word. *‘Lycan.’*

“Goosebumps covered my arms, warning me of the fear I saw in my father’s eyes. The hair on the back of my neck prickled on its ends when I heard the heavy breathing behind me. I glanced over my shoulder. Standing behind me, no more than a few feet, was a monster, a demon of some sort. Something in your wildest dreams you would never have imagined existed. Its eyes glistened when it blinked at me. I tried to scream, but my throat locked up dry and tight. The only thing I could think about was to run. As I ran, I heard something burst from the bushes behind me. It was another one of these creatures. I glanced over my shoulder to see its head turning to me. I tripped and fell. The one leaped at the other that was chasing me. I scrambled to my feet and ran.”

I stopped and closed my eyes again. The image of the angry eyes of the first wolf remained clearly in my mind. I opened my eyes, holding my breath as I noticed Casey’s wide eyes and the color drained from her face.

“What does this mean?” I whispered.

“I ...” She tried to find her words. “I’m not sure? A werewolf?” Casey shook her head. “You don’t even like scary movies.”

“My dad?” I trailed off into another thought.

The expression on her face changed. One of the same remorse I saw on Charlotte’s face last night. “Julie,” she began, “I know this is hard for you. I know how close you were to your dad. How close we all were to him.” she paused again trying to find the right words. “His funeral is going to be tomorrow. My parents have arranged a wake tonight. You know how our fathers do things. All flamboyant.” She rolled her eyes and waved her hands in the air. “But if...”

The box I had tightly closed tried to open. I drew a slow breath, pressing firmly down on the box full of emotions. There was no delicate way of saying my father was gone.

“Casey,” I tried to make my voice as calm and assuring as I could. “I’m okay. I will make it through this. I just need to stay...” How could I explain this part of my little box to her? I looked down at my hands and closed them together. Her hand reached over and touched mine.

“I understand. You need not say anything more,” she smiled. “It will be okay. I will be there. You know my family is your family.”

“I know.” A genuine smile of appreciation crossed my lips. She was truly more of a sister than a best friend. “I love you.”

“I love you, too. We all do,” she said. “I need to run home and pick up more clothes. Do you want to go with me?”

Just the thought of being alone for a while would be a perfect break. “No, go ahead. It will be a good time for me to collect my thoughts. You know, preparation.”

Casey’s lips turned into a smile and then she nodded her head. She understood the time I needed to deal with my loss. However, she and Charlotte would be there when I needed them. Shortly after, she was showered, dressed and out the door. She promised with a smile she would return in a few hours. Casey still had errands to run for her father. I was grateful as it would give me more time. More time to adjust and see exactly how my little box was holding up. I watched her drive off in her little black sports car and waved behind her.

I paused, and then walked back into the house. Walking through the large open living room, I headed toward the patio. Unlocking the large glass door, I slid it open and walked through. The air was fresh, clean and crisp. I could smell the grass when I walked out onto the patio. Glancing around, I noticed the dew on the freshly cut lawn. I moved slowly with my hand gliding across the wood rail and walked down the steps until I reached the ground. Not missing anything in the back yard, everything was perfectly trimmed, manicured and landscaped. The summer flowers were all in bloom. The fullness of the green foliage surrounded the edge of the yard which sang with the hum of the bees already out for a taste of the nectar in the new blooms. As I looked around, I noticed what looked like an open trail at the end of the yard.

Slowly I walked toward it, moving a small tree limb from out my way. This was odd. My father could have added it after I went to college. I remember another trail in the front we all used to walk on in the summer to go to the river and fish. However, I never remembered this one. Following the trail, I took notice of the birds above as they sang. A woodpecker in the distance pounded out his breakfast. Shortly after, I heard a squirrel. I figured it must have been a mother squirrel barking a warning to her nearby young as I approached. Smiling to myself, I continued through the forest following the newfound-adventure. Looking ahead, I saw a break in the forest. The closer I came to the edge the more uneasy I became. Standing at the edge of the forest, I stared out into a meadow. The meadow was exactly like the one in my dream. My breath caught in my throat while my heart drummed loudly. I took a deep breath, releasing it slowly, forcing myself to calm down.

My mind raced back to the dream. Did something happen here? Did this have something to do with my father’s death? I heard a twig crack and I froze. I held my breath and listened. My eyes darted to all corners of the meadow to see where the noise came from. Suddenly from the left of me I heard a short snort. My heart drummed loudly, but I didn’t move. I was afraid the horrid image of the monster wolf would appear. What if they were real and right here? I heard another snap. The urge was too strong not to look. I turned my head slightly to the left. Hearing the short snort again, my body remained in a frozen state. The foliage moved. I wanted to run, but I couldn’t. My eyes fixed on the foliage, watching as the thick brush parted and a large buck stepped into the meadow. The wind blew lightly and he turned his head my way. He stared at me and snorted again. This time he darted across the meadow to the other side of the forest. I let loose the breath I held and breathed new air. Shaking my head, I realized this was just an overreaction to the dream. Still, I felt there was more to it. I decided to go back to the house and mull over it there.

Turning around I gasped. My heart slammed into my chest again. Before the day was over, I just knew I was going to have a heart attack.

“Hey!” Daniel walked toward me. “I thought I might find you here.”

“How did you know I was here?”

“Well, you left the door open on the patio in the back and I noticed footprints that led down this path,” he stated flatly. “I wanted to see if you were okay. You didn’t come back with Casey for breakfast. Mom sent over some muffins for you.”

“Blueberry?” I asked already knowing the answer. She was cooking breakfast and baking muffins.

“Of course.” He chuckled. Standing beside me, he looked out onto the meadow. “It is beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is. I just don’t remember it being here.” I kept my eyes straight ahead of me. I was afraid to look at him, but I also couldn’t help from stealing a glance.

“This is where Martin would always come.” He gave a half-way smile, glancing at me from the corner of his eye.

“Really?”

His smile turned into more of a wicked grin that started from the corner of his mouth. With his face in full view, I wondered if he could tell my reaction to his beautiful eyes that my blood rose a few degrees.

“Yes, really.” He grinned and lowered his eyes to the ground.

My thoughts eluded me. Where was my safety net? He had never done this to me before. Who is this new dark and mysterious Daniel?

“So,” he continued, “Casey mentioned you had a bad dream about werewolves last night?” His tone serious, his body rigid, and his face stern, kind of reminded me of Thomas in the courtroom.

“I guess she told you about it. It really wasn’t anything.” I lied, hoping he wouldn’t persist with the issue any further. I felt a little silly about the whole thing.

“She said your screaming scared her half to death. So you were being attacked by a werewolf?” His eyes fixed on mine for an answer.

“Well, not exactly attacked. There were two and one jumped out from the bushes and attacked the other.” I felt like an idiot for such a stupid dream.

Daniel stood in silence, waiting for me to continue. I didn't say any more hoping that he would let it go. He took a couple of more steps toward me. My heart thundered.

"What do you think the dream means?" The tone in his seductive voice caused me to lose my train of thought.

Daniel frowned slightly, the muscles tightened in his strong jaw line. His eyes peered through the beautiful eyelashes waiting for my answer. He clasped his hands in front of him while I watched the muscles flex in his strong arms.

"I...I..." Realizing I was stuttering, I stopped and frowned. "Not sure. It may just have something to do with my Dad on a hunting trip. Considering the fact he is..." I

paused, when I felt the box unraveling, I inhaled a deep breath.

"Well, you have to deal with a lot right now." He spoke in a sweet and soothing manner. The concern in his eyes was evident. Dear Fate, he had an adorable face. My heart started that silly thumping again.

"So how's Virginia?"

"Who?" My eyes and mind focused somewhere else.

"Virginia? The state where you attend college?"

Well, here was another embarrassing moment to add to my collection. My cheeks suddenly turned warm. So much for paying attention.

"Oh. It's a beautiful state. I enjoy all the mountains." I managed to turn away from him, but not before I caught the wicked smile that crossed his lips.

"Casey tells me you are in your last semester of college."

"Yes. I'll be finished."

"Any plans afterwards?"

"Not really. We should talk about what you are doing. I hear your project is more interesting than mine." I felt a little embarrassed with all the questions he asked. Talking about myself made me feel uncomfortable.

"I doubt that anything would be more interesting than you." His eyes met mine again.

A wave of butterflies hit my stomach. Hot blood coursed in my veins. I felt the heat of it sting my face. A sly grin erupted at the corner of his mouth; raising his eyebrows, he turned his focus back to the meadow again.

"Since when are you so easily embarrassed, Julie?"

Immediately, the blood that ran through my veins boiled. It wasn't the flush from blushing. No, this one was a temper surge. I frowned to myself when the revelation hit me. Daniel may have changed physically, but he was still the same gangly kid that tortured me to death when we were young. I huffed a discontented breath.

"Daniel?" I glared at him and turned around toward the house. "You are still an ass." With my back facing him, I marched toward the house. I heard a chuckle from behind, which drove the blood to a new level of heat.

"What did I say?" he continued. The laughter was louder. I wanted to pull up a tree and hit him with it. No, a tree wasn't good enough. A baseball bat would do it. No, not enough damage. I was still contemplating deadly weapons when I broke through the trees into the back yard. I saw Casey standing on the deck. I was still murmuring to myself as I walked by her. Her eyes followed me with a long and surprised stare.

"What's wrong?" Her voice was tense.

"Ugh!" I surprised myself. It sounded more of a roar than a grunt.

"What did you do this time?" she aimed at Daniel. That's my girl, I thought. Get him! I rounded the corner to the kitchen still contemplating weaponry. Butcher Knife! That is exactly what I need.

"Nothing!" he retorted.

"Daniel! You are an ass!" she snapped at him. That's my girl!

"Well then, be that as it may, I shall return to the zoo!" he snapped back at her. I listened and heard his footsteps walking toward the front door and stop. "Enjoy the muffins, Jewels! Try not to blush while you are eating them!"

"OH!" I shouted as I rounded the corner toward the living room I heard the front door slam. I was so angry I could have shot knives from my eyes. Casey's face was shocked at the angry look I had on my face.

"What did he do this time?" I turned to her only to find she was holding back a laugh.

"Just being herself!" I seethed. There really wasn't any surprise when she let loose a laugh. I didn't see anything funny in this situation. She, on the other hand sat down on the sofa with tears running down her cheeks. I was still not laughing. "What is so funny?"

Casey wiped her eyes and cleared her throat. Looking at me as seriously as she could, she blurted out the most irritating words. "HE LIKES YOU! AND I THINK YOU LIKE HIM!" I turned and walked back into the kitchen.

"Julie!" I heard her plea from the great room. "Please, seriously I have to talk to you about these dresses! I'm sorry! I won't say anything else about your little crush!" I

would've probably taken her more seriously if I hadn't heard the *hee, hee, hee* after the last word.

She rounded the corner with a dress in each hand. I planted myself on a barstool in front of the kitchen counter and stared at the beautiful black dresses.

"Mom and I went shopping. She figured you didn't bring anything so she bought these two for you." She held out in her right hand a beautiful long black silk dress.

The dress was pretty much straight and sleek. I walked over to examine it more carefully. Draping in the front, two strips of small rhinestones acted as the shoulder straps to keep this beauty from falling off me. It was dressy but not revealing, something which was appropriate.

"Do you like it?" Casey's eyes watched me intently.

"Yes, it is lovely," I sighed.

"Good, because this is the dress you are wearing this evening. The other is for tomorrow. She also picked out some shoes for you as well. Dad is picking us up in about three hours." Normal just went out the window for me.

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The doorbell rang just as I put the final touch on the top of the dress. The drape of the fabric fit perfectly, but it would've been nice if I had a strapless bra to wear. The designer wasn't thinking of me when he made this creation. I turned again to the mirror. The black color against my olive colored skin and brown hair did give me an alluring quality.

Unlike Casey, who truly looked more like a model, but I would survive. Casey popped through the bedroom door.

"They are here!" she announced in a hurried voice.

I turned to look at her. Her face brightened when she looked over the dress.

"Mom was right, you look breathtaking." Her smile comforted me. I looked down again, sighed and then put both hands on my breasts. Casey laughed a little.

"They look fine too. It's modest."

I glanced one more time in the mirror. An ancient Greek or someone with the same taste must have designed the dress. This is what I imagined the dress to be.

Quickly walking down the stairs, we headed toward the front door where the driver awaited to escort us to the car. Following Casey out the front door, I paused and switched the lock to the on position. My eyes lifted and caught a glimpse of the black limousine waiting in front of me. The driver stood beside the limo in his black uniform with the door open. Stepping toward the limo, I realized I had to keep myself in check. The high-heeled shoes were something I wasn't accustomed to, and it took a little effort to keep my balance intact. I bent over to climb inside. Once my head was inside, Casey settled in on the left side of me. Charlotte sat across from her, Thomas and then, of course, Daniel. My eyes caught his when I climbed into the back and sat down. There was no way to hide the expression on his face, or mine for that matter. At first, the surprised look on his face told me it was my appearance. Then the hot rush ran over my cheeks when I realized his eyes didn't stare at my face, but my chest. Only then, did I realize the top of my dress hung down a bit too far when I climbed into the limo. I suppose if he had ever wondered what my bare chest looked like, he surely had his answer by now. I sat back in the seat, adjusted the top of my dress, and glared at him. Clearing his throat, he turned and looked casually out the tinted window. The door shut and the spacious limo darkened, with the exception of the lights on the bottom of the inside doors.

I sat still, trying hard not to look at Daniel. The voices of Charlotte and Thomas spoke softly to one another. I blocked out their conversation. The feeling that Daniel's eyes were already on me again, was more than I could stand. Uncomfortable I readjusted myself in the seat to lean more toward Casey. I felt the coolness of the air touching my leg. Apparently, when I shifted in my seat, I had forgotten the long slit in the right side of the dress, which exposed my leg up to my thigh. I quickly grabbed the dress and pulled it over my leg to cover the exposed skin. Glancing up, I saw Daniel staring at my leg. The dim light in the limo hid the expression on his face. His body looked somewhat stiff when he sat with his back straight up in the seat. Glancing away from him quickly, I remained quiet and held my thoughts.

Checking my box, I knew it was tightly sealed. The evening may not be as difficult as I imagined. My thoughts then drifted to my father and the wild animal attack. I wondered exactly what happened. Most of their hunting expeditions were successful, and no one ever was even injured. This time, the only incident cost him his life. I checked the box again. The box was still safe, so I continued with my thoughts. I wondered what kind of animal could have done this. I have heard about bears and mountain lions. Could my father have run into one of those? The image of the attack was too difficult to imagine. My father was an excellent sharpshooter. There must have been more than one. His aim

was flawless. I had spent enough time with him on the shooting range to know this. I needed answers. This wasn't the time for questions, but I would find the right time to get my answers.

The cordial announcement from the driver stating we had arrived at our destination broke my intense thoughts. I couldn't believe that my thoughts had consumed me for over an hour. The door to my right opened, allowing the light from the hotel to seep into the car. The lights from underneath the overhang were bright. Leaning toward the open door, I squinted at the bright lights. A sudden memory made me stop for a second and place my hand to my chest when I bent forward to step out. Daniel released a low chuckle that made my lips twitch. My head quickly snapped up to give him a disapproving glance. A grin formed on the corner of his mouth and then he raised his hand to try to hide it. However, his eyes, even in the darkness of the limousine showed the humor on his face. I took the hand that gently supported me while I stepped out onto the pavement. While smoothing out my dress, I looked up to see Casey stepping out the limo. Daniel followed, then Thomas. Thomas and Daniel both stood in the opening as Charlotte's long leg stepped out onto the pavement. Thomas ever so gently held her hand, supporting her weight while Daniel remained on the right side ready to assist. Charlotte emerged from the limo and stood. The long black elegant dress suited her perfectly, reflecting the soft lighting against her slim figure. She was the vision of beauty. She adjusted the sheer black shawl that draped around her back to cover her shoulders. My attention turned to Daniel. How gingerly he handled his mother as if she were a china doll. He looked great in his black tuxedo. His black hair smoothed back straight. He walked toward Casey and me placing a hand on the small of our backs.

"Ladies," he gestured, indicating that he would escort us inside. I felt a little silly, but took his arm anyway and we walked into the Plaza. Toward the left, voices chattered over the soft classical music that played in the background. We walked toward the room and stepped inside. Glancing around the large room I noticed so many people. Located to the left corner, a table held an assortment of finger foods. Waiters and waitresses carried drinks on their trays through the crowded room. My eyes widened when I saw a few of the people turn their attention to us. Daniel loosened his arms for Casey and me.

Instinctively, I held tighter to his arm. He leaned down to me, pressing his lips against my ear. *"It is okay, I will not leave you."* The words were not as bad as the hot breath that tingled my senses. A sudden chill ran through me and I shivered. His arm slid around my waist and pulled me closer to him. Warm heat emanated from his body to mine, giving me the security I needed to make it through the night. He took a step forward and paused briefly for me to follow. We walked through the crowd. A waitress walked up to Daniel from his left.

"Could I get you something from the bar?" Her voice was soft and pleasant.

"Yes, a Scotch and soda please."

"Lime and soda please," I managed to return to her. With Daniel securely by my side, we walked toward the tables covered in white linen. Slowly we made our way to the table that carried a little card saying "RESERVED MAXWELL". Daniel pulled out the chair for me and I sat down. I heard the chair next to me slide out from underneath the table and then his body was next to mine again. Glancing around the room, I had lost Thomas and Charlotte. I couldn't see Casey. Where did they go? "Are you okay?" his soft voice asked. I nodded while my eyes darted around the room in search of my best friend.

"Julie? Julie? Oh my darling little Julie!" I recognized the voice immediately. The grey haired older woman walked toward me. She still looked good for her age. I estimated she must be around sixty. The short balding man trailing behind her was as round as ever.

"Hello Aunt Doris." I forced out a smile as she trailed over to hug me. I could tell within inches that she had maybe too much to drink already. Stepping back to balance herself on the man's arms, she gently leaned over and gave me a kiss on the cheek. "Hello, Uncle Dave. How are you both?"

"Oh Darling," she began in her overly dramatic tone. "How are you? I heard the news and got a flight immediately. It's just dreadful, dreadful I tell you."

Aunt Doris, the adopted sister to my father. Married money and still looking for money. I suppose her motivation was probably not respect, but to see if her dear brother left her anything in his will. She was a few years older than my father was. Even still, I thought back to how my father made his own way in life. Even though he was a self-made millionaire, his family was very poor. Not compared to Thomas, whose family always had money. I suppose living a life of luxury didn't impress me. Dad's dreams were just to take care of me. On the other hand, bringing my thoughts back to Aunt Doris, the only goals she had were the alcohol and where her next rich husband was coming from.

"Have they caught the animal?" Her question sent my nerves into a wild frenzy. I settled down when Daniel's warm hand touched my back. His body pressed closer while he inhaled a quick breath to speak.

"Not yet. I understand the authorities are still looking for it." His stern voice denoted a slight *"Drop it"*. Aunt Doris, even in her intoxicated state noticed the tone. Quickly her eyes shifted to me again.

"Dear, are you eating well? You are skinny as a rail," she reached down and grabbed my hands. "Pale too. What no engagement or wedding ring? Nowadays, it is best to get married early; at least you have your pick of the good-looking ones. When you get my age, the only thing you have to look forward to is their bank accounts, retirement funds and death benefits." Her cold hands patted mine while her eyes trailed to Daniel.

The warm flush fell again over my cheeks. There was no word in the dictionary that my father could properly use to describe my aunt. There were however, several, which he had used, which were inappropriate. Always, this woman brought out the animal in my father. After being in her presence only a few moments, Dad would put a sailor to shame.

I remembered clearly the language he would use was a series of grunts, huffs, and four, five and six letter words that made a complete sentence. This was the only time that I had ever seen my father upset and mad. I smiled to myself thinking of poor Uncle Dave. The short, balding and overweight man was so passive compared to his overly opinionated and controlling wife. He was a sweet, quiet man and I often wondered repeatedly how he ever married this obnoxious woman. Maybe it was love. I could only believe it was her love of money that drew them together. Knowing Aunt Doris, she probably told him they were going to get married and when. Whenever Dad would ask Uncle Dave how he put up with Aunt Doris, Dave's response was always the same. *"When it becomes too bad, I just take my hearing aid and teeth out. So when she yells at me I can't hear it and I just smile at her."* I let out a laugh that surprised everyone standing around me.

"How're those batteries, Uncle Dave?" My lips twitched trying to hide my smile.

His aging eyes twinkled as he looked at me. "Oh, they are holding in there." His smile broadened as he winked at me. "Quite some gathering. Your father had a lot of friends."

"Well, you know how his friends do things. When everyone gets together, it is the same type of function for a funeral or wedding. I think it is more social than mourning. ... " my voice trailed off when I noticed Aunt Doris looking curiously at Daniel. "I'm sorry," I began, "Aunt Doris, Uncle Dave this is Daniel Maxwell." I wanted to cringe in my seat at what I could only expect would come out of her mouth next. Her long fingers reached over to shake his hand.

"Well, Julie." My heart pounded loudly. If there was some way, I could distract her from the next few words.

"It is nice to meet you, Daniel. Maxwell? As in Thomas J. Maxwell, attorney at law?" I looked up at Uncle Dave hearing his voice. The expression on my face was a pleading venue of thank you.

"Yes. Thomas is my father." Daniel's smooth voice tingled in my ears.

"Yes, I thought I could see the resemblance. Tell me, are you following in your father's footsteps?" For some reason, I don't know exactly why, Daniel's body stiffened. His arm muscles tightened against my side. Nervously, he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"No, sir. I am following a different route all together." The sharp tone in his voice indicated tension at the mention of his father's name. I knew he could tell that I noticed the difference in his voice when he looked into my face.

"Well, I have always believed that every man should follow his own heart," Uncle Dave replied.

"So do I, sir, so do I." Daniel smiled broadly while his fingers ran lightly up and down my back.

"Well, I..." Aunt Doris started.

Uncle Dave turned toward her and cut her off again. "It was nice seeing you again Julie. Daniel it is truly a pleasure to meet you. Hope to see you again. Don't let your dreams die." He gave me a quick wink and smile.

She opened her mouth to protest, but his arm was already moving Aunt Doris away from us. Her voice trailed out in a series of protests while he guided her through the crowd.

My eyes fell to the table and I couldn't help laughing again. I felt Daniel's hand on my back again. "That woman," I muttered, sounding like my father.

"I think she's... well, unique," he teased.

"So did Dad." We both laughed. It was a good feeling to be able to laugh again. The anxiety wasn't as bad as it was a few minutes ago. The waitress returned with our drinks.

Daniel held his glass and leaned slightly toward me. His hand touched my back ever so lightly.

"Shall we..." My eyes followed his to an outdoor patio. I nodded.

I knew there were two things I was certain about at this point; first, I didn't like being in a room full of people. Second, I hated being the center of attention. It was as if he read my mind. Gently he held on to my chair. When I stood, I felt his hand on my back again steadying me, and then guiding me toward the patio.

The sun had gone down, resting long behind a grove of trees. The full moon illuminated the night, bringing with it a romantic feeling. The gentle chill in the night's air felt good against my bare skin. I couldn't express in words my gratitude to Daniel for saving me from my anxieties. The silence of the night, along with Daniel's presence washed



away all my fears.

“Thank you.”

“For...” His voice trailed softly in question.

“For saving me from all those people. I don’t think I could’ve taken another second being in that room.” I ran on.

“You do not like crowds do you?” Daniel leaned against the railing holding his drink while he looked curiously at me.

“No, I don’t. I become uncomfortable.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I just don’t like people staring at me. It makes me... uncomfortable.” A warm rush filled my cheeks and I lowered my eyes. A quirky grin crossed his lips, followed by a humorous chuckle.

“What?” I moved closer to the balcony, resting my arms on the concrete rails, my eyes lifted to his.

“Nothing. I just can’t imagine that *you* would feel uncomfortable with people staring at you.” The word ‘*you*’ pulled on my nerves.

“What do you mean by that?” The words that left my mouth shot out before I had a chance to control the tone.

“Well, it’s just...” he turned to me and glanced around, “You are the most beautiful woman here.” He whispered as if he were telling me a secret.

A sly and sinister grin crossed his face while he raised his eyebrows. For some reason it was the way he said that and the expression on his face made me laugh. I couldn’t even be offended or embarrassed. The sly grin turned into a complete smile showing off his beautiful teeth. I glanced at the moon again, suddenly remembering the thoughts of why we were here.

“Daniel would you tell me something?” I hoped since we were alone maybe he would answer some of my questions.

“I guess that would depend on what you want to know.” He turned the glass to his lips.

“What happened to my father? Everyone seems to be so sensitive around me.” I checked the box one more time to make sure I could handle the information. So far, the box was secure. I took a deep breath and prepared myself. His eyes looked deep into mine; the expression on his face showed concern.

“Dad received a call from one of his friends in the Midwest, Ted Neely. He owns a ranch in Oklahoma. It did not seem to be a big problem at first, one or two cattle missing per season. This was different. Ted had gone out to check on the herd one morning and found something he had not expected. A full-grown Black Semital bull weighing approximately twenty-eight hundred pounds found dead. He had been use to wolves in the area. Normally they would take out a calf or two. The pack never was strong enough to take out a full-grown bull. He knew that these types of killings were not normal. No matter how many wolves were in the pack, there was a slim chance they would have taken down this bull. He was huge.” His voice trailed off in thought. Looking to me, he could tell the story pulled my curiosity. He continued.

“So that is when he called my Dad. Dad called his hunting buddies to go help their friend. They all flew out there and decided to hunt the pack down and kill them. Apparently, they were too dangerous to leave running wild. The chances of them reaching human population would be dangerous or even attacking a human for that matter of fact. Wolves normally stay away from human populated areas. The day before everyone left, Dad received another phone call from Ted. He explained they believed the same pack of wolves attacked a local. The person...” He stopped.

I didn’t realize I had stopped breathing, until I caught my breath and began breathing slowly again. The expression on his face told me he didn’t want to continue. It was too late; I already had a good idea. I waited silently for him to continue.

“So,” I decided to try to figure out the rest of the story. “The person was mauled and they took off after it. In short, my father was attacked by the same animal.”

He nodded silently. The sick feeling in my stomach grew heavy when the thought of my father mutilated by some wild animal ran through my mind. “Wolf?” I stared into his eyes.

Daniel closed his eyes and nodded. His gentle voice soothed the emptiness that I felt.

“There were two of them. Martin had managed to take a clear shot into one of them. It went down immediately. The second one slipped away. Apparently it backtracked and attacked Martin before the others reached him.” The numbness crept back up my spine. I couldn’t help the next question that escaped from my mouth.

“These were not *normal* wolves were they?” He shook his head slowly. My mind flashed back to my dream. “*Lycans*” I whispered. I noticed Daniel straighten up and his expression turned from sadness to curiosity. His eyebrows knitted together.

“What did you say?”

“Lycan. I heard it in my dream.” Then I heard something inaudible that sounded like he said “*not lycan*”. Before I had the chance to ask him to repeat himself the door opened behind us.

“There you two are,” Thomas announced, exchanging glances between Daniel and me.

“She needed some fresh air.”

“A room full of so many people just made me uncomfortable. I just couldn’t take it anymore,” I chimed in. I knew that if I gave him another suspicion he would let it go.

Apparently, Thomas’s intention was to hide the truth from me. I reached over and squeezed Daniel’s hand, “Daniel brought me out here so I could breathe.”

“Oh, well of course then. You should have come to me and said something. We would have left immediately.”

“I didn’t feel right about doing that.”

“Honey,” he began, I raised my hand in protest. He closed his mouth and nodded his head. It was pretty easy to understand how Casey wins arguments with her father. He was a sucker when it comes to the women in his life. “Well, let’s go then. It is late.”

Everyone knew that the Maxwell’s make an appearance. Unfortunately, so do the Knights, a legacy which I couldn’t live down. We always arrived fashionably late to any event, only to leave ever so fashionably early.

Either way, I was glad that it was time to leave. I had enough to think over for one night. Daniel’s warm hand moved slowly across the small of my back, breaking my thoughts, which were headed into another direction. He led me back in the room and through the crowd of people. We stopped occasionally for the people who wished to convey their sympathies. The mask I wore became a fixture for the routine of the smiles, the hugs and the handshakes. There were the never-ending compliments I received concerning my appearance and not to forget the curious glances from Daniel to myself.

Moving toward the door, I noticed Thomas, Charlotte and Casey waiting on us. In a way, I envied Casey. She looked like a beautiful blond model striking a pose for *Vogue* magazine. Her beautiful long blond hair hung over one side of her tan shoulder leaving the other side exposed. Her brilliant diamond earrings sent sparkles across the room whenever she would nod and smile at people. My chestnut brown hair and olive colored skin didn’t compare to her features. Smiling to myself, I was proud to have a best friend, let alone someone who I considered a sister as beautiful as her.

Under the awning, our driver quietly waited with the door held open. Another hour drive back home, allowing me to mull over my thoughts. Charlotte entered first, Casey next and Thomas followed. I waited for Daniel, but he gave me a little nudge and leaned over to my head, his lips gently brushed my ears. A feeling of warm heat rushed up my spine before I heard the breathless words “*I would rather you go first. I couldn't take that again.*” Heat burned my cheeks again. I bent my head down, holding the top of my dress with my hand and started inside the limousine. I know it wasn’t my imagination, I swear I thought I heard Daniel clearing his throat. What now, I thought, I have nothing exposed. Once I settled inside, his head popped in to see where everyone was seated. Casey had decided to sit between Charlotte and Thomas. The current seating arrangement forced Daniel to sit beside me.

Somewhere I believe her smile gave her plan away. I could probably deal with this, if I didn’t feel like everyone pushed us together. Yes, I admitted to myself that he was gorgeous, adorable and sexy, especially when wasn’t acting like an ass. Daniel glanced toward me with a smile.

My newfound information subdued my thoughts. Two wolves, not even a pack. My mind flashed back to the dream where the two huge oversized wolves fought. So how far off was I from the dream? Maybe there some type of connection between my dream of the wolves, and the Lycans. I remembered hearing clearly the word Lycan, but in Daniel’s off thought, he murmured “not Lycan”. There must be some difference between the Lycan and the werewolves. Strange, I couldn’t imagine something like this actually existing. Was this what they were hiding from me? I figured this evening answered more than one of my questions. This was what they were keeping from me. Tomorrow I would somehow find the evidence before I confront them. These people are part of my family; my heart melted. I knew they loved me. A deep breath, yes, the box remained closed.

## *Somewhere*

in the back of our minds, we block out items of reality. Legends and old stories, we consider them just that, stories and fables. Stories, we tell to children or tell over campfires to scare the living daylights out of unsuspecting teenagers. Reality is; we block the truth from our minds because it is so obscure it couldn't be true. Our minds only accept what we believe truth to be. In that moment, one shock in our lives, one devastating event can change one's life forever. Forcing the reality of which has been hidden deep within your mind to the forefront of our imagination.

The morning came with a refreshing note, no dreams. Turning over to check the clock, I rested my head back on the pillow for a few minutes longer of sleep. Seven-thirty and my body didn't want to wake up so easily. Today's plans played over in my mind, a bit of snooping and research. There was still the question of Lycans and of course going through my father's papers. My heart suddenly dropped. Today, I thought, before anything else was my father's funeral. Closing my eyes tightly, I sank deeper into the pillows. Checking the box again, I was satisfied it remained intact for the time being.

My senses slowly came alive. The fresh aroma of coffee traveled into my bedroom along with the faint sound of voices downstairs. No use in trying to sleep, I was fully awake. The smell of the coffee sounded the alarm to let the day begin.

Walking down the stairs, Casey's voice and another voice spoke softly. As I moved closer toward the kitchen, I clearly recognized Daniel's deep voice. Giving no second thought to my morning appearance or my embarrassment, I walked straight into the kitchen. The conversation between the two stopped abruptly. They sat at the counter drinking coffee. I walked by the kitchen counter, giving them both a forced smile. Reaching up to the cabinet, I pulled out a coffee cup and poured the coffee into it. The only noise was my spoon stirring the cream in my coffee and the small flat screen TV that played the morning news. I turned around to face them and tipped the cup to my lips. My eyes traveled to Casey first. A look of despair claimed her face, not the normal look as concerning my father's death. Glancing toward Daniel, he didn't look at me; his eyes remained focused intently on the television. The expression on his face was one of remorse and pain.

"What?" The silence of the two had become unbearable at this point.

"Two people were found dead last night in Summerville near the Chattahoochee National Forest." Her voice couldn't hide the distinct fear behind it.

"The police said that it was an animal attack," Daniel shot in. His eyes followed up to mine.

Last night's conversation with Daniel suddenly came back to me when I glanced at the television. Uniformed men moved white bagged bodies away to a large black van.

The news reporter announced: *"No one knows what type of animal it was. Police could only say that it was a large animal. A special forensics team has been assigned to determine the type of animal that caused such brutal killings. In the meantime, police have warned all individuals to stay away from heavily wooded areas and not to go out after dark. Keep your houses locked and stay inside. These are the second bodies found within a ten mile radius of one another."*

The ringing phone broke my concentration, taking me away from the horrifying images. Reaching over the counter, I grabbed the phone and placed it to my ear.

"Hello?"

"Julie?" It was Thomas. "Listen, I just saw the news. You are to gather your things together and come over here with us immediately. I don't want you to stay in that house another minute." His stern voice sent fear through me.

"I..."

"Julie!" His voice commanded by full attention.

"Okay, I understand. I'll be there." I pushed the off button and placed the phone back on the receiver. "That was Thomas. He said that I should get my things and stay with you."

"Well, I think that's a great idea. Let's pack your stuff together now." Casey forced out a smile.

Daniel didn't speak. With the same worried expression on his face, his attention remained on the news. Reluctantly, Daniel tore his eyes from the television and gave me a stern look.

"I will wait and then follow you both to the house. I need to run into town and then meet you at the funeral." His voice trailed off into his own thoughts.

Not putting too much thought into his plans, I had to concentrate on my own. Glancing at the clock, it was eight-fifteen. The dark clouds caught my eye when I glanced out of the window. A nasty storm approached from the east. At least we would be inside the church during the funeral. My father requested that he be cremated. His urn would rest in a vault beside my mother in the cemetery.

Casey helped me pack and between the three of us we loaded Daniel's car with my belongings. They were surprised by my protest when I wanted to take my car. Convincing them that I hadn't had the chance to drive it, I wanted to enjoy my father's last gift. My reasoning may have been a little different, but the car provided me with the opportunity for time alone.

The little black Mercedes headed out first, followed by my new Eclipse Spyder. Daniel followed close behind in Charlotte's white Lexus. We made it through the long wooded driveway to the main road. Casey sprinted ahead in her shinny BMW. Not sure exactly what this new car would do, I gave a little more pressure to the gas and she was off. In the rear view mirror, I saw Daniel quickly approaching the rear of my car. I settled in the seat and turned on the stereo. The car was nice, I thought. My father knew me better than I knew myself.

The car rode so smoothly, I didn't realize I was speeding until I caught a glimpse of Daniel when he flashed his headlights in my rearview mirror. Quickly glancing down at my speedometer, it said I was going ninety. My foot pulled off the gas, and I tapped the brakes lightly to slow down. Luckily, he was there to warn me. When we approached the hilltop, a police cruiser waited with a radar gun pointed in our direction. Ahead, Casey slowed down to make the turn into their driveway.

Pulling up to the huge house, I followed her around to the garage. Daniel pulled up behind me. He jumped out of the car before Casey and me. Daniel appeared in a rush, pulling items out the trunk left and right. Walking behind him into the house proved to be a challenge, his fast paced long strides made it difficult for Casey and me to keep up.

Once inside I heard Thomas and Charlotte. Her tense voice clearly indicated she was extremely upset. Daniel dashed up the stairs with my suitcase. Following Daniel up the stairs, Charlotte caught my attention and I stopped abruptly.

"Julie, go ahead and start getting ready. The driver will be here in an hour and a half. Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine." My suspicions ran wild. Secrecy filled the air. I knew they were hiding something from me. Daniel ran down the stairs, catching my full attention.

"I promise to be there as soon as I can," he shot to Thomas.

"Be careful," Charlotte shot back at him with a worried look on her face.

Casey's hand touched my shoulder. "Come on, let's get dressed."

The agony hit hard in the pit of my stomach. There was too much going on for me to try to be calm. The horrific events consumed my thoughts. Was this a coincidence? On the other hand, were there just some strange events that just happen to be related to my father's death? Everything became a blur to me.

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Sitting on the end of the pew in the chapel, still not fully aware of the ride there, I looked around nervously for Daniel. The sound of Charlotte's voice added to my suspicions and fears. Something, perhaps she knew or found out. Thomas sat rigid. Casey remained quiet and not her normal self. All of this wreaked havoc on my nerves. I inhaled deeply to try and calm myself. I wasn't worried about the box at this point. The agonizing feeling of not knowing took over.

All we stood when the Pastor stepped forward to give a moment of prayer. I could barely focus on what he said. My hands trembled and my thoughts ran wild. I heard the AMEN, managed to raise my head, and felt a nudge to the left of me. It was Daniel. I moved over to my right and sat down leaving him enough room.

Family, friends, co-workers, business partners and the socials packed the large church. Even with my father's faults, many people thought well of him. It pleased me to know that all these people cared about him. I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

The Pastor stood behind the wooden podium in front of the church. He opened his Bible and began reading. Daniel's hand slid around mine. Squeezing it lightly, I was surprised how much it helped calm my overactive nerves. Casually, he released my hand and slid his arm around me. Whatever instinct he felt toward me, he knew what I needed. I relaxed and my focus returned in time to watch Thomas give the eulogy.

Who better to speak of my father than Thomas, the longtime friend of my father? He spoke clearly and earnestly about my father, their friendship and Martin's dreams for the people he loved. He spoke of Martin's love for life. The love that led him to support different charities and to find cures for certain diseases. My father's work to find cures for childhood cancer and how his donations and work saved over a thousand lives. Thomas also reminded everyone that even though Martin departed from us physically, his work and his love remained with us all.

My heart shattered when the memories of my father filled my head. The warmth of him, the smell of him, and the heart he had. Thomas's words stirred all those loving memories of my father.

One memory was the Room of Secrets. Dad and I spent hours in conversations where whatever we spoke of would never leave the walls of that room. There were many things I told my father, he never judged me, but lovingly understood and corrected me when necessary. The reflections of how he loved life, of how, indeed, he was a wonderful and loving father. How he brought his fatherly love out, not just to the community but across the country. I felt for some reason, all the things he did were because of his love for humanity. My hands trembled again. The box had slipped open. I took a deep breath, no good. Another breath, no, not good. My body trembled, fighting back the threatening

tears. Daniel shifted ever so slightly, drawing me closer against his warm body. His lips pressed against my ear, whispering softly words only I could hear. “It is okay, Jewels. You are okay. I am here.” I pulled on his strength and fought back the tears. One last deep breath and I managed to tightly close the box.

The ceremony ended. We rose and then headed toward the back of the church. A warm sense of awe filled my heart when I noticed the number of people who came to honor my father. Joy filled my heart from the people I knew who felt the same way about my father as I did.

A strong squeeze around my waist guided me to the limousine that waited. I paused outside the church doors, eyes lifted to the dark sky. Sprinkles of rain filled the air, drifting quietly down to the wet ground. I hurried inside the limo to the destination of the final resting place of my father’s ashes.

Everyone consumed in his or her own thoughts remained silent for the ride home. Daniel followed us in his car. He pulled the white Lexus in front of the limousine and parked it in the garage. Thomas stepped out first to help the rest of us out. Silently I walked behind the rest through the front door and then followed Casey up the stairs. I wanted to change clothes and knew she had the same idea. We left Charlotte, Thomas and Daniel downstairs in the great room.

Fumbling through my suitcase, I found a pair of jean shorts and a cool light blue cotton tank top. Quickly I dressed and pulled my hair into a ponytail. I turned to face Casey who waited for me on the bed.

“You okay?” The grim expression on Casey’s face didn’t shock me.

“Yeah, I guess so. I’m just having a hard time believing that...” she paused, her teary eyes lifted to mine. “Mom says lunch is ready,” she continued. “She figured that no one was in the mood for anything big, so she put together some ‘comfort snacks’ as she calls them.”

Poor Charlotte, she wasn’t taking this well. The feeling was mutual. My arms reached over to Casey, holding her tightly until she exhaled softly. We let each other go and walked out the room and down the stairs to meet with the others.

“Comfort snacks” was an understatement. We walked into the kitchen where a large array of food items sat waiting to be devoured. Thomas stood by the counter holding a cheese cracker. Daniel changed into jeans and a blue T-shirt which stretched over his muscular body. His head lifted, sporting a solemn smile when he noticed my entrance.

“So what’s good?” I gestured toward the array of food.

“Everything. Mom seems to have gone overboard this time.” Daniel pierced his fork into a slice of meat and cheese.

“Charlotte, have you ever considered catering?”

“Oh, heavens no!” her excited tone rang. “I would not be able to handle the stress of owning a business.” Somewhere with her last statement, we all roared in laughter. We were not sure if she meant that as a joke, but it really was one.

Thomas’s voice broke through after the laughter settled. “Julie, there are some things that we need to go over concerning your father’s will.”

“Thomas!” Charlotte hissed at him.

Pretending not to hear the warning in her voice, he continued. “There are several corporations your father owned major stock in that will fall into your hands. These companies all work together in a sort of ... network.” He glanced toward Daniel. “One of which, is co-owned with Daniel. DalMar Corporation. I have arranged for each of the heads of these companies to give you a presentation of their work. You will be able to see firsthand what they do. I have scheduled the presentations tomorrow around ten. Of course, if you are not up to it we can reschedule.”

“No, it’s fine. I will be there.” Dad had more than one business venture, surprising news. Holding my plate, I reached for the fruit in front of Daniel. It would be nice to have time to myself, to enjoy my car for a change.

After the little lunch ended, I wanted nothing more than to go back to the house. The careful eyes of the Maxwell’s remained glued on me, so my chances of slipping past them were not going to be good. Tomorrow would give me the prime opportunity I needed. Since I’d left my computer at the apartment in Virginia, I decided the best excuse was to shop for new clothes, buy a new laptop and, of course, buy some CDs for my new car. At least they would think I was pre-occupied. Eventually they would have to trust that I would be all right in the big house all by myself. There were still many things to be considered, and I needed the alone time to sort them through.

The sheets of rain poured down, lightning streaked through the dark sky making it the worst storm of the century. I finally found my peace while I sat quietly in the large glass Florida room, listening to the storm wail outside. The trees bent back and forth in the howling wind. I wrapped my arms around my knees, pulling them closer to my chest while I snuggled deep against the wicker sofa.

“Ah, enjoying the weather?” Without even looking up the voice was without a doubt recognizable.

“Actually, yes. I love a good storm.” My heart took a different direction.

“I do to, actually.” His warm and soft voice lured me to him. Daniel looked extremely handsome when He sat down across from me on the sofa.

“Doing okay?”

I nodded slowly and forced out an awkward smiled. He followed my gaze out beyond the glass walls, watching a bright light flash that was followed by a loud grumbling of thunder.

“So what are you thinking about?” The question posed something new for me. It wasn’t so much the question, but the question as it was directed to me. No one has ever asked me my thoughts before. I found it interesting.

“I guess,” I paused not knowing where I should begin. Bore him with my insane thoughts of werewolves, or rather give him the obvious choice of my thoughts of my father? Since I was afraid to let the box open, I decided to go with the first choice. “Wolves and the whole Lycan thing.”

“Oh.” Daniel’s face remained expressionless. “Any luck with that?”

“No, not really. The only thing I have to go on is a memory of a dream, and old movies. I don’t think that’s enough to answer my questions.”

“Like?”

“Well, for starters, what are werewolves? Secondly, what are Lycans?”

Daniel contemplated his answers. When he spoke, his words came out softly and distinctly making sure any emotion remained covered in his voice.

“The legends have it,” he began slowly. “Around the late fifteen hundreds, two Frenchmen, Pierre Burgot and Michael Verdum, made a pact with the devil. To avenge the ones they loved, they traded their souls to be turned into a terrifying killing machine, a werewolf. Although, after they sought their revenge on the town’s people, their souls were condemned to walk on the face of the earth in the daytime as a man, and at night to turn back into a werewolf by the light of a full moon.” Looking into my eyes, he could tell I was neither afraid nor nervous, but interested in the story tale. I raised my eyebrows slightly for him to continue.

“That is the short version of the legend of werewolves. I guess similar to your dream. On the flipside, there was another kind of animal created. See, the universe is a delicate creation. You have heard the ‘everything is in balance’ theory. Ying and Yang. Good and Evil. Hot and cold.” I nodded to let him know I followed along. He continued. “So whenever there is something new added, there always has to be an opposite created to balance it.”

“The Lycans.” I whispered. He nodded.

“Lycans do not live by a curse. They are born this way. The Lycans are the ‘protectors’, so to speak, of mankind. They weight the balance against the oddities from evil creations.”

“So are Lycans wolves?” I asked totally intrigued with the conversation.

“Lycans are similar in many ways to werewolves. Most of the legends you hear are about spirit wolves in the American Indian Folklore, of a boy or man taking on the spirit of a great wolf. Actually, it is a bloodline. Lycans are wolves, larger than a normal timber wolf. They have their own wills and are not condemned to the thirst of killing or revenge. They live peacefully.”

“So, the Lycans are actually a form of a wolf, only good wolves. How can you tell the difference?”

“Well, the werewolf can walk on its hind legs, practically making it eight feet tall. The head and neck are similar to that of a wolf; the body is more similar to that of a man. The Lycans, on the other hand are large wolves. They walk on all fours, and have thick fur. They are extremely strong, and have razor sharp teeth. Again, the strength is carried to the person who is the shape-shifter. Their bodies protect them from the sharp claws and teeth of the werewolves.”

“So the Lycans, were borne, or created to kill the werewolves?”

“Yes.” His smooth voice became silent.

Waiting for a moment to compose my thoughts, I realized that the werewolf was the animal that killed my father. My eyes widened, unfolding myself I sat straight up. “My father...” I breathed out.

“I think you have heard enough for one day, Jewels. Try not to ponder on it too much.”

“But you do think that it was a werewolf that killed my father?”

“We think so. Like I said, do not ponder on it. We should go inside. It is late.”

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That night I lay in the bed and couldn’t sleep. Ignoring Daniel’s advice not to ponder his words was asking something of me I couldn’t give him. My thoughts went from my dream, to the events of my father’s death. I envisioned a human-like wolf killing him and taking him from me. My father, who loved life more than anyone I’d ever known. He

was a man who would give up his own life to protect and help others. Now he was gone. Just like that. No warning. No time to prepare. Not even to give me a chance to say, “*I love you Daddy*” just one more time.

My heart felt the crushing pain. The box had come undone. Hot tears ran down my face. He was my friend, I thought when I sat up in the bed. Whenever I had a problem, I could always run to him and he would be there. Now, I had no one. The pain erupted like a volcano through my mouth. I slapped my hand across my open mouth to try and stifle the mournful cry that had come out. My tears ran like a river down my face. I wrapped my arms around myself and rocked back and forth, trying to silence the grief inside. No one else needed to join in with me. This party was all mine. I grieved for the loss of my father’s love, for the loss that had been taken from me. He was the only one I had ever had. I knew the Maxwell’s had considered me family, and they were close enough to me that I felt they were. Nevertheless, still, it was my Daddy.

Another burst of air came from my throat. I slapped my hand across my mouth again, trying to hide the noise. I turned quickly, and hid my face in the pillow. I wanted to scream, but I was afraid to wake the whole house. In the midst of my continuum of pain, I felt something warm moving on my back. Startled I jumped and pulled my head from the pillow. As I raised my head up, I felt the weight of a body against mine. The soft whisper in my ear, “*It is okay. Come here.*” Daniel’s soft voice whispered in the dark.

Without another word, his strong arms pulled me to his body. He wrapped my arm around his neck where my head buried into his chest. His arms tightly enclosed around me, holding me closer as I cried. No longer could I contain the pain in normal doses. The sorrowful wails that came from deep within me muffled softly on his chest. His hand pressed firmly against the back of my head, holding me close to him. The sound of his soft voice, cooing unrecognizable words brought out more of the pain.

Flooding my soul with an unmentionable depth of sorrow, my box opened. No one could imagine but me, the pain I felt at this point. All dignity was lost. I was lost in a sea of emotions all at once, tossing me back and forth by a raging storm that threatened life itself. Bearing down on all that I knew, my emotions were like a ragged ship sinking to the bottom depths of the ocean, never to be found again. Still, somewhere, there was hope this storm which raged and wailed out of me would end. A voice soft as an angel’s whispered into my ears, leading me to a light out the darkest of storms. It directed to a brightness my eyes couldn’t see and delivered me from the hands of hell that gripped by heart.

Like the fierce storm it was, it had come and gone. All the tears and pain ended. Only an empty box remained. The sniffles that I tried to retract came slowly. The hand of my rescuer brushed my hair from my face with his fingers. My eyelids felt heavier with each smooth stroke of his fingertips against my skin. Slowly, my eyes closed and the storm ended. I drifted, drifted toward the safeness of the seashore. At last, I was safe.

## FOUR

*Morning* came quickly; yawning, I stretched my sleepy body. I jerked my hands back to my sides and twisted my head toward the other side of the bed. Empty. I relaxed while my heart’s arrhythmic beat returned to normal again. Remembering last night clearly, Daniel had taken me by surprise. I suppose I shouldn’t have been surprised to find myself alone in bed this morning. After all, he was there for the moment. Daniel’s cologne lingered on my nightshirt. The clean scent made me somewhat light headed, in a good way. I rolled over on the pillow to smell the fragrance once again, allowing parts of last night’s memory to fill my mind. Daniel was so sweet and tender, unlike the ass he once was.

The thought of looking him in the face this morning terrified me. After being a blubbering idiot last night, I thought he’d seen the worst of me. I couldn’t help the rush of emotions I experienced last night when my box so violently opened. I could face the embarrassment, but not the aftermath of teasing.

After jumping out the bed, I glanced at the clock. The alarm clock said seven-thirty, just enough time for a shower and then dress for the drive to Thomas’s office. My schedule remained the same. I wanted to do a little shopping then run home to rummage through my father’s things.

Fully dressed, I walked down the stairs. I heard loud voices. A heated argument came from the kitchen. Charlotte’s voice was clear as crystal.

“I do not care what *you* think! It is too dangerous! I am not going through this again Thomas! I cannot handle it!” Her sharp voice was strong and loud.

“Mom, listen to me!” Daniel’s voice was tense and pleading. “She is stronger than you think. I agree with Dad, she has to be told. It is her right.”

“Damn it Charlotte! Martin...” Thomas roared.

“I do not give a *damn* about what *HE* wanted,” she hissed at them. “I want her to be safe. You know how much I love that girl. If it were not for him and his wants, her mother would still be alive!”

“Charlotte! I think you have said enough. You have gone way over the line. You are forgetting what we stand for,” Thomas shot back.

“Then tell me that it is not true! You know as well as I do what her mother was. Did that stop him?”

“Charlotte! Stop it!” The rage in Thomas’s voice sent chills up my spine; even the hair prickled on my neck.

*You know as well as I do what her mother was.* My heart dropped. Surely, with everything that has happened, could this be what they were hiding from me? What was my mother? My legs weakened. The sick feeling returned to my stomach, making it difficult for me to breathe. In all my years, I’d never heard anyone talk about my mother in such a harsh way. My father would’ve probably killed them, or at least had the last word. I sat down on the stairs, until I heard silence. Then their conversations took a normal twist.

A new disarray of images filled my head. Something strange and odd-happened with my family and I was a part of it. If there was a truth, at least Thomas and Daniel remained on my side. Inhaling deeply, I bit my bottom lip and stood. If there was something I needed to know, then they were going to tell me.

“Hey!” Casey stood behind me.

“Good morning.” I forced out a smile.

“Sleep well?”

“Yes, I guess so.”

We walked down the stairs and into the kitchen. Casey floated past Charlotte and headed for the coffee. I found myself the center of attention. Charlotte, Thomas and Daniel watched me carefully. I’m sure they noticed how uncomfortable I felt. Thomas eyed Charlotte and sat his coffee cup on the counter. Walking past me, he gently squeezed my arm.

“Good morning, dear. I’ll see you in a couple of hours.” His pace quickened when he rounded the corner into the great room.

“Julie, please come and sit down. I have made breakfast.” Charlotte stood and motioned for me to sit down.

There was no way I was going to let them know, at least not right now, the conversation I overheard. Taking the plate from Charlotte, I made my way to the counter beside of Daniel. I dared not lift my eyes to his for fear of embarrassment from last night’s outburst.

“*Feeling better?*” he whispered low enough for me to hear. I nodded.

“*Thank you.*”

Picking through my food, my eyes kept time on my watch. I was eager to get home and go through Dad’s things now more than ever. The plans had changed slightly. Once in the car, when I hit the main road, I would call Thomas, explain to him I wasn’t ready to go over all the details today and then head to the house. Yep, good plan. Sticking with the plan, it was time to put it into effect.

Standing up, I placed my plate in the sink, walked over to Charlotte, and gave her a quick hug. She wrapped her mothering arms around me and squeezed me tightly.

“Well, I’ll see you later on. Thank you for breakfast, Charlotte.”

“Okay then.” Daniel had a hint of light humor in his voice. “Mom, thanks for breakfast. We will see you later on this evening.”

“Well, I thought I would drive. I have a little shopping to do,” I said, a little shocked as my get-away plans got-away without me.

“That is all right. Casey wants to be dropped off at the college; she should not be finished until around three, so I will have plenty of time to take you where you need.” The smile I use to think was adorable had turned sour to me. There was no way to avoid my capture.

Daniel headed past me to the car, Casey behind me. He held the door open while Casey climbed into the back seat. I reluctantly settled in the front while he closed the door. Watching him curiously, he ran around the front of the car to the driver’s side and climbed in. With the car started, we headed down the driveway.

The car ride was smooth, as I glanced over to see the speed he was driving. Eighty-five. I pressed my lips together; my car must be faster than his. Then a few short beeps and a buzz, and he pulled his foot off the accelerator. The car slowed to fifty-five.

Daniel glanced at me and pointed to the radar detector on the dash board of the car.

“That’s how I knew to warn you to slow down yesterday.” He grinned.

“I guess I need to get one of those,” I muttered.

We raced toward Thomas’s office after dropping Casey off at the college. Arriving promptly, Daniel and I had enough time to seat ourselves in the conference room before Thomas arrived. The eyes of everyone in the room fell upon me. The feeling at my father’s wake didn’t compare to what I felt in a room filled with intimidating people.

The door opened and Thomas walked in, dressed in a black suit with a black and gray tie. He walked toward me, touched my arm and gave me a warm smile. I took a deep breath and nodded at him.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is Julie Knight, the daughter of the one who we all knew so well, Dr. Martin Knight.” He began from left to right around the table. “This is Eddie Carson. Eddie is the operating CEO of Syntex Laboratories in Dayton, Ohio. Syntex is the nation’s industry leader, providing the US government with cybernetic research and development. Ms. Anna-Bella Lunden, the Vice president of Sitton-Bell Corporation located in Rome, Italy. Among Sitton-Bell’s contributions to the world is their laser surgery designs and techniques, which I am sure you are aware of by now. Ben Yasamino, the President and CEO of Tempex Corporation. Tempex is a research and development corporation specializing in micro and macro nano technology.” Thomas took a breath, walked toward Daniel, and continued.

“Last, but not least, my son, Daniel J. Maxwell, CEO of DalMar Industries located in Edinburg, Scotland. DalMar has made its stand in DNA research.” Thomas paused once again, only to hand me a stack of documents.

“Julie, in case you are wondering why these people are here today, they represent what your father has built over the years. Martin owned controlling stock in each of these companies. As agreed upon in the event of his death, the controlling asset of each one now lies in your hands. The paperwork you have in front of you details each of the companies’ current assets and net worth.”

Each of the CEO’s gave a brief presentation. Finally, Thomas turned his attention to Daniel. “Daniel, if you please.” Thomas reached over and turned the lights off in the conference room.

A wall opened up with a large screen. After a few light taps on a key board and the screen flashed the words in large print DALMAR INDUSTRIES. In detail, Daniel explained the research of DNA and the company’s assets and holdings. I sat listening intently while he described the successes of proving cures exist for diseases on the cellular level with the technology that has been gained by the joint research of the other companies. He explained with the help of Tempex Corporation and their nano technology, they have successfully cured cancer on the cellular gene level of laboratory rats.

Daniel showed a video of the system they were now working on. The concept was truly science fiction, which ultimately became reality. DalMar combined its research on DNA with Tempex development of macro nanos by duplicating the creation process of cancer cells. The nano probes once entering into the blood stream would seek out and reverse the process of the cancer by altering the individual’s DNA to prevent a re-development. So far, the risks, not proven yet, would be less than radiation and less harmful to the individual. He stated that during the research they discovered a few people naturally carry DNA that prevents cancer from developing. The cellular levels showed on the screen replicated how the nanos would attach to the DNA walls and rewrite them. The nanos replicated themselves to the DNA strand that naturally occurred in those individuals that do not contract the types of cancer, which is a two-step process. A second treatment of the nanos would remove the cancer cells from the host. The process would save time and money from the costly radiation treatments. When the process was complete, the body would eliminate the nanos through the urine.

To my amazement, Daniel’s research was more than just research. He was so much like my father, a true humanitarian. He believed in saving lives and apparently spent millions on cures and research as well. There were no words to explain my surprise of finding my father’s interests had broadened into companies like these.

“Ladies and gentlemen, what you have seen has been considered science fiction up until now,” Daniel continued. “This Labrador Retriever named Lucy was brought to us by her owner for help. Lucy had no chance of survival. There were no known cures for the type of cancer she had. In the experimental stage, we gave Lucy an injection of the GNI, Genesis Nanos I. Within twenty-four hours, the cancer was isolated and cleaned up. In the Second stage, we injected her with GN2, Genesis Nanos II. Twenty-four hours later, Lucy’s DNA was restructured with the GN2 making the bridge gap preventing the cancer from recurring. Lucy has been living free of cancer for six years.” Daniel finished.

The lights were back. Everyone in the room started talking at one time about the new scientific breakthrough.

“Please! Please!” Thomas sounded out loudly.

“Dr. Maxwell, how long do you think it will be before you test the GNI and GN2 on human subjects?” Mr. Yasamino asked in a heavy accent.

“We have been testing the GNI on human subjects now for just a little over a year. The success rate has been ninety percent. The casualty rate has been minimal with ten percent of the human subjects rejecting the nanos,” Daniel finished.

The title *Doctor* came out loudly in my head. Daniel looked different to me, probably due to his title. Casey never mentioned anything to me about him obtaining his doctorate in science. His eyes caught mine and I quickly glanced down to the stack of papers in front of me. Terrified that everyone in the room would notice how much I admired Daniel, I glanced down to the stack of papers in front of me. My thoughts drifted to last night when his strong shoulder was there for me to cry on. I felt everyone would see through me. I was afraid they would see in my eyes what my heart was feeling at this moment. My eyes rose from my papers and met his across the table. Our eyes held one long glance. There was more to this new Daniel and I wanted to know everything.

Much to my relief, I was ready to leave when Thomas dismissed the meeting. Pushing my chair back, I stood and gathered my papers. Daniel crossed the room and leaned close to me.

“*Ready to go?*” he whispered in my ear, apparently he wanted to leave the room as fast as I did. While the others were talking amongst themselves and Thomas, we slipped out like two school kids skipping class. Moving quickly toward the elevator, we stepped in as he pushed the down button. A smile crossed my face. He looked down at me and returned my smile.

“What?”

“Nothing.” My face warmed. “It just seems like you are always saving me from a crowd of people.”

“Oh, that.” He chuckled. “Hungry?” With twinkling eyes, he turned to face me.

“Sure.”

“Great! Come on.” Guiding me across the street, his hand slipped around mine. We headed for Tony’s Pizzeria, which happened to be my favorite restaurant.

Once inside we were greeted by the hostess and seated promptly at a table near the window. After a few minutes, the waitress arrived to take our order. Still studying the menu, I heard Daniel speak up first. “Yes, we will have the medium, thin crust with pepperoni, pineapple and jalapeños. One large coke and one large diet sprite.”

Smiling politely, I handed the menu to the waitress. Daniel sat across from me with a quirky grin. His eyes flickered with a sense of satisfaction.

“How did you remember?” the question blurted out my mouth.

“Your favorite pizza or your favorite pizzeria?” He leaned over the table. “*There are many things I could never forget about you,*” he whispered as the grin returned to his face when he sat back in his chair.

When I looked across the table into his eyes, my heart felt like it was on the way to an utter halt. With sweaty palms and dreamy eyes, my blood ran a few degrees warmer than usual. Daniel took my breath away. Placing the food order, he impressed me yet once again by remembering my favorite pizza. The man that sat across the table from me wasn’t the same boy I once knew.

“What?” he asked.

“I was just thinking how much you’ve changed.” I spoke in a soft voice as I gazed into his dreamy eyes. “You were just so mean to me when we were growing up.”

“Well, it *was* hard to win your attention. You and Casey talked about boys all the time.” A wicked grin formed on his perfect lips.

“Were you jealous?”

“Yes.” He laughed. Then a frown crossed his face, “My name never came up.”

There was an old saying about sticking a knife in someone’s heart. I felt the sharp pain entering into the sacred area because of my shame. I had no response for his statement. I had always looked at Daniel as an older brother, not knowing he had a crush on me. This new all grown up Daniel had changed and was definitely more appealing than he was in his younger days.

“I am sorry. Maybe it was the wrong thing to say. I seem to always say the wrong things, especially around you.” The uncomfortable tone in his voice disturbed me. Looking up into his face, the agony was apparent.

“No. No. You didn’t say anything wrong. I guess I’m the one who....” How could I measure what my thoughts were of him now? “Daniel, you’ve been great.”

“Aside from being an ass on the first day you saw me in four years?”

I laughed a little louder than I expected and nodded my head. “Yes, aside from you being an ass. Last night, you were there for me. That means something to me.”

“Jewels, I will always be there for you. I mean that.”

Something must have gone right in the universe at that moment, because my heart melted. It was all I could do to restrain myself from leaning over the table and kissing him. Suddenly, I realized there were a few topics I wanted to discuss with him.

“Not to break the current conversation so abruptly, but I do have some questions for you.”

“Go ahead.”

“What type of DNA research are you doing? Your presentation sounded too good to be true. The type of technology you describe doesn’t exist.”

“Apparently it does. We have developed a unique way to cure diseases through DNA reconstruction. It is more complex than what the presentation leads you to believe.”

“No, I can guess its complex. I just wondered how you began. Usually, you need a type of gene to create a complex organism to replicate. Where did you find the source?” My

question struck a nerve with Daniel. His head rose up quickly and his eyes narrowed.

“How do you know about replication of complex organisms?”

“It was my thesis in Biology. Did you forget my Dad? We sat for hours contemplating complex organisms. I’m impressed you figured out the synthesis.”

“I am impressed you are more aware of the project than I thought.”

The waitress brought the pizza and served Daniel and me the first slices. We both picked up a slice and bit into it. The taste was just as I remembered, from the sweetness of the tomato sauce and pineapples to the tangy warmth of the jalapeños. The pizza was truly heaven.

“So,” sipping my soda, I continued with the interrogations. “You didn’t answer my question.” He placed the pizza back on his plate and wiped his mouth with his napkin.

“We were testing theories at the time. It was completely accidental. I worked closely under the supervision of Dr. Frank Miller. His thoughts on DNA replication were incredible and fascinating.”

“Dr. Frank Miller? My mother’s doctor?” Now I was the one who had set the pizza down. He nodded slowly. “Daniel?”

“Yes?”

“What do you know about my mother?”

“What has Martin told you?”

“Well, he had said that there were complications during her pregnancy. Her body rejected me. Dr. Miller had put her on a certain type of treatments to help her along with the pregnancy. When I was born her body gave out.”

“Well then, you would have the story correct.” I couldn’t tell by his expression whether there was more to the story or not. My intuition told me there was still something more to this.

“I know this is going to sound absurd so don’t laugh. Was my mother different? I mean, was she a werewolf, Lycan or a vampire or something?” Daniel’s expression changed. His eyebrows rose and he let out a chuckle.

“No, Jewels, your mother was not any of those. I assure you she was one hundred percent human.”

“Well, honestly I wondered. I mean, I heard Charlotte in the kitchen this morning saying something like, *I know what she was.*”

“Oh, you heard that?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you know Mom does tend to over react. She loves you and she is just concerned about you right now. She knows that you have been through a lot.” Daniel’s voice remained soft and reassuring.

Tears welled in my eyes. Yes, I missed my father. I didn’t want to talk anymore about my mother, because it brought back fond memories of my father. I knew he loved her more than life itself. In a way, I wondered if he ever came to terms with losing her.

“So tell me something more about the werewolf or Lycan legends,” I managed to strain out, hoping to change the subject.

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Can their bite turn a human into a werewolf?”

“Oh, I see.” He paused and took a sip of his drink. “Well, of course, Hollywood has blown all the legends about werewolves, vampires and such out of proportion. According to legend, if a werewolf bites a person he or she could die or turn into a werewolf. Theory has it, that if the person carries the predisposition of the genetic gene, then they will turn into a werewolf. If they do not, then the body will reject the bacterium and it will eventually kill them, usually in three days.”

“So what about Lycans? If a person is bitten by them?”

“Well, Lycans as I said before are similar to werewolves. The bacterium within the Lycan saliva acts as an antidote to the person who has been bitten by a werewolf, but only within the three-day period. On the second note, if a Lycan has bitten a person the body reacts in the same way as it would if it is fighting a virus. Kind of like a severe flu virus.”

“It sounds like you have done your research well,” I added. “Like you have studied them up close and personal.”

“Quite a few years ago, Dr. Miller ran into a young man, who apparently had been attacked by a wild animal. According to the records, he described it as a human-like looking wolf. The young man was running such a high fever; none of the treatments Dr. Miller was giving him was working. That is when he decided to run a series of tests on the young man to determine what exactly was going on inside of him. He deliberated for hours. After the DNA results came back, he made a decision to try something unorthodox to save the young man. He worked closely with your father to make an antidote. Within hours, it worked. By the third day, the fever had broken and the young man was well again.”

“So this is why Dr. Miller was so interested in DNA?” The breaking news was more than what I had hoped to gain.

“Yes and no. He has always had a passion for DNA research. His beliefs were treating patients on a cellular level, not just the symptoms.”

“That was the reason he treated my mom then. Because of the DNA.”

“Exactly. It was just one of those conditions. Your mom and dad loved you very much. They wanted you.”

Tears threatened my eyes again. I blinked them back and took a deep breath. Daniel gently smiled at me. His attention turned to his cell phone which hummed softly.

“Hello Casey. Yes. Okay we will see you soon. Bye.” He said flipping the phone closed. “Well, that was Casey, and she has finished her paper. She is ready to be picked up.”

He motioned for the waitress.

Daniel and I left the restaurant and walked back past Thomas’s office building toward the garage where he had parked. Through the next few hours my mind was occupied by thoughts of my mother and father again. I was satisfied to know my mother wasn’t a strange and mystical creature. The question remained as to what my father and now the Maxwell’s were hiding from me. I guess the question would be better suited for another time.

Charlotte cooked dinner again, which meant her level of stress rose to an all time high. My hopes of returning to my home faded when I realized dinner would be late. At least the information I acquired today with Daniel tamed my urge for the time being. Mentally exhausted, I decided to shower and go to bed early. Tomorrow I would try a new form of escape.

## FIVE

*Sleep* came quickly for me that night. The next morning just as quickly, when my eyes opened to the bright sunshine that peered through the window. Squinting, I let my eyes adapt to the light while I tried to focus on the alarm clock. Rolling back on my pillow, I realized I slept well last night with no nightmares of horrific creatures chasing me. Daniel consumed my dreams last night, much to my satisfaction.

Since the news reported no recent animal attacks, chances of me making it back to the house were very good. Peering out the window, it looked as though it would be a perfect day. Clear sky all the way.

Dressing quickly, I grabbed my keys from the dresser and then headed out the bedroom toward the stairs. I paused briefly to take note of any loud conversations. The only voice I heard was Charlotte’s, discussing something about roses to one of her friends on the phone. Of course, I didn’t make it very far when her attention turned toward me.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning,” I replied. “Where’s everyone?” Mostly I wanted to make sure I had the day to myself.

“Thomas and Daniel left over an hour ago. Casey made a run to the store for me. Would you like breakfast?”

“No.” My hopes shot to an all-time high. “I’m going to head over to the house.”

“Okay, be careful. The roads may still be a little wet.” Surprised by her tone, I couldn’t believe that my wish had come true.

“I’ll be careful. See you later.” I dashed for the door.

For years it had been just my father and me. Truly, I loved the Maxwell’s with all my heart, but they were just a bit over protective for my taste. My father always allowed me the freedom to breathe. I suppose I learned to appreciate that a little too late.

Slowly, I pulled the car out the garage, heading down the driveway to my destination. The sporty little car grew on me the more I drove it. Once I made it to the main road, I applied more pressure on the accelerator and reached the top of the hill in no time. I realized the speed trap was just ahead. Slowing the car down to a safe speed, I passed by the officer with no problems.

Excitement burst inside of me when I turned left down the wooded driveway towards my home. Never before did I pay attention to the details to the house until now. The sun touched the glass wall windows reflecting shimmer rays of bright light. The glass house I called home.

Stopping the car in front of the house, I jumped out and headed to the front door. Unlocking it, relief washed over me, finally I made it home.

Of course the first place I wanted to visit was the kitchen. Walking toward the refrigerator, I paused and turned on the TV underneath the kitchen counter. The words from the TV caught my attention; *this is channel three news with a weather update. Tropical storm Charlie has now become a category one hurricane with sustained winds at seventy-five miles per hour. Hurricane Charlie is moving north-north east and is expected to reach a category four hurricane status by the time it reaches landfall somewhere around the panhandle of Florida. Florida residents are already preparing for the storm. The authorities have already announced a major evacuation....*” The voice trailed behind my own thoughts. I decided to pour myself a glass of tea and head toward my father’s office.

Consumed with the thoughts of the recent days, I needed to sort through them; the stories and legends were true concerning werewolves and that they do exist. Satisfied to know that my mother was human added to my relief, but somehow I wasn’t satisfied by Daniel’s statement that Charlotte overreacted. Not to mention the fact that there was something they were still hiding from me. Something that Charlotte was against them telling me. Something my father wanted me to know. Soon enough I would find out the truth. One way or the other, I decided if I didn’t find the truth here, the final confrontation would be with the whole Maxwell family.

After an hour of sorting through papers and files, I concluded my answers wouldn’t be found here. There was no information on my mother. I found no information on my birth and especially no information on anything that pertained to Lycans or werewolves. Sitting behind my father’s desk, I felt that maybe I overreacted. I shoved the papers and folders back into the desk and sat still. My eyes traveled around the room still in thought. Not looking for anything anymore, I decided to give up the idea that there may have been something strange with my family.

The dream I had of my father flashed over my eyes, sending a cold chill down my spine. The thought of werewolves and Lycans existing haunted me more than I wanted to admit. I considered this newfound knowledge the secret that had been hidden from me. I looked at the facts: Charlotte was concerned for me; Daniel and Thomas thought I should know; and there was Daniel’s honesty concerning the werewolf and Lycan legends. They probably knew these secrets and thought I couldn’t accept them.

Satisfied with my conclusions, it was time to work on my new decisions. I still had one semester of college left in Virginia. My heart urged me to move back home. Even after the completion of college, I still had no idea of what I wanted to do. My thoughts flashed back to the interest in DNA. Maybe that was it. Maybe I could continue my father’s work in saving lives. This conversation was one that would probably be something that I would save for Thomas and Charlotte.

The conflicting thoughts, I left behind in my father’s office, trailing my way back into the large living room. Sunlight filled the large room with its rays of hope for a brighter day. To make my day brighter, it would take a shopping trip with Casey. Rummaging through my purse, I found my cell phone and dialed her.

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It didn’t take Casey and me but an hour to complete our first wave of shopping in the crowded mall. Even though we hadn’t necessarily finished, the first purchases of summer clothing had been completed. The next wave included shoes followed by swimwear. The time we spent together reminded me of the years past, our laughter, the non-stop chattering between us and even the occasional double-takes by cute guys we passed. Of course, Casey didn’t take too much notice when one whistled at her while she was bent over fixing her shoe. I suppose if I hadn’t mouthed to the guy “She’s mine,” maybe he wouldn’t have run into the store’s window almost breaking the glass.

The Food Court was the next stop after shoe shopping, followed by the makeup counter. Testing out the latest fragrances on each other, we made a decision on two perfumes. I chose a light floral fragrance, inspired by Givenchy called “Irresistible”. My second choice was a more sensual scent, Dolce Gabbana, “The One for Her”.

We finished the day with a makeover, pedicure and manicure. I checked my watch and realized we were going to be late for dinner. My stomach would never forgive me for such a treacherous act. This was one time I hoped dinner would be ready without delay. By the time we made it back to Casey’s home, I’d probably be starving.

Casey filled me in on her hot new love interest she met while taking a few summer classes. Nathaniel MacArthur transferred here from Oklahoma State University. Anyone could tell she really liked this guy. Every time she mentioned his name her face lit up and her eyes turned dreamy. I listened while she rambled on about his good looks and his character as a sweet person.

“Have Charlotte and Thomas met him yet?” It appeared I popped a balloon of ecstasy. Casey’s dreamy gaze turned to one of distraught.

“No, not yet. I’m a little worried they’re not going to like him. You know how Dad always stresses *good bloodlines*.” Her voice showed hints of sarcasm. “He’s so old fashioned.”

“Well, I’m sure he’s just looking out for you. Besides, it would take a special man to acquire the hand of Thomas Maxwell’s only daughter.” I tried to make it sound as a joke. “You know many of them would be intimidated just to talk to you.”

“Yeah, family curse,” she murmured looking out the window.

“Family curse?” I repeated. I tried to keep my eyes on the road but couldn’t help from glancing over at her. With her hands neatly folded together in her lap, she turned toward me. Immediately I knew my words struck a nerve with her.

“Casey?”

“Well, it’s just you’re right,” she sighed. “Mom and Dad believe that I should marry someone within our little group. You remember what the people were like. I haven’t met anyone remotely interesting.”

As I drove, my mind traveled back in time to a few of the parties that we were required to attend. Casey and I always thought it was just the fun part of being able to dress up and socialize with the rich and famous. As for me, I guess I never realized that these parties were to be anything other than mere socializing. Apparently, to our parents it was much more. It was a match making party. Breathing in quickly, I tried to hide my slowness in perceiving the reality. Focusing hard to choose the right words wasn’t easy. In my heart, I knew how she felt. Maybe I was just slow, a late bloomer so to speak. The interest in the opposite sex had no appeal to me until recently. Shifting my thoughts again, I tried hard to concentrate on what to say to Casey.

“Well,” I paused trying to be logical. “Why don’t you give it awhile with Nathaniel and see how things go. That way if things progress between you two, then you can tell Thomas and Charlotte. So don’t worry about it right now.”

The sparkle returned to her eyes and her face brightened with a smile.

“I suppose you are right. I’ll give it a little more time to see where we go. Then if the relationship progresses, I’ll confront my parents.” She was ~~now~~ her chipper self again. “So what do you think of Daniel?”

The question threw me off guard. She always had this way of catching me in a situation where I didn’t have time to think about an answer. I glanced toward her, noticing the silly grin she wore. It didn’t take long before I noticed my heart fluttering from the mention of Daniel’s name.

“What?” I breathed out.

“Aw, come on Julie, even I have to admit my brother is gorgeous. You don’t think I haven’t noticed the way he looks at you. Not to mention the way you look at him. Everyone noticed it at the wake. He never left your side. Not even for one moment. I’ve never seen him this happy.”

“Well, yes, I have to admit he has grown into a handsome man.” I heard her make a huffing sound. “Okay,” I rolled my eyes. “He’s gorgeous,” I added.

“Jewels, why can’t you just admit you like him?”

“I guess I do like him.” I heard a slight “*Yes*” that hissed under her breath. “Okay now, let’s not get carried away.” I cautioned. “I have a lot on my plate.” Her smile told me she understood.

Turning the car down their driveway, I could feel the grumbling in my stomach again. I checked my watch and it was already six-thirty. I pulled the car to the garage and popped the trunk. Casey and I hopped out and started pulling shopping bags full of clothes out. Heading into the house, we went straight up the stairs to our rooms. To my relief as I breezed through the great room, I could smell food. One more trip and the treasures of our expedition were stowed. Seating ourselves around the table, we all met in the formal dining room. It took every ounce of restraint I could muster to not cram everything on my plate in my mouth at once. Remembering my manners, I chewed one bite at a time. In a way, it gave me the opportunity to savor the flavor and enjoy food. The table conversation remained light. Thomas discussed his golfing buddies. Charlotte mentioned the garden club meeting. Casey rambled about our shopping trip. Gazing in my direction throughout dinner, Daniel remained quiet.

“Julie?” Thomas’s voice broke the concentration on the savory piece of meat I was about to devour. I looked up. “Well, you have not spoken a word all evening.”

My first reply would have been something like, *I’m trying to stuff my face and don’t have much time to talk*. The best response was always, “It was an eventful day. I enjoyed the shopping trip with Casey. It feels good to be home.” I hoped the smile on my face would assure them my sincerity.

Wiping his mouth with his napkin, Thomas leaned back against his chair. “So Julie, what are your intentions?”

“*Could someone just let me finish my food!*” my thoughts screamed out while I tried to control my facial expression. Daniel chuckled in amusement by my reaction. I shot him a quick glance as a “*What are you laughing at?*” crossed my mind.

“Well, that’s something I wanted to discuss with you. I do have one semester to finish in college. I have the apartment there with at least six months left on the lease. I have no idea exactly what my options will be when I graduate.” Everything rolled out at once.

Thomas raised his eyebrows and cleared his throat. “You can always transfer to the college here, unless you are determined to graduate from your college. Then, I can always help with the lease. As far as your career, you do have many choices. Did anything in particular interest you yesterday?”



“Well as a matter of fact it did. I’m very interested in DalMar’s theories on DNA reconstruction.”

Thomas nodded slowly in agreement. He locked eyes with Daniel momentarily and then his eyes fell upon me. “You do know that you own half of DalMar Industries? So if you choose to have a job, it can be easily arranged.”

Thomas made everything sound so simple. It was as if he waved a magic wand and everything became clear and perfect. Your wish is my command. The new semester would begin in three weeks. This would give me time enough to plan my move.

“If you don’t mind I would like to start staying at my house.” *My house*, it sounded so strange. I would always consider the expensive home my father’s.

“Well, we do want you to be safe. It is a large home, Julie, and it is not exactly in a subdivision where neighbors could keep an eye on you.” He paused, giving Charlotte an intense stare. “However, we are just a few minutes away, and there will be people coming over to take care of the house. So I think you should be all right.”

I heard a slight gasp coming from Charlotte and turned to her to see she wasn’t in agreement with Thomas. She held her tongue, but her eyes held all the protest in the world.

“Great, I’ll move my stuff tomorrow.” A sudden sigh of dread hit me. All those clothes I’d just bought.

“Daniel and I can help!” Casey shot in.

“Really,” I breathed, “it’s not that bad. I can manage.”

“Nonsense. I saw the bags you two brought inside today. It looked as though you two bought the whole mall out.” At last he speaks, and with humor too.

I was defeated once again, winning one war and losing another. Smiling I nodded. Yes, it would be nice to have help with my baggage. After finishing dinner, I promptly excused myself from the table. With a full stomach and contentment, I headed upstairs for a shower and then to bed.

Rolling over in the bed, I pulled the sheets up to my chin. The full moon shined brightly outside the window. So bright, I wanted to close the blinds, but I was too comfortable to move. Closing my eyes, I focused on the night’s silence. Relaxing into the soft pillows, my body drifted into that wonderland of sleep.

## SIX

*Dreams* are involuntary images of the mind while the person sleeps. They are a place where the mind creates images of real and fictitious people and places. Relating to dreams, I supposed they come from the subconscious mind. Too much information to process during the day, that was my theory anyway.

Where the dream began, I don’t know. The beautiful dreamscape blended with a previous dream of a green meadow. The fresh aroma of clover covered field complemented the bright sun and gentle breeze. Daniel stood in front of me in the middle of the meadow. His beautiful long black eyelashes softly accented the warmth of his light brown eyes. The light blue polo shirt accentuated his well-defined muscular arms. His soft hand reached to my face, touching me lightly. His finger lingered on my cheek then traced the contour of my cheekbone. The sensual smell of his cologne intoxicated me. A whirlwind raced through my mind like a tornado when his head slowly moved closer to mine. My thoughts were all rushing at one time. My breath caught in my throat when his lips grazed over mine. Savoring the moment of the electrical surge that ran through my body, my hand went to his face, touching his cheek. Slowly my fingers explored the line of his face to the nape of his neck.

We both jumped when a low growl erupted behind me. I peered into his eyes for the confirmation that matched the fear in my heart. Before I had a chance to speak, he grabbed my arms and under gritted teeth, I heard the word “*RUN*” clearly. Heart pounding and full of fear, I followed his gaze. The green brush parted by a horrifying werewolf. With its eyes firmly locked on us, it crouched, preparing to pounce. Gripping Daniel’s arm, I stepped backwards. My heart raced, pounding wildly in my ears. Vaguely, I could hear Daniel as he turned quickly and yelled “*RUN!*” This time his voice was louder and sharper. I broke into a run, sprinting toward the end of the meadow. Looking back over my shoulder, I screamed when the werewolf leaped into the air toward Daniel. What I didn’t expect to see came next. Daniel moved in a blur toward the creature. A second later, a giant black wolf stood in his place. The two locked into a battle of life and death.

Cringing, I dared not look, while the sound of ferocious snarls and teeth snapping rumbled behind me. The sudden silence shot the hair on my neck to its ends. I knew the battle was over. My feet tried to keep speed with my heart, racing for my very life. It didn’t take long before I heard the galloping of fast-paced feet closing in behind me. A low growl bellowed from the creature followed by heavy huffs of air. I turned my head to the side just in time to catch a glimpse of the dark body when it leaped in the air toward me. I screamed.

I could’ve said that the most humiliating moment in my life happened when I woke up screaming hysterically while people were watching. Charlotte and Daniel both tried to wake me from my horrid dream. Both spoke calmly to me while I wrestled with the reality of the nightmare. Gathering my senses, I fell back on the pillows and accepted my embarrassment.

Something of a shock ran through me. I sat up in the bed and leaned closer to his face. Staring into his eyes, I felt that I was still dreaming. He gave me a precarious look.

“Daniel?”

“Julie, are you all right? You look like you have seen a ghost.”

“Since when have your eyes been hazel?”

Charlotte laughed and then walked out the room. A slight brush of red covered Daniel’s face when he let out a laugh. “My eyes have always been hazel. Why do you ask?”

“Because, a few days ago your eyes were a dark brown. In my dream they were light brown.”

“In your dream?” He lingered on to the last word a little too long. Then that sly grin crossed his lips.

“Oh, get over yourself!” I snapped and hopped off the bed.

“Well, you were the one who had the dream.” The amusement in his voice was utterly unbearable.

“Actually, you were not the one who made me scream,” I said flatly with my back to him.

I could hear his soft steps as he padded toward me. I glanced up in the mirror to see him stop and stand behind me. He leaned closer to my neck, with his lips barely touching my ear. His hard body pressed closer to mine, close enough to feel the heat that emanated from him.

“*If I were to make you scream, I*” he whispered, “*It most certainly would not be in fear.*” The vibrations of his deep voice set off certain signals inside my body. I wanted to melt right through the floor.

Standing in front of the mirror, I caught my breath when he strolled out the bedroom. With the feeling of his words still lingering on my neck, my body felt like it was on fire. A hot rush filled my veins and burned into the very core of my existence. A slight tremor ran through me, causing me to steady myself against the dresser. Yes, a cold shower would do wonders for me at that point.

With each passing day, Daniel became more dangerous to me. He stirred unexplored feelings and emotions within me. I prided myself on being in control of any situation, but with him, it was impossible. He did a great job of unraveling my self-control, bending my will to match his. I felt a depth attraction that I had never experienced before. This new attraction unnerved me.

Showering and dressing quickly, I packed my suitcase. The new clothes I purchased remained in their bags. Scanning through my cosmetic purchases, I found the cologne I felt the most like. Dashing out the bedroom, I leaned over the balcony and looked for Daniel.

“Daniel?” My voice loud but not so loud that it would ring throughout the large home.

“Yes.” He voiced from behind me.

“Um,” My thoughts eluded me, Daniel’s body was closer than I expected. I tried to refrain from looking into his eyes, but that required a will power that I didn’t possess. Brown. I knew it. This morning his eyes were hazel, but now they’re brown. I knew I wasn’t losing my mind.

“Yes?” He prompted with one raised eyebrow.

“Oh! You were going to help me with my stuff.” Shoving past him, I grabbed the bags. He followed me into the room and picked up my suitcase and a few shopping bags. With my purse on my shoulder and hands full of shopping bags, we headed out of the room and down the stairs.

Charlotte met me at the bottom of the stairs with opened arms. I set my bags down and reached up to hug her neck. I lovingly accepted the hug.

“Thank you so much.” I squeezed her tightly.

“You know you are welcome. Listen.” Her voice was firm. Pulling back, she looked directly into my eyes. “There is a tropical storm coming and if it becomes too bad I want you to come back here. Do not forget to lock your doors at night. AND for heaven’s sake, do not go wandering around those woods in the dark. You never know if there are any...well strange wild animals out there.”



“I promise. Tell Casey when she wakes up to come over and visit anytime.”

“I know she will. If you need us, just call.”

I acknowledged her request with a warm smile just as Daniel pulled the car up to the front door. Quickly moving past her, I ran to the car. Jumping in my Mitsubishi I started her up and was off down the driveway with Daniel following close behind. I suppose again, I was a little more excited than usual.

When I made it to the main road, I applied a little more pressure on the accelerator. To my surprise the car spun out and did a little fish tail. Looking up, I saw Daniel laughing in the review mirror. He was right on my bumper. I pressed the accelerator to half way, the car engine hummed and then with a burst I was in the wind. Looking back, I saw him move up closer. I pressed the accelerator further down. Soon we came up on the curve. I tapped the breaks before hitting the curve, and then gunned the engine in the middle of the curve. I didn't see him flash his headlights, so I increased the speed. Soon, we topped the hill. My foot came off the accelerator. I glanced in the review mirror, still no flashing lights. It was too late for me to slow down. The police car sat at the top of the hill. I went passed him doing a nice round eighty-five. Daniel was just a breath behind me. He passed the police car and flashed his head lights. I looked in my rearview mirror expecting to see the police car spin out with its blue lights flashing and sirens blaring. Nothing but Daniel with his head lights flashing. I slowed the car down and pulled over on the side of the road. Daniel pulled up behind me and stepped out the car.

“Did you just see that?”

“He didn't even pull out. I was doing eighty-five when I passed by him.”

“No, I mean something is wrong. His radar gun is always turned on. I'm going back to see what's wrong.” He turned before I could say anything else.

I pulled my car back onto the road and followed him back toward the police car. He pulled the car off the road onto the shoulder. I pulled up behind him.

“Stay here and leave the car running.” I heard the anxiousness in his voice.

He crossed the road and walked over to the police car. He stepped back a couple of steps and looked around on the ground. Daniel saw something and followed it to the rear of the police car. His body froze when he looked down at the ground. His head rose, looking around the woods behind where the police car was parked. Cautiously he crouched down to the ground with his left hand extended. He stood up quickly and backed away reaching into his jean pocket. Looking back behind him, he flipped the phone open. He ran toward my car with the phone held to his head. His words were unclear as he started to speak. “Call Dad!” The tense tone in his voice sent chills up my spine.

“Yes!” I heard him shout. “Just now. No. He always has his radar gun on and this time he did not. I did not see anyone in the car. Yes, we will wait.”

Pulling my cell phone out, I called Thomas. Daniel opened the passenger door and climbed into my car. When I had Thomas on the phone, I handed it over to him.

“You know the policeman that usually has the radar on down on East Fifty-four? Well, I just passed him doing ninety. His radar was not on. I turned around to see if he was okay.” He paused and looked to me. The horrified expression on Daniel's face terrified me.

“I found him behind the car. He has been attacked.” He paused. “No, he is dead. His body is, well, torn apart.”

I gasped. My breath came in quick spurts. Closing my eyes, I inhaled slowly. “The police are on their way. Okay, we will be here. She is fine.” He slapped the phone together and handed it back to me. “I am truly sorry you have to be here for this.” His face was grim.

“He was *attacked*?” The words seemed to come out in a breath.

“Daniel? What is going on? Was it a....”

He nodded. “This is not good.”

“What happened?”

“Apparently, it must have pulled him through the driver's side window. There is glass inside the car. It dragged his body behind the car and killed him.” His eyes stared forward through the windshield.

The tone in Daniel's voice told me there wasn't any need to take a look at the body. Then there was the reality check. A werewolf had attacked a police officer sometime last night. It didn't take long for my thoughts to drift back to Charlotte's words about strange animals. My next thought abruptly ended when three police cars pulled up behind us. The ambulance followed close behind and then pulled onto the opposite side of the road.

A couple of minutes later, the police began their investigation with Daniel and me. They questioned each of us separately. Not long after the questioning began, Thomas showed up in his black Mercedes. Another officer greeted him promptly, passing a few words back and forth. Thomas climbed out the car. The officer who questioned me looked up to see Thomas and the other officer while they walked toward the cruiser.

“Karl, this is Thomas Maxwell. He's the father of the guy in Ted's car. He says the two left the house a few minutes ago. His son, Daniel Maxwell was helping move her to the house down the road. She'd been staying there with them for about a week. She's Martin Knight's daughter,” the police officer whispered the last few words.

“Well, Miss Knight, I have your phone number and if there is anything else, we'll give you a call. I'm sorry you had to be here. Just be careful tonight. We'll do everything we can to find who or what did this.”

“Thank you, Officer.” I climbed out of the cruiser to find Thomas talking with the other police officer. Daniel climbed out of the other police car and immediately walked toward me. The anxious look on his face remained when his arm slid around my waist. He walked me back to my car without hesitation.

“It is going to be okay,” he whispered in my ear.

I looked past Daniel to see Thomas walking toward us. Thomas's horrid expression matched Daniel's.

“Julie, this is not a good time for you to be in the house by yourself. Honey, I know you want your independence.” he paused. “I know you are not comfortable with a lot of people around you. But...”

“Thomas, you know I love you and Charlotte. I consider you my second family. But I need this.” My pleading sounded more like begging. I just wanted to be home.

“Okay then, but at least maybe Daniel could stay with you.” His voice was firm as if he had already won his argument.

“Not a problem. I will follow her to the house, and then help her settle in. Afterwards, I will return home and pick up a few things. I think it would be a good idea if I just stayed with her until this is over.” Daniel agreed with Thomas.

“Well, it looks as though I have a bodyguard.” My voice was controlled and showed no emotion. Here I will be alone in a house with a man that sends me into a rush of molten lava. I was positively sure that neither of them knew that I was hoping to have plenty of cold water available.

A monster werewolf remained on the loose. For some reason, I felt safe just knowing Daniel would be with me tonight. Now there was another danger to face, myself and this new attraction toward him.

Thomas climbed into his Mercedes and headed back to his home. I managed to turn my car around after having every single police car moved out of my way. Daniel followed behind me toward my house. Once we arrived, I pulled the car up to the front door where unloading my things would be easier to handle. He followed me inside the house and then quickly moved past me, setting the luggage down on the floor.

“*Stay here.*” He whispered as he walked through the bottom half of the house. Quickly he moved up the stairs and covered the entire house. Running back down the stairs, he grabbed my suitcase and the bags again. “Which way?”

We dropped off the bags in my bedroom and returned down the stairs to the great room. I walked toward the kitchen.

“Tea?”

“Please.”

“You know there is supposed to be a tropical storm heading this way tonight.” My words were more conversational. I reached for two glasses and filled them with ice.

“Yes, I guess we are going to need a few candles just in case we lose power. Do you have any flashlights, batteries, etc.?”

“Yeah, I'm pretty sure they're around here somewhere. My Dad should have plenty of camping supplies in the garage. I'll get everything together.” Handing him the glass his fingers touched mine slightly. He smiled and then took a sip. His eyebrows drew together.

“What's wrong?” I raised the glass to my lips and tasted. The frown on my face matched his. “Sorry.” The tea had gone sour. I reached for the glass and poured both out in the sink. “I'll have fresh tea when you return, promise.”

“Okay, I will run back to the house to pick up my stuff. I should be back in within an hour or less. Lock the door and do not let any strangers inside. Okay?” Daniel's usual smooth voice turned firm and commanding.

“Yes sir!”

“Julie, I mean it!” He retorted with a frown.

“I know. I will. Don't worry I'll be fine.” I pushed him forward into the great room.

My skin crawled with the thought that a killer werewolf ran loose. The legends were right concerning the werewolves. Where were the Lycans in all this? They were the ones that were supposed to be the *protectors of man*. Locking the door behind him, I decided to head to the garage to see what my father had stored for storm supplies.

Opening the door to the garage, I flipped on the light switch. No lights. For reasons that I couldn't explain, I thought if I tried again the lights would mysteriously turn on. Nothing. The light bulb must have blown. My fingers trailed past the light switch to the garage opener. I pressed the button and the garage doors opened. Light from the sun illuminated the whole garage. Neatly stacked in the corner of the garage, my father's camping equipment remained untouched.

Walking down the stairs, I glanced around the garage for anything else that would be beneficial. Rummaging through the equipment, I found two good working flashlights and a Coleman lantern. I headed back up the stairs and pushed the button to close the garage doors. Closing the door, I locked it and headed back to the kitchen. There had to be candles around here somewhere. Then it occurred to me as I walked back to the great room and glanced over toward the coffee table. There were decorative candles all over the house. Stepping back until I could see the dining room table with several candles in the center. A smile crossed my lips when I realized something very important.

Last year during a bad storm, one of the trees fell on the power lines. Dad waited for two weeks for the power company to fix the damage. Shortly after, he purchased a whole house generator. However, the thought of sitting alone in the dark with Daniel would be nice. Maybe the storm wouldn't be that bad, after all.

Heading back to the kitchen, I ignored the television as I walked by. Walking to the counter I grabbed the container marked TEA. After I started brewing the tea, I left the kitchen to take care of another urgent matter.

I certainly had enough time to do the laundry. Most of my laundry accumulated at my stay with the Maxwell's. Heading back up the stairs, I gathered my laundry and returned downstairs to the laundry room. After I set the load and grabbed a glass of tea, I went to prepare for the storm.

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My heart jumped when the sound of the doorbell chimed. The first thought I had that it was probably the police officers again. I hurried around the kitchen to the front door. It was Daniel. He stood in front of the glass door with a suitcase in one hand and a backpack in the other hand. I unlocked the door and let him in.

"What's this?" I motioned toward the backpack.

"Well, I figured we would need a few things if we lose electricity."

"Um, Daniel," I paused. "Dad had a whole house generator installed last year." I winced.

"Well, just in case."

"Okay, well, pick out a bedroom upstairs. I have to check the laundry." Turning I headed back to check on the last load in the dryer.

We spent the good part of two hours outside picking up any items that might become dangerous projectiles in a strong wind. Living in a house with huge glass walls, one considered all possibilities of danger. The wind gusts picked up as we moved the last of the patio furniture into the storage building. Our next difficult measure came when we tried to secure the pool cover. Dark clouds moved in and a burst of rain fell; we gave up. We made a dash through the patio and into the house.

"Well that was..." I paused a little breathlessly. "Interesting."

He nodded.

"So what's for dinner?" His lips broadened into a smile.

A quick glance at my watch told me it was already five-thirty. With my limited skill in the kitchen, cooking dinner was a funny thought. The old saying is "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach". If this statement was true, I would never win my way to Daniel's heart. I remained motionless with a blank stare on my face.

"Okay. We shall see what waits in the refrigerator to be cooked." He cheerfully announced.

My heart fell into the pit of my stomach when he opened the refrigerator. His right eyebrow rose when he opened the freezer side. With a soft sigh he turned toward me. "I wonder." He contemplated. "How long can a person survive without food?"

"A few weeks?" My eyes drifted upwards toward the ceiling.

"Hmmm. Well, I did see two steaks. I think I can manage to fix a suitable dinner until we go grocery shopping tomorrow." A smile crossed his face.

Seated at the counter I watched while he prepared a culinary masterpiece with sautéed potatoes, onions and broiled steak. We ate our dinner at the kitchen counter while the wind and rain hurled around us outside.

"Let me guess. Charlotte taught you how to cook," I said between bites.

"Actually, I was taught how to cook by a chef. I spent a lot of time in the kitchen." He smiled a little.

"So you like to cook?"

"Sometimes."

"Sometimes?"

"Sometimes I like to enjoy another person's skill in the culinary arts." His smile broadened.

He had to be joking, I thought shifting in my chair. "Culinary skill, huh? Well, good luck with that, because I'm not very skilled in the kitchen."

After dinner, I cleaned up the kitchen, but apparently I didn't move fast enough so he joined in to help. With a spotless kitchen, we walked into the living room to wait out the rest of the storm. I stopped and looked out the window. The storm was in its full fury now. The wind howled and hurled through the tops of the pine trees, bending them to their sides. I nearly jumped out my skin when a large branch slapped hard against the glass window.

"I have a great idea," Daniel spoke distracting my fear.

Walking past me, he went to the sofa and reached for the remote controls. Looking at each of them carefully, he clicked one and the fireplace started. He then chose another remote and pressed another button. We were now in the dark. After a few seconds, my eyes adjusted and I could see him sitting on the sofa.

"Come here," he whispered.

My heart beat a thousand beats to one breath. I walked toward him and sat down on the sofa. He moved slowly and reached for me. I could feel his hands around my arms as he turned me and pulled me back to him. His arms went around me, pulling me closer to his hard chest. I nestled my head against his chest where I heard the steady rhythm of his strong heart.

"Better?" he asked.

"Better," I replied.

"We should be safe. The storm is not that bad," his soft and velvety voice cooed.

"Tell me more about the Lycans," I whispered.

His hand adjusted the pillow under his head and then rested on my arm. Slowly he rubbed his hand up and down my arm.

"Did you know that the Lycans mate for life?" I shook my head. "There are very few Lycans. They usually stay with their own kind. Not mixing with humans. On rare occasions, a Lycan will take a human as a mate. The connection and bond is so strong it is never broken. Not even in death. If one should die, the other would never take another mate."

"That sounds like a lonely life."

"Not really. You see the bond between Lycan mates is incredible. They become one with each other. Their thoughts, their emotions, their minds and even their heartbeats.

They begin to hear each other's thoughts. The emotions are awakened to a height that is beyond human conception. Each one feels what the other feels, the pain, love, and passion. Their heartbeats begin beating to the same rhythm. I guess when you are truly one together, why would you look for another that could never replace what you had to begin with?" He paused for another moment. I dared not speak.

"The separation is not lonely. You still *feel* the presence of your mate with you. It never leaves you no matter how long you may live. It is not a feeling of grieving. It is a satisfied feeling." His voice was so soothing and warm. I snuggled closer to him.

"Sounds like my father and mother. He never remarried. I suppose he had the same feelings."

"Somewhat," he whispered.

My thought was of my father and the love he had for my mother. So many years I believed he was lonely. It was probably just as Daniel had said concerning the Lycans; he was satisfied to have found his mate in life. My heart swelled inside my body that this type of love actually existed.

"The ancients say that the reason for the bond helps with the hunt." His soft voice broke my thoughts.

"The hunt?"

"The hunt for werewolves and other creatures of the night. In Lycan form, it cannot speak verbally. Their communications are pretty much like regular wolves. Their thoughts are still human. It is common that mates hunt together. They combine their strengths together. They hunt as one. They attack as one. They kill their prey as one. Only the mated ones are permitted to hunt. Because of the bond."

"Is that why it is rare that a Lycan would take a human as a mate?"

"Yes. According to the ancients, it is not allowed. The laws have been broken only a few times in the past. The ancients believed in keeping the bloodlines pure and sacred. Human blood only weakened the lines. Cross breeding, they called it. There were severe penalties." I could tell his voice had trailed off into a thought as we both heard the wind howl outside and sheets of rain pounding against the glass wall. Soon he continued.

"A human woman could not carry a Lycan child. The body would not recognize it and ...." he paused again. The sigh in his voice made me tremble. "Neither the mother nor the child would survive." Utter sadness filled his voice.

"You know the stories the locals told of the shape-shifters?" He continued changing the subject.

“Lycans?” I asked and shifted against his chest.

“Yes. A few people say the Indians that lived on Fort Mountain many years ago made a pact with a few settlers before they left. They granted them sacred rights to their lands in exchange for their help. The new settlers agreed and the Indians introduced them to the Great Spirit Wolf. The Great Spirit Wolf, we now call Lycan, would become the protector of mankind and guardian of the great wall which we know as Fort Mountain.”

“I had never heard that version of the story.”

“Not many people have. It has been a secret for many years. The remainder of the settlers stayed in this area and still to this day guard the wall and the humans. They are the only few remainders of the original bloodline of the Lycans.” His soft voice trailed off into another thought.

“I thought the wall was considered to have magical powers.”

“According to the legend it does. The Indians that lived behind the wall were spiritual in their belief. Their chief was a wise man. He was aware of the evil nature of the werewolf. While the building of the wall continued at night under the moon, the Indians performed a ceremony during the daylight hours under the sun. The power was so strong in the wall it was said the sun would illuminate one side during sunrise and the other during sunset. The power held within the wall itself would not let any evil creature past it.”

My eyes were already getting heavy. I closed my eyes listening to the strong beating of his heart. Slowly the world drifted out from underneath me.

## SEVEN

The softness of the night drifted into my dreams. Daniel and I stood in the meadow again. My senses ran wild and I felt more alive than ever. His hand slipped around mine as he led me down through the clover filled meadow. Our steps quickened into a run. Enjoying the breeze in our face, we ran until we reached the forest and continued through the trees. Suddenly, Daniel disappeared. I kept running until I reached the river.

Standing by the river, I searched for him. A sense of fear washed over me. In the midst of the trees, I saw a dark figure move toward me. It wasn’t Daniel but instead, a werewolf. My heart thundered when I saw the unimaginably horrifying beast. Its large oversized wolf looking head was covered with stiff hair. The body was shaped similar to a human, with muscular long arms, oversized shoulders and thick muscular neck. The claw shaped-hands were attached to its long arms. It balanced itself on its dog-like haunches. It stared at me with its red blazing eyes. I knew in an instant that I was its target. Fearing for my life, I bolted into a run. The roar and growl behind me made the adrenaline rush through my body.

My heart raced wildly as I found strength in my fear to keep running. The creature was extremely fast. Glancing over my shoulder, I could see it run in leaps on its claw-like hands and dog-like hindquarters. “*It’s just a dream!*” I demanded my mind. “*It’s just a dream! Face your fears!*” I commanded myself. Taking a deep breath, I whirled around to see the creature leaping in the air toward me.

My hands flew instinctively in front of my face while its claws dug into my upper arms. The full weight of the beast forced my body onto the ground. With a heavy thud, I landed on my back. My hands grabbed its prickly shoulders while my arms locked to prevent the sharp teeth from biting me. My resistance was a futile effort. Its strong muscled jaws pushed forward to my throat. Its sharp teeth snapped toward my face. The loud and heavy snarls ripped from its mouth. Quickly its head moved and I felt a sharp stab in my arm. Its head moved closer to mine, dripping crimson red blood from its mouth. Closing my eyes, I screamed, “*Daniel!*”

My eyes flew open while the rapid beating of my heart pounded in my ears. I tried to comprehend that it was just a dream. My breath came in gasps. It was morning. Looking around the room, I realized I was now on the floor beside the sofa. Laying my head back on the floor, I inhaled deeply trying to relax. My mind was coming back to reality. I raised myself to a sitting position. With one hand on the sofa, I managed to stand up. The sudden throbbing pain in my arm hit me. I raised my right arm and turned it around. Apparently, when I fell off the sofa I had hit it on the coffee table.

“Daniel?” I called out. There was no answer. He was probably taking a shower. This was not a bad idea. A nice hot shower would help me clear my head from the dream. Slowly, I walked up the stairs.

I grabbed my bathrobe and walked into my shower. The hot water felt good when it hit my skin. With my arm feeling the throbbing pain, washing my hair appeared to be a difficult task, but somehow I managed. The images of the dream still lingered in my mind of the horrid beastly creature. I finished my shower and stepped out. Wrapping myself in my bathrobe, I returned to the bedroom to dress.

“Julie?” I heard his voice call from downstairs.

“I’m up here! I’ll be down in a minute!” I yelled back to him.

I dressed quickly and ran down the stairs. The butterflies in my stomach fluttered again. He sat at the kitchen bar watching the TV. My eyes wandered down the length of his arms, noticing the bulging muscles. The tight muscles in his body showed clearly through the light green T-shirt that he wore, sending a rush of warmth through my body. My eyes traveled back to his wide shoulders, traveling slowly down his side. Not missing anything, his stomach must be tightly muscled. My eyes traveled down the length of his upper legs.

“Are you okay?” His words broke my thoughts. The warmth of blood rushed to my face and I couldn’t help but smile as my eyes turned toward the TV.

“Yeah, I guess I’m just trying to wake up.” It sounded a lot better than saying to him that I was admiring his well-built and toned body. I quivered at the thought once again when I managed to walk by him and head for the coffee.

“I checked outside for storm damage. Luckily, there was no damage to the house. A couple of trees fell down across the driveway. I managed to move them out of the way.” There was something more. His voice was a little tense. I turned to see only the worried expression on his face.

“What’s wrong?” The sickening feeling of fear crept inside of me.

“There were two more attacks last night. I just saw it on the news before you came down the stairs. Two campers.” He spoke slowly never taking his eyes from the TV. “I received a call from Scotland. There appears to be some kind of problem and I need to leave this evening.”

Everything within me wanted to scream at him, *I need you too!* Holding the cup tightly in my hands, I considered the possibility that I may just be daydreaming. The fact that I had grown so attached to him fascinated me. Daniel had become my shelter of safety. He stood and then walked toward me. Gently he touched my arm and I winced from the pain that ran up to my shoulder.

“What?” he responded to my sudden movement of pulling my arm away from his hand.

“I had another nightmare, apparently after you left; I fell off the sofa and must’ve hit my arm on the coffee table.” Cautiously, his fingers clasped around my arm, drawing it closer to him. He ran his finger down my arm and over the hard red spot. Tingling sensations ran through my entire body from such a simple touch.

“I don’t think it’s broken, but you definitely took a hit.” His eyes traveled back to mine and a frown formed on his face. “What were you dreaming about?”

Carefully, I chose my words; there were some details that I wanted to leave out. He didn’t need to know the part about us running hand in hand through the meadow. It sounded too childish. Actually, I thought it was a good idea not to mention he was in my dream all together. “A werewolf attacked me.” There. Straight to the point.

His mouth twisted into a sly grin while his eyes twinkled with humor. “So,” He held up my arm. “How much damage did you inflict on the werewolf?”

“Not much.” There was no way I could’ve stopped the laughter that burst out of me. We shared the humor for a moment, and then his face turned serious again.

“Listen, I should not be gone for more than a week. I want you to stay with Mom and Dad,” the soft voice pleaded with me.

“Daniel,” I sighed.

“Julie, it is for your own protection. This house is in the middle of the woods, and you are about ten minutes from the nearest house.” He pleaded.

“I’ll be fine here.” I protested.

“I won’t.” His expression changed. The warmth of his brown eyes peered deeply into mine. “I would not be able to concentrate on anything else but worrying about you, wondering if you were all right. I do not think I would forgive myself if something terrible happened to you while I was gone. Please Julie.” He continued in a velvety rich voice. “You mean too much to me.”

Those words lingered in my ears. It touched something within my heart. I’m not sure what he saw in my eyes, but his face moved closer toward me. His lips touched mine ever so lightly. I couldn’t breathe. My pulse raced. His lips trailed over mine lingering ever so softly. Fire flamed through my veins, bringing my blood to a boil.

Electricity charged my body. My hand gently touched the side of his face. His warm hand touched mine, sending wonderful sensations throughout my body. Pulling away

from me, his face only inches from mine, my eyes slowly opened to see him carefully watching me. When I finally exhaled, his lips pursed into a smile. He had done his job well, intoxicating me from the first kiss.

Satisfied, slowly he came closer again. The look in his eyes was more than satisfaction; it was desire. His lips pressed against mine again with a little more force. I caught my breath. His fingers traced my jawbone down my neck where his hand cupped the back of my head. He took a deep breath and then pulled me closer to him. His tongue traced my upper lip, wanting to be invited inside to explore what he desired. My knees weakened. His arm wrapped around me, pressing my weakened body closer to his. I molded into every inch of his lean muscular body. I drew the scent deeper in my lungs, allowing his fragrance to fill my senses. My hand ran into his hair, clutching tightly the black tendrils between my fingers. My body burned with an intensity of fire like never before. His mouth hungered after mine, teasing, taunting and unleashing a desire that I had never known before.

Daniel stopped, tearing himself away from my lips. His ragged breath matched mine. The desire in his wild eyes intensified, matching my own desires for him. He held me firmly in place while stepping away from me slowly. Somehow I still managed to hold onto the coffee cup without spilling it. We laughed when we looked at the cup and then each other.

“I will come back. I promise.” His words were as true as any I had ever heard. “Please, just stay with Mom and Dad, for me?”

“Okay,” I whispered.

“I’ll call you every day to make sure you are okay.” The confirmation was all I needed.

“What time is your flight?”

“I am leaving in three hours. I have just enough time to get packed and make it to the airport.”

“I’ll drive you to the airport. It’s still daylight. I don’t think we will have to worry about werewolves in the daytime. Right?” I forced out a smile.

His head tilted to the side, giving me the impression he had to think about it. “Yeah, you might be right. I would like that.” After a quick kiss, he turned and disappeared into the great room.

My hand absentmindedly went to my face. My finger touched my lips where his lips had been. The thought of what I had missed all those years brought back a slight regret. However, excitement and joy ran through me. I felt like I could skip through the clouds and run laps through the meadow outside. I wanted to fling myself out a window and scream. The feelings I had were the kind I wanted to savor forever. Never had I felt this way before, and I wanted to enjoy it.

After a few moments of basking in my newfound delight, I came back to reality. The news on the TV issued a special report. The two victims from last night’s attack remain unidentified. Police stated the attack was animal related. They suspected a large wolf or possibly a pack of wolves. The doorbell rang, breaking my attention from the news. I set the coffee cup on the counter on my way to the front door.

Heading around the kitchen, I glanced toward the front door. Two police officers stood waiting patiently for me to answer the door. One police officer, taller than the other, had blond hair and wore dark shades. The other officer, a much stockier build with brown hair glanced down at his note pad. Two men dressed in animal control uniforms stood behind the police officers. Nervously, I reached for the door and opened it.

“Miss Knight?” The taller of the two police officers said.

“Yes?”

“My name is Officer Duncan, this is Officer McKenzie. May we speak with you a moment?”

“Yes, I suppose so. Come in.” I stepped aside to let the officers pass. The two animal control officers remained outside. I glanced at them and then toward Officer Duncan.

“They are with the animal control,” he stated firmly. I nodded and walked passed them into the great room and motioned for them to have a seat. I sat down slowly.

“Miss Knight, we will only take a moment of your time.” He said looking at his notes. “I understand that you are aware of the animal attacks in the area lately.” I nodded

slowly. “You have been living in Virginia for the past four years? Is this correct?” I nodded again.

“I returned home for my father’s funeral last week.” I added. He scribbled something on his note pad.

“Your father was attacked by an animal as well? Is that correct?” A frown crossed my face.

“Yes, that is what I’ve been told. Is there something different?”

“I’m sorry; we are just asking some routine questions. Where exactly was your father when he had been attacked?”

“I don’t really know. Somewhere out of state. The Midwest I think. He went on a hunting trip with some of his friends.”

“What kind of hunting trip?”

“One of his friends owned a ranch and was having problems with wolves attacking the cattle. They went there to try and get rid of them.” My voice had become cooler.

Both police officers looked at one another and then the blond one scribbled something down on his notepad again.

“Just a few more questions. Do you know who went on this little hunting expedition?”

I thought for a moment. “I don’t know all of them. The only one that I know was Thomas Maxwell.”

“Would you know if there was anyone else who was injured?”

I shook my head. “No, I haven’t heard anything about any of them. I see Thomas on a regular basis and he looked fine.” I noticed his eyes trailed down to my bruised arm.

“Well, we’re concerned that maybe this animal is carrying rabies.” He paused. “That’s a nasty bruise on your arm, Miss Knight. How’d you get that?”

Daniel distracted me from my answer when I saw him walk down the stairs. There was a look of surprise on his face when he saw the two police officers. Their attention drew to Daniel as he walked into the room, and sat down beside me.

“Officers?” He nodded to them. Daniel’s focus was on the blond officer with the sunglasses.

“And you are?” Officer Duncan asked.

“Daniel Maxwell.”

“Well, Mr. Maxwell, do you also live here?” His tone changed immediately.

“For now,” Daniel answered flatly.

“Are you planning to go somewhere?”

“I came up here for her father’s funeral. Our families are close.”

“I see,” he said sarcastically. Daniel’s body tensed at the tone of the officer. “So where are you from then?”

“I have been in Edinburg, Scotland for the last five years. Is there something that we are being placed under arrest for?” Daniel’s voice showed the signs of irritation.

“Oh no.” The officer shifted his attention from Daniel to me. “Miss Knight, the arm?”

“I fell asleep on the sofa last night. During a bad dream, I hit my arm on the coffee table when I fell off the sofa.” The words rushed out my mouth.

“Hmm. Well, if you don’t mind we would like to look around the property to see if there are any tracks like the ones we found around the victims.”

“Do you have any idea what it is yet?”

“Our animal control officers say it is a pack of wolves. However, according to the tracks they are probably the largest wolves we have encountered. I suggest that you keep your doors locked and stay inside. Do not go out into the woods. If you see anything strange, do not try to approach it. Call us immediately.” He said handing me a business card with his name and phone number on it.

“Please help yourself. There are probably about twenty-five acres around here. I will be staying at Mr. Maxwell’s if you find anything.” I said as they stood. I followed them to the door and let them out.

“Thank you for your time Miss Knight,” he said as they walked to the other two men standing beside the large trucks. I closed the door and turned toward Daniel who already had a grim look on his face.

“I don’t like this. There is something else going on,” he said.

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Why were they questioning you about your father?”

I shrugged my shoulders not seeing any relevance to the questions in general.

“Why didn’t he just ask you at the door if they could look around the property? Why all the interrogations?”

“Daniel, I don’t know. What are you thinking?” He shook his head as his eyebrows met in a frown. “Look, we know what this thing is.”

“Things.” He corrected me. “The officer said there was a pack. That means we are dealing with more than one.” His face went off into a blank expression. There was no way I could tell what he was thinking. The uneasy feelings crept inside of me as I could only guess at what was going through his mind.

“Daniel?” I tried to distract his deep thoughts. “You said that if there are werewolves, then there are Lycans, right?” His eyes traveled to mine; his brows remained drawn together. “Then where are the Lycans that are responsible for protecting us? Protecting mankind like you said the legends say they would?” For whatever ever reason Daniel’s eyes narrowed. The once glowing warm light hazel brown eyes darkened into a deep shade of blackish brown. He stepped away from me and headed up the stairs.

Standing in the middle of the large foyer, I felt alone. It had to be something I said which caused such a look on his face, a look of hatred. A chill ran down my spine. The lovely sensuous morning turned over within a few moments to something hurtful. I had expected him to answer and not to just walk away from me the way he did. Pain shot through my heart like fireworks on the Fourth of July. The threatening tears halted when I heard his steps approaching down the stairs.

"I need to take Mom's car back to the house. We can leave from there." He snapped. I nodded and walked toward the kitchen to get my purse.

As I picked my purse, I noticed another news break. *"This is Channel Three News with another News Breaking Update. Police have determined that a large pack of wolves have been the culprits in the recent animal attacks. As of last night there had been two more people found dead because of the attacks. So far, three people are reported missing within the area. Residents in the listening areas are to be cautious if seeing any animal that resembles a wolf. They are dangerous. Police have advised all residents to stay indoors at night and make sure doors are secure and garage doors closed. In other news, Gang Members. A new Gang has been recognized in the area with ...."* I turned off the TV and turned only to find myself facing Daniel. The tension in the air was thick enough to cut with a knife. I didn't speak when I walked past him to the front door. With jaws firmly locked, he moved quickly behind me. I followed him out of the house to my car, where I noticed he was already waiting in Charlotte's Lexus.

Backing up around the police cars, I pulled my car between the animal control trucks almost hitting one of them as I headed down the driveway. My pain turned into anguish. There had to be some explanation for his behavior. I guess all that glitters is truly not gold. The more I thought about his reaction the more heated I became. Without realizing it, I already had the car up to eighty. I slowed down just in time to turn into his driveway.

Pulling up in front of the house, I noticed Casey's car was gone. I jumped out my car before Daniel had a chance to pull up behind me. Quickly I went inside.

"Charlotte?" I called out.

"In here, dear! We are in the kitchen," she called out to me.

Dropping my purse on the sofa, I walked into the kitchen to see her and Thomas sitting at a small table with coffee mugs, empty plates and the newspaper.

"Julie." She walked toward me with arms opened wide. I embraced her tightly. "Breakfast?"

"What do you have?" I forced out a smile and I glanced at my watch. We had at least one hour before we had to leave to make it on time to the airport.

"How about a little of everything? Come on sit down. I'll fix you a plate."

Daniel walked through the kitchen just as I seated myself opposite Thomas. He briefly glanced up from his morning newspaper to notice Daniel enter the room. Daniel spoke briefly to his mother, but only glared at his father.

"We need to talk," he shot at him. Thomas folded the paper and placed it on the table. Excusing himself, he walked with Daniel out on the patio where Daniel closed the door behind him.

Charlotte placed the plate of scrambled eggs, bacon and toast in front of me. The smell of the food made me realize I was hungry. One of the things I did like about the Maxwell house, on the weekends they enjoyed sleeping late.

"Julie, what's going on?" Her soft voice showed the concern.

"The police came by this morning. They were asking questions about my Dad's accident and then they wanted to look around the property for tracks. I heard on the news they believe it is a pack of wolves." Shoving a forkful of eggs into my mouth, I chewed slowly.

"Oh. We read something about that in the newspaper. Three people are missing. All this is a little closer to home than what I would like. Daniel said he convinced you to stay here until he comes back?"

I nodded.

"He is more like his father than he would like to admit. He can be extremely convincing."

"I noticed," I managed to say in between bites.

Her face softened into a smile. "So what did you two do last night in the middle of the storm?"

"We sat in the living room and he told me stories about Lycans."

"Really?"

I wondered if telling her that Daniel and I had snuggled up in front of the fireplace and had hot, wild sex would have been more appealing to her. The thought of that made me smile and blush nonetheless. Apparently, she must have seen my faint blush and the smile returned to her face as she glanced away when we both heard the patio door open. Daniel and Thomas returned to the kitchen. Charlotte looked at Thomas then at Daniel.

"The lab is having some complications, and I expect to be back in three days. Julie will stay with you until I return."

"Of course, I would like nothing more." Charlotte added sending me a friendly smile.

"Julie, you are not to go near that house until I return. Do you understand?" The tone in his voice frightened me. The sharp and demanding tone frightened me. I nodded slowly. This was a side of Daniel I had never seen, and frankly I didn't want to see it again.

"Don't worry son, we will take good care of her. You be careful and return home as soon as you can. Will Jason be returning with you?"

"I think so. I will know more when I get there." he paused. "Julie we need to go now." I took one last bite of the toast and drank the remaining contents of the glass.

My arms folded around Charlotte's neck and then surprising myself, I even hugged Thomas. He gave me a little squeeze and somewhat of a grumble like a bear escaped him. Grabbing my purse, I headed to the front door where Daniel waited.

"I'll drive." Daniel was still upset. I didn't argue with him as I tossed him the keys and climbed in the passenger side.

The silence between us tortured me. I couldn't help wondering if it was something I had said to him to cause such anger. My thoughts ran back to the last moments of our conversation at my house.

"This is a nice car." Finally, the silence broke. He speaks again, I thought.

"Thank you." I replied.

"Julie," he began, "I am not mad at you. Everything about the killings, the werewolves... this is what upsets me. Not to mention how much you have been through."

"Daniel, I'll be all right. I'm fine. If you are worried about the nightmares, well, I started having them long before any of this ever started."

"I know. That is what is making me anxious."

"My dreams?" He nodded.

"It bothers you." His sharp tone suddenly turned soft. "I don't think you know how your screams affected me that morning."

"I'm sorry.... I just... it was..."

"Don't be. When I said you meant something to me, I meant that. I never want you to be afraid of anything anymore. You have no idea how much I hate leaving you alone... especially now."

I couldn't speak. I dared not bring up the conversation we had earlier. I knew in my heart he didn't want to leave. There were no words to describe how much I wanted him to stay: I had grown to know Daniel on a different level. No, I didn't want him to go. I knew he had his work in Scotland, and I was here in Georgia. If anything, I had to believe that fate would play out her hand. If it was meant to be, then it would be, the moments, I would cherish, every one of them.

Daniel pulled the car in front of the airport. It had been a long drive. He stepped out the car and retrieved his suitcase from the back seat. I climbed out and followed him to the front doors. He stopped and turned to me. "I want you to go straight home to the house." I nodded.

Daniel reached for me and I placed one arm around his neck while he drew me tightly against his body. His lips touched my ear and in a faint whisper, I heard the words, "I love you." I pulled back slightly and his lips met mine. The feverish kiss lasted a bit longer than what we expected. He pulled back from the kiss, with a breath that escaped me, I breathed the final words until I saw him again, *"Hurry back."* Turning I got into the car and pulled away from the airport.

My heart tugged and pulled in turmoil inside of me. All in one moment love and pain tore into me ripping away pieces of my heart. I was in agony, a pure hell of an indescribable dimension. Anger and joy ran through me in one swift blaze. It was utter confusion. The joy from my newfound love and anger at the same time he was leaving. He would be back soon I kept reminding myself. The question in my mind was; could I make it three days without him? As I drove the long drive back to his house, the turmoil continued.

Deep inside my heart, I felt the crushing waves again. No box could contain all of the emotions that welled inside of me. There was no grief or sorrow. Suffering a few moments was like an eternity of torment. Hard as I tried to free myself from the agony, there was nowhere to run or hide. There was no way of knowing when relief would come and deliver me from these chains. The chains of love wrapped tightly around my heart. How could something so beautiful, so wonderful hurt so badly? I would gladly take a room filled with a thousand people and stand in the middle of the room, rather than deal with this type of anguish.

Close to Daniel's home, I realized I needed to stop by my house to pick up my clothes. I reached for my phone and decided to call Charlotte and let her know what I had planned and would be over in a few minutes. This is one time I didn't want to be alone. I was afraid to be. Afraid that I would go mad in the state I was in.

Pulling up to the house, I noticed the police cars and animal control trucks were gone. Relieved, I jumped out of the car and headed into the house to pack my bags. There was something odd about the blond haired police officer. Rushing, I grabbed everything I could think I needed for three days. I figured if I forgot something, there was always Casey.

I ran back down the stairs and locked the door behind me. Now back to the Maxwell's again. Maybe I should have just stayed with them after all.

Pulling the car up to the garage, I noticed Casey climbing into her BMW.

"Hey." I waved to her. "Where are you going?"

"I'm meeting Nathaniel at the Library, afterwards we're going to have lunch. I'll see you this evening," she said with a smile.

For a long moment, I stood at the garage and watched her drive off. Still caught in my own turmoil, I needed a distraction. Opening the trunk of my car, I pulled the suitcase out again. Here we go again, I thought. Slowly, I walked through the garage and into the house.

"Charlotte? I'm back," I called out to her.

"Okay, dear."

Taking my things to the spare bedroom, I did not even feel like unpacking. Placing the suitcase next to the door, I flung myself across the bed. The turmoil still raged inside me. My eyes closed tightly while I willed the pain to subside. There was no relief. The thoughts of Daniel flooded my mind, seeing his face, touching his lips to mine and the softness in his voice when he said "I love you." How could all this have happened so quickly?

"Are you all right, dear?" Her voice was soft as she stood in the doorway.

"No," I whispered.

Charlotte moved toward me and sat on the bed. Her hand touched my arm lightly. "Julie, do you want to talk about it? I know something is bothering you." She smiled. "Call it a mother's intuition."

"I don't know. I can't explain it. I feel miserable." My words rambled out. I closed my eyes tightly. "It feels like I'm going mad. Charlotte, I feel so confused."

"Oh, I see," her voice gentle and concerned. "Let me see if I can shed some light on this." She paused for a moment, while she carefully sorted her words. Charlotte always pondered a moment before she spoke. "Well, you have been through a lot lately, with your father's death and all. Then with these terrible killings around our front door, I can see where this would bring a certain fear. This is the reason that Thomas and I wanted you to stay with us, to be safe." Listening, I didn't dare speak.

"Then, well, there's Daniel." The waves crashed hard against my heart when she spoke his name. My heart burned into an oblivion of pain. "There is something that I have never seen before with Daniel." I opened my eyes and looked at her.

"From the first day he saw you, I saw something in him. There is warmth in his eyes when he looks at you. The way he stands close to you. Even at the wake, I noticed that he never left your side not even once. It reminded me of Thomas and I when we were young.

"Thomas was the same way, very dreamy and always overly protective of me. He had told me one time, he was just guarding his heart. I thought that meant he was being cautious of letting his heart go out to me, but he told me that I was his heart. I fell in love with him instantly. I couldn't deny how I felt when I was with him. He provided the safety I needed. Although, you may see him as a hardnosed obnoxious attorney, he was and still is, an old softy when it comes to me.

"I guess what I am trying to tell you, Julie, I know how you feel. Sweetheart, you are in love. Sometimes, when it first happens, it can be very confusing. You have all of the extra emotions you do not understand. I know I did."

"So what did you do?" I asked still wary of the answer.

Her smile broadened on her beautiful face, "What do you think? I married the man. I found that I couldn't be away from him. He was a part of me and I was a part of him. We were whole when we were together. That is what is going on with you right now. See, sometimes it does not take a person a long time to fall in love when the right one is right in front of them. It truly happens on a level that is different from anything that the mind can comprehend. It is like two lost souls searching for something and finding each other. It is fate dear. You and Daniel have found something in each other, something that you desire. Honestly, I couldn't be happier. I know my son, and I know he will never leave you; it is not in his nature. So don't worry, he will be back."

"What can I do in the meantime? I mean I feel so... well..." I tried but the words were not coming.

"Distract yourself. Find something to do."

I thought for a moment, and then the idea hit me. "I did promise him I would cook dinner." My eyes widened and I sat straight up in the bed. "Charlotte, will you help me?"

"Of course I will. I can tell you his favorite dish is duck. We will put together a dish that will absolutely blow his mind. I will make a list of a few things to get then we will start preparing it Wednesday morning. We will have it ready for you to cook it when he arrives. I will take care of the extra guests. It will be great."

"Thank you." My eyes filled with tears I reached out with my arms around her tightly.

"You are welcome. I want you to just relax and take a nap. Let your mind relax. I will be downstairs if you need me. I have a lot of planning to do." She smiled, walked toward the blinds, and closed them. On the way out the door, she turned the lights off and closed the door.

The room wasn't completely dark, but it felt comfortable enough for me to close my eyes and relax. There were many ideas of how to keep myself preoccupied until Daniel returned. Learning how to cook would definitely be on my list. Maybe the days would go by quickly. I could only hope. Relaxing into the softness of the pillows, I closed my eyes. Letting my body relax, I drifted.

## EIGHT

*The* bedroom was brighter than what I remembered before I closed my eyes yesterday evening. Lazily, I climbed out of bed and walked over to open the blinds. The sun was bright in the sky. The dew glistened from the sun's rays on the beautiful rose garden below. It suddenly dawned on me, that it was Monday morning. I had slept for over twelve hours. Charlotte must have been right that I needed the rest. A refreshed feeling swept over me. I turned and glanced at the clock, it was already six-thirty.

Today, I wanted to go into town and talk with Dr. Miller about my dreams. Maybe he could give me something that would help. Dashing out of the bedroom, I headed for the shower. The hot water felt good on my skin. As I awoke, the thoughts of yesterday traveled back to me. At least, after the conversation with Charlotte, it made since that I had fallen in love with Daniel.

The signs were there, and whether I recognized them with or without her help was another question left unanswered. My torment was soothed, at last. The only anxiety that remained was when I would see him. Feeling him close to me and longing for his lips to touch mine again. Yes, I was utterly in love with Daniel James Maxwell.

I finished my long shower and dressed. Rushing through my makeup, I headed down the stairs. The aroma of food drew me in like a magnet. Walking into the kitchen, I saw Charlotte and Thomas sitting at the breakfast nook. Casey sat at the counter picking through her plate of food. There was someone new in the kitchen, a woman of medium height and slightly heavy set who appeared to be in her mid-forties. The dark hair was a mixture of grey and silver tones as it accented her round face.

"Good morning, sleepy head." Thomas shot at me over the morning paper.

"Good morning," I replied with a gentle smile.

"Did you sleep well?" Charlotte asked.

"Yes, I did. Thank you." The thank you was sincerely for everything Charlotte had given me. She smiled and gave me a gentle nod. It would be our mother-daughter conversation.

"This is Rose. She is our cook." I glanced up at the heavier set woman in the kitchen. Charlotte's tone was soft. "She graduated with high honors in her culinary class. Rose came to Thomas looking for a job a few years ago. She is a very talented woman, and we are very proud to have her."

Sitting down beside Casey, I glanced over at her plate. Before I had the chance to settle in my chair, a plate was set in front of me. Eggs Benedict, my favorite.

Leaning over to Casey, I whispered softly so only she could hear. "So, how was the movie?"

Casey's head perked up and her eyes flickered with excitement. "Great!" she whispered back.

"So you'll tell me all about it?" I kept my voice low. She nodded and smiled.

"Can't wait." Her beautiful face was so bright with excitement. I knew in that moment she really liked this person.

The new relationship seemed to make Casey happy. Her eyes twinkled whenever she mentioned his name. I couldn't understand why they would disapprove of this person. The conversation with Charlotte let me know that she approved of me because it made Daniel happy as well. Was there really such a big difference? The young man was attending college, so it was not as if he was a freeloader looking for a rich girl to support him. He must have a few goals in mind. Maybe it was Casey's time to find true love. If I found it, then I was sure she would.

Distractioning me from my thoughts, I heard Thomas's chair move. He folded the newspaper and placed it on the table. Kissing Charlotte on the cheek, he squeezed her shoulder slightly and looked toward Casey and me. For the first time, I noticed how loving he was toward her. A radiant glow emanated around her as he kissed her cheek. I pursed my lips together in a smile. After all those years of being married, they were still in love. I wondered if this was something I had to look forward to with Daniel. Hope burned brightly.

"Well, ladies, I must be off to the office. I have a big case today. I will see you later on this evening." Thomas said, and then disappeared through the living room.

"So, what are you two going to do today?" Charlotte broke in.

"I have to go to the Library for my homework assignment." Casey shot out quickly.

"I thought I would run into town." I added.

"I have a list of things for you to pick up. What we discussed yesterday?" Charlotte stood and walked over to the counter. She pulled out a slip of paper from underneath one of the decorative vases, and handed it to me.

Holding the paper, I opened it. It was a shopping list. She handed me two one hundred dollar bills.

"I think this is too much?"

"Not exactly. Go to Ralph's Liquors and tell him you are buying the cognac for me. Give him the hundred-dollar bill. He'll get you the bottle and put it on my tab."

Maybe I didn't understand all of this. I looked at her, and then heard Casey chime in.

"The hundred is just for getting the cognac here. It's a special order item, and he buys it in a case. Mom pays for the shipping. The cognac actually costs five hundred dollars."

My mouth flew open.

"Julie, don't look so surprised. You cannot make this unless we have the cognac for the sauce. Trust me. Besides, I ran out a few weeks ago. Thomas got a little stressed and decided to have a few glasses." A soft laugh came out.

"Well, I guess I'll be on my way then," I said, shoving the note and money in my pocket. I turned to Casey. "I'll talk to you this evening?"

"You bet!" she said hugging my neck.

Off again. As I drove, I sensed that everything was going to work out, and things were going to be perfect. If my way of thinking was a delusion, then I wanted to enjoy it as long as it lasted. My mind filled with more pressing thoughts, concerning my dreams and their meaning. Daniel would have to take a back seat for the moment.

A red glow came from the dashboard of my car as I approached my exit. I glanced down at the control panel, and saw the check engine light was on. Lovely. I've had this car for a week, and now something is wrong with it. It wasn't flashing, so I figured I still had time to take care of first things first, Dr. Miller.

Pulling into the parking lot of his office, I hopped out of the car and headed through the large doors. The waiting room was not crowded, so I thought there was a good chance I could get in to see him. I walked toward the receptionist and stood in front of the large windows. A moment later, she turned her attention to me.

"May I help you?"

"Yes, I'm here to see Dr. Miller?"

"Do you have an appointment?" the short brown haired woman asked in a flat tone.

"No. I was hoping he had an opening this morning."

"Dr. Miller is booked solid today. I can make you an appointment for..." she trailed off while she typed quickly on the computer. "Next week at ten."

"No, that's no good," I persisted. "I really need to see him today. Please tell him it's Julie Knight."

The irritated receptionist picked up the phone and called his nurse. I heard her sarcastic tone when she looked away from me. "Yes, I told her he was booked today. She said her name is Julie Knight," she paused. "Okay, thank you." A bit more deferential, her attention turned back toward me, "Wait here just a moment, the nurse is checking with the doctor."

The feeling that I used my name to obtain what I wanted was a horrible one. It was necessary, I thought. There was no more time to wait; there were answers that I needed. Besides, as far as I was concerned, it was an emergency.

"Julie!" a familiar voice broke through the door.

"Dr. Miller," I said extending my hand.

"Julie, you look great. It's been a while hasn't it." His light grey hair accented his dark complexion. I guessed he had been boating again. "Please, come into my office."

I followed him through the hallway doors and down a hall into a large office. He sat down in his chair, and looked at me seriously.

"So what brings you in here? Are you feeling all right?"

"Actually, no. I've been having these horrid nightmares."

"I see," he said taking his glasses off. "Any headaches or nausea?"

I shook my head. "Just the dreams. They all start out similar, but end up the same. I feel like there is something that I'm missing. I see things in the dream, and later find out they are real places. Places I don't remember existing."

"When did these dreams start?"

"Last week, when I returned home for my father's funeral."

"Well, you've been under a lot of pressure considering the fact you just lost your father. Don't you think the dreams may have something to do with your loss?"

"Dr. Miller, please don't think that I'm crazy, but I'm having dreams about being attacked by a werewolf." I watched as his cordial expression turned into concern.

"All right, then. Tell me about this dream."

"There is nothing really to tell, except like I said, I'm always in the meadow behind my father's house, and then I'm attacked by a werewolf. Sometimes there is another one who protects me."

He studied my face for a long time before he spoke. Sitting back in his chair, his hand went to his mouth.

"Julie, sometimes the mind can block out certain things, such as events, places and even people. It's a way the mind protects itself. For example, a tragic event, an occurrence which would cause the person a tremendous amount of pain and even severe shock. Then later on in life, when the person is more mature and settled the events of long ago resurface. Sometimes people have just bits and pieces of it, like a vague memory, visions, or dreams." He paused still watching my reactions intently.

"I don't think I was ever attacked by a werewolf."

"Was there any time in your life you couldn't account for?"

Thinking hard, I ran over anything that would be considered relevant. There was one even which remained unclear. "When I was twelve, I remember waking up in a hospital. My Dad told me that I'd an accident. I never questioned it further and forgot about it."

"What do you remember about that?" he continued. I shook my head. "Okay, I am going to try something. Granted I have only done this a few times. It's not my profession, I remind you." He stood and moved away from his chair. "Julie, I want you to lie down on the sofa," he said, drawing the blinds down in his office making it dark. He pulled up the other chair beside the sofa.

"Have you heard about hypnosis?" he asked. I nodded in response. "Okay then, I want you to relax. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath and let it out. Relax your body totally. Concentrate on the sound of my voice, and nothing else." His voice was as calm and soothing.

"I want you to visualize a cloud. A soft white fluffy cloud. You are floating on this cloud. You feel the softness of it. Gently floating. You relax on this cloud, still listening to the sound of my voice. Your eyes become heavy. You're floating. Floating softly, gently letting go of the tension in your body. You still hear my voice. Your body is relaxed. You're still floating on the cloud. You're still hearing my voice. You're thinking back to when you were in the hospital at the age of twelve. Still relaxed. When I count to three, you will be there. Back when you were twelve. You have no fear, no emotions. You're still floating on a cloud very relaxed. One, two, three. Tell me what you see."

"I remember you being there. My Dad. I remember," I paused. "My arm was bandaged." Taking a deep breath, images of the werewolf flashed in my mind. "I was playing in the backyard, it was late at night. I heard a dog howling. I went to see what was wrong with it. I followed the sound to the meadow. That is when I saw it and it saw me. I screamed and tried to run back to the house. It chased me, I fell and it pounced on top of me and scratched my arm. Another wolf jumped out at it and knocked it off me. They fought... while I screamed. Then I remember seeing..." my voice trailed off.

"What did you see Julie?"

"It was trying to kill my Dad. Daddy!" Distraught swept over me.

"Julie, it's all right, you are safe. You're still floating on a cloud, the soft cloud." his voice soft and smooth.

I shook my head. "No, Daddy! Not my Daddy!" I continued.

"Okay, Julie, listen to my voice. You're safe. You're relaxed. When I count backwards from three you'll be fully awake and remember everything. Three, you're floating on the cloud, Two, you're relaxed and beginning to wake up. You're aware of your surroundings. One, you're awake and remember everything."

I opened my eyes and stared at him for a moment. It was a little hard to comprehend such a memory. It appeared to be more like my dreams. I looked at him with a frown on

my face. “I was attacked by a werewolf?” He nodded.

“Yes, I clearly remember the event. You’re in the hospital overnight. You’re in such shock that you forced the memory from your mind. Strong will, I tell you. I have never seen anything like that in all the years of my practice.”

“What happened though, I mean with my Dad?”

“He heard you screaming and rushed out for you. He saved you from your attacker.”

Still puzzled, I found myself glaring at him. “But there were two of them.” I paused. His expression hadn’t changed. It dawned on me; he was waiting for me to figure this out on my own. I looked to Dr. Miller for a confirmation or a sign that I was crazy. For the moment, he kept the same expression on his face and nodded his head.

“Your father and I’ve been friends for many years. He felt the need to keep the secret from you until you were ready to handle the truth. He would’ve told you sooner, if it hadn’t been for the attack. We discussed this option many times and now here you are.”

“My father, then,” I paused trying to collect my thoughts, “Wasn’t a werewolf, but a Lycan.” I couldn’t grasp this new found knowledge. It didn’t seem real. Daniel had told me the stories. I was dazed.

“Julie,” he said standing, “I’m going to prescribe something for you to help you sleep. This is a lot for you to comprehend at this point. There’s no need for you losing sleep over it.” He opened the blinds and returned to his desk. Picking up his glasses he grabbed a small blue pad and begun to scribble on it. He handed the small piece of paper to me. “It’ll be all right. You’re fine. It’s just a little shock to your system right now. It’ll all come back to you.”

Slowly, I stood and walked to the door still in a daze. I turned back to him. “Thank you, Dr. Miller.” I said flatly. I was numb again. I walked out of the office building toward my car, still pondering over the new found information. My father was a Lycan. Starting the car, the annoying “Check Engine” light came on again. I decided to take the car to the shop and have it checked.

Still in my fog, I made it to the dealership and somehow managed to tell them about my car. I sat down in the waiting area while they looked the car over. My thoughts drifted back to everything Daniel had mentioned to me, and to the argument that Charlotte and Thomas had that morning. Things became clearer. My mother was human which was the problem. Daniel tried to tell me the truth all along. My father was a Lycan. Now I wondered who else was. Dr. Miller? He knew. Daniel must have known. Charlotte had to have known. My thoughts drifted to something more terrifying. If my father was a Lycan, then what does that make me? I cursed under my breath for not thinking of the question soon enough to ask Dr. Miller. He’d been our families’ physician ever since I could remember.

Of course, now I remember, Daniel had said that a human woman couldn’t carry a Lycan child. Her body would reject it. I remember that was the problem with my mother; this was the reason she died. Instead of having an abortion, she wanted me. My father wanted me as well. My heart swelled in pain. My father was the one who protected me.

Things were suddenly clear. He’d gone on the hunting trip, not to find wolves, but to find werewolves. He went to hunt them as a Lycan. The next thought, I fought back and refused to let it enter my mind. He didn’t have his mate to fight by his side.

My cell phone rang, breaking my deep thoughts.

“Daniel?”

“Hi there, sweetheart. Are you okay?”

“Yes,” I managed weakly, “How about you? Everything okay there?”

“Everything is fine. We have the problem fixed. As for me, I miss you something terrible.”

A smile broadened across my face. I could feel the warm fuzziness when they swept over me just from hearing his sexy voice.

“I miss you, too. I really, really do.”

“I will be home in a couple of days. I have a surprise for you.”

“What kind of surprise?”

“Oh no, you are going to have to wait until I get back.”

“Well, I have one for you too.” Thinking about dinner, then I thought about what I had just learned. “Actually two.”

“Oh? So I am going to be pleasantly surprised?” His voice was seductive and smooth.

“Oh, very much so,” I teased.

“Mmm, I cannot wait.” He purred into the phone. Hearing his voice made me melt. It was all I could do to keep myself from jumping up and down in the car dealership.

“So how are things around there now?”

“Quiet so far. There hasn’t been any bad news lately.”

“I did not expect there would be. There is not going to be another full moon until next Sunday.”

“Yeah, I kind of thought about that, too.”

“All right baby, I have to run. I love you.”

“Love you too.” I heard the click and flipped my phone closed. Just hearing his voice was like a beautiful symphony playing directly to my heart, its lullaby played on harps by angels themselves. Yes, I was truly in love with this man.

“Miss, your car is ready.” The voice surprised me. The mechanic stood in front of me holding the keys to my car. “We just had to make a few minor adjustments. Nothing to worry about. No charge.”

Thanking him graciously, I floated out to the car. I still needed to stop at the grocery store before going home. I wanted Daniel’s surprise dinner to be the best. I knew with Charlotte’s expertise that it would be perfect. A quiet romantic dinner alone, then I could spring my newfound news on him. This was exciting.

The parking lot to the grocery store was crowded. I parked a little ways from the front of the store. It wasn’t difficult to figure out that the store would probably be crowded as well.

Moving quickly around the grocery store, I gathered all the items I needed. Heading to the check out, I glanced over the lines to find the shortest one and walked over to it.

My eyes wandered absent-mindedly around the checkout line while waiting on the person in front of me. In the next lane over was a very tall young man, blond and very handsome. He appeared to be around the same age as me, twenty-five or so. Immediately, I guessed he worked out in the gym on a regular basis. The muscles in his upper arm and chest were very pronounced. He handed the money to the cashier and grabbed his bag. He turned as if he knew I’d been watching him, and stared directly into my face. I couldn’t take my eyes off him. His eyes were very dark, like Daniel’s at times. He walked past me, his eyes still staring at me. Turning his head quickly, he was out the door.

The same odd feeling came back to me, the burning sensation in my stomach. There was something about this young man that bothered me.

I frowned as I placed my things on the counter for the cashier to ring the items up. I handed the cashier the money, grabbed my two bags, and headed out the door. Walking to the car, a series of whistles erupted to my right. I looked up and saw two vehicles parked under the trees. The first was a red Jeep and the second a blue off road truck with large tires. There were three young men whistling at me and yelling. My eyes sized them up and then the fourth young man walk around to the back of the vehicle. It was the same strange blond-haired young man from inside the grocery store. He said something to the others and they stopped. I walked a little faster, jumped in my car, and locked the doors.

The four men stood by their vehicles as I pulled out of the parking lot. They watched me as I sped out onto the road. Looking back one more time, I made sure they stayed there. A little nervous, I drove faster than normal back to the house. There were many things to discuss with Charlotte. I also needed time to talk with Casey. I wanted to find out more about her new boyfriend.

Charlotte wasn’t in her usual spot when I returned to the house. She was outside working in her rose garden. I placed the cold items in the refrigerator and walked outside to see her. She looked very content.

“Did you find everything?” she asked, her hand brushing her hair away from her face.

“Yes,” then I thought, “NO! I forgot the Cognac. I was terribly distracted in the grocery store parking lot. I’m sorry.”

“No worries. I will give Thomas a call, and he can pick it up on the way home,” she said, sitting back on her heels.

“Charlotte,” I hesitated a moment. “There’s something I need to discuss with you. I went to see Dr. Miller this morning.”

“Is everything all right?” Concern swept over her face and voice.

“Yes. Everything is fine. It was about my nightmares. I know what happened to me. The attack. I know about my Dad.” I hesitated. She stood quickly and took my hands. Tears welled up in her eyes. “Dad wanted me to know, but he couldn’t tell me.” I continued.

“Because he was afraid to, sweetie. He loved you so much, Jewels. He wanted you to know the truth. You had such a shock. You scared us all. Martin and I stayed in the hospital with you until you opened your eyes. I was so terrified for you.”

“Charlotte,” I interrupted her. “My Dad, he was a Lycan?”

She nodded and smiled. “Julie,” she said kneeling down and taking my hands, tears streaming down her beautiful face. “Remember how I told you that you are like family to us?” She sniffled and I nodded. “Well, you are. Martin and Thomas met a few years before he met your mother. Thomas and I were already married, but we all formed a very



tight knit bond. We knew that we needed each other. Everyone that we have been close to in our little group are Lycans. No one else knows what we are. We fit into society very well; however, we hide our secret equally as well.” She paused and glanced away for a moment, and then her watery eyes returned to mine.

“Why do you think I was so happy to see you and Daniel together?” Tears ran from her eyes. “I love my son so much. I never wanted anything more for him than to find one of his kind to love him and be the mate he deserved. I watched him daily struggling with the loneliness. It was torment for me. We tried desperately to find a mate for him. There was no one that he would choose. We just wanted him to be happy. It was as though he had already given his heart away. He lived in such torment for so long.” She paused for a slight moment. “Then, you came home. It made perfect sense to me. I love you like a daughter, as much as I love Casey and Daniel. I watched you grow up from a baby. I saw such tenderness in you, the same as I saw in your mother. I know why your father fell in love with her, you remind me of her in so many ways. It is not a wonder that Daniel’s heart belonged to you. Do you know honestly, how happy I am? I could not have prayed and asked God to send such a wonderful angel to him as you are.”

Tears flowed freely from my eyes. I reached down and threw my arms around her. We held each other rocking back and forth crying tears of joy. Charlotte and her family had truly been there for me. I never knew how much until now. I never noticed how much they wanted me to be a part of their family, even Daniel. After all those years, I never realized that I was the cause of his anguish. How could I have ever known? He knew all along what he wanted and it was me.

After the crying stopped, we both sat back and wiped our eyes. Our faces grew into smiles and we shared a little laughter. The tormented years for all of us had ended. It may not have come the way my father wanted it to, but I knew he would’ve been pleased. I could feel his presence next to me. I felt his loving arms around me. My eyes closed and could see his face as he smiled at me. Somehow, the heavens blessed me in that moment. I could hear him softly as he spoke, “*Julie, I am so very proud of you. I love you so much.*” I opened my eyes and smiled. More tears flowed softly down my face. Charlotte reached over and touched my face wiping the tears away.

“I will tell you what,” her hand gently patted my knee. “We should go inside, have a glass of good old fashion southern iced tea, and a piece of Rose’s Georgia Pecan Pie.”

“Sounds good to me,” I said, rising to my feet.

“You know, if there are any more surprises like the ones I have had in the last few days, I just might take on a business venture as a caterer.” She glanced at me with a serious look on her face. I couldn’t help the laughter as it escaped me.

“What? I am being serious. I cannot take much more of this.” A smile crossed her lips and with her arm around my shoulder, she laughed with me as we walked inside.

The hours passed quickly with Charlotte and me. It was probably the most time we had ever spent alone together. We laughed together as she reminisced over the funniest times she had with Thomas. She shared openly about their lives as Lycans, which made me wonder what my new life as a Lycan would be.

Charlotte shared the intimate details of being a Lycan female, of their sensitivity, nurturing and loving ways. She spoke of the bonding, which I already knew from Daniel. One of the facts which stood out in my mind was there would be times I wouldn’t be able to distinguish my own needs from his.

I listened carefully to every word she spoke, letting myself be the student and absorb years of important information that I missed. It was a joy to see her enthusiasm as she spoke proudly of her race, no, our race. Her voice was ever so soft and gentle. Then she said something that shocked me.

“There is a very strong attraction between you and Daniel, one that I have never seen the likes of before. When you two are around one another you give off a certain scent.”

“An odor?” I interrupted and feeling a little embarrassed.

“No.” She smiled and laughed. “It is more or less like a certain type of fragrance. A light and spicy scent. Humans couldn’t detect it. It is actually a mating scent to Lycans.

Other Lycans are aware of it. It does not bother them because the scent does not attract them. Everyone has his or her own scent. It is like a pheromone to each of you. The stronger the attraction, the stronger the scent becomes. I want you to be careful,” she warned, her cheerful voice stern.

“You must understand there are laws we live by and they cannot be broken. Daniel may be hesitant to tell you this right now, but I feel you need to know.” She paused collecting her thoughts. “It is very difficult to explain. He cannot have you until you are married.”

“I don’t understand. Do you mean sexually?” At first, I thought maybe this was a little old fashioned, but I saw the seriousness in her face.

She nodded. “Yes. There are many reasons for this and I cannot go into them right now. However, do not tempt him and do not give in to him. Julie, you can be very seductive to him without even realizing it. As much as I hate to say this about my own son, he can be as seductive to you without even knowing it. You will eventually burn with intensity for one another, and you both must fight it. He knows this. Just trust me on this one thing, please. You will understand why this is so important later on. As I said, we are spiritual creatures. Just know it is a life and death situation.”

“Charlotte,” I paused for a moment reflecting back to how I felt with the first kiss. “How do I? I mean... what can I ...” I broke off as Casey walked in the room.

“Hey,” I said brightly.

“Hello, darling,” Charlotte spoke softly.

Casey breezed by us without saying a word she ran up the stairs to her bedroom and slammed the door. Charlotte and I looked at one another, then got up and went up the stairs to check on Casey.

“Casey?” Charlotte said knocking on the bedroom door lightly. “Darling, what is wrong?”

“Nothing! I just need to be by myself right now,” she shrieked.

“Casey, let me in!” Charlotte pleaded.

“Mom! Please!”

“Darling, please! Honey, I am your mother. Whatever it is, you know you can talk to me.”

There was no answer. I touched Charlotte’s arm and looking into her worried face. “Just give her time to calm down.” She nodded and we both went back down stairs.

For the remainder of the evening, Casey stayed locked in her room. She didn’t come down for dinner. Thomas tried to talk to her through the door-her response was still the same.

We all went to bed that night worried about Casey. I lay on my back looking at the dark ceiling in my room, wondering what was so bad that she didn’t even want to talk it over with me. Casey was always the bright and cheerful one. Whatever happened had to be bad to make her withdraw from the ones that loved her the most.

Rolling over on my side, I stared out the window into the night sky. My thoughts ran back to Nathaniel. Had he done something or said something to Casey to make her act this way? There was no way I was going to know until she found a safe place within herself to talk about it. Until then, I had to be patient and wait.

Just one more day, and I would see Daniel again. So many thoughts ran through my head. I smiled as I remembered Charlotte’s words, which I was grateful for and very thankful that she was there. So many years had passed that I couldn’t retrace. For now, from this moment on there was no going back. There was only going forward in a new life. Now I knew the truth of the new life I live; I am a Lycan. I planned to live it to the fullest. To enjoy everything that this new life has to offer. In one moment of loss, I gained so much more. I never imagined such bliss.

## NINE

**Tuesday** came and went with a blur. Today, Casey appeared to be herself again, as if nothing was wrong. She wouldn’t discuss whatever it was that had upset her.

Yesterday evening, I made an attempt to talk to her concerning the relationship with Nathaniel. She didn’t want to discuss Nathaniel and even became irritated with me for bringing up the subject. Through the tears she shed, she told me that I wouldn’t understand and to let it go. Her defensive behavior only increased when I asked her why he was so different. I knew the relationship between the two of them had grown into a strong bond. She was protecting him, a true nature of a Lycan female. Protecting those you love even if it meant losing your own life. This type of behavior isn’t a choice for us; it’s a part of us.

Lycans love like no others. The males and females both love with deep emotions and bonds. I could understand why the Lycans are the protectors of the humans. We will fight to the death to protect those we love because it’s what we believe. The natural instinct of a thousand year old love built into our genetic makeup.

Yes, Casey was in love with Nathaniel and whatever he was, she would protect him at all costs. I couldn’t fault her because of my own love for Daniel. It was my only hope that Nathaniel loved her in the same way.

I made the decision to focus on believing in the brighter side of my own life. Daniel was only moments away from me. I paced back and forth in the airport waiting to see him walk through those doors. I kept praying that I would keep my dignity. After all, it wouldn’t make a good impression if Dr. Martin Knight’s daughter were to make a fool of herself in public. I sat down but couldn’t calm my rush of excitement.

To distract myself, I watched a young mother wrestling with her twin boys. They were both climbing on her as if she was a jungle gym. She would no sooner have one seated

when the other started climbing all over her lap. My distraction didn't last long. Peopled flooded through the opened doors. Immediately I stood, my heart raced while tiny beads of moisture formed on my hands. I fervently looked for that gorgeous man of mine and then there he was. My heart gave a giant leaped. Beautiful, tall, dark and handsome all rolled into one package. A package that was smooth as silk chocolate melting in your mouth. He hadn't yet seen me. Daniel was talking to another man who was a little shorter than he was. Once they walked through the doors, it was as if I couldn't move.

Daniel glanced up and looked directly at me. My heart went into over drive. His huge smile showed off his perfectly white teeth. "JULIE!" he called with his arms held open wide.

"Oh, damn the dignity!" I hissed under my breath and made a sprint straight into his embrace.

My arms wrapped around his neck as the force of my body slammed into his. He let out a chuckle as he balanced himself and wrapped his arms around me tightly.

"I will never leave you again. I have missed you terribly," he said setting my feet down on the ground.

"I've definitely missed you more."

"Mmm..." he hummed, "I really," he pulled me closer to his lean body. *"Really don't think so,"* he whispered across my lips.

Fire screamed throughout my body when his lips slowly touched mine. For a moment, I forgot where we were. I heard a low, "Uh-hum" when someone cleared their throat.

Daniel released me and we turned toward the two people who stood in front of us. Daniel smiled a sheepish grin to the man.

"Jason and Heather, this is Julie Knight. Julie, this is Dr. Mrs. Jason McLaughlin."

"Oh, the pleasure's all mine. Daniel hasn't stopped talking about you, not for a moment." He held his hand out to me. The first thing I noticed other than his brown curly hair, was his accent.

"It's certainly nice to meet you. Your accent, is it Scottish?"

"No, Lass, I'm afraid I'm one hundred percent Irish. Bred, born and raised. Ya' know I grew up with a baby bottle in one hand and an Irish whiskey in the other," he said laughing.

"Well, I'm sure you did just fine," I said laughing.

"Yeah well, me own mum couldn't wean me from the bottle. I still carry me whiskey flask 'round with me wherever I go." He patted his coat pocket.

"Oh, don't let him fool you. I can still drink him under the table at the local pub. My name's Heather." The small, attractive petite woman said holding her hand out. She couldn't have been more than five foot four or five. Small round face and her red hair was close cut. She looked like a little fairy. Smiling, I extended my hand.

"So, did you drive?" Daniel asked. I shook my head. "Oh," he nodded. I pointed toward the front door to the limo that waited.

The best thing about the ride back to the Maxwell's wasn't just the laughter we all shared, but it was that Daniel and I were together. It felt good to have him within my reach again.

Jason and Heather appeared to be a perfect match. They were full of energy as they kept Daniel and me laughing. It was impossible to imagine Daniel working around those two and completing any work. I could see how they'd become such good friends. I enjoyed listening to the two of them talk. I adored Jason's heavy Irish accent.

Soon we pulled up in front of the house. We all departed from the limo and unloaded the luggage. I paused behind Daniel and waited for him while he opened the door to the house. It was customary to let the guest enter first. Jason and Heather walked in. I heard her gasp when she walked through the home. I passed through the door as Daniel followed.

"You might want to turn left around the corner. That would be the great room." Daniel said.

The expressions on their faces were priceless. Heather's eyes were wide as she looked around at the paintings and out the window that overlooked Charlotte's flower garden. I took a step to follow them around the corner when I felt a hand around my arm. Daniel pulled me around swiftly.

Forcefully he grabbed my shoulders and pushed my back against the wall so hard it shook the pictures. His hand went to my face, while his fingers went slowly around to the back of my neck pulling my head closer to his.

*"We have unfinished business, you and I,"* he growled quietly with his lips gently on mine. I could smell that soft spicy fragrance I'd longed for.

*"Yes, unfinished,"* I breathed as my arms went around his neck. His kiss sent a fire flaming down my skin again. His body pressed closer to mine, covering the length of my body. My hands went to his head. Gently my fingers ran through his hair. Slowly his hands left my neck, letting his thumbs trace down my sides where he ran his hands over my back.

My eyes opened when I heard Charlotte's voice greeting Jason and Heather.

"Where are Julie and Daniel?" she asked. All I heard was Jason's chuckle.

Daniel let me go and we both tried to compose ourselves as we walked into the great room. I stopped to set the picture back in place as Daniel let out a soft laugh. We walked around to see Charlotte with her arms held wide to hug her son. He embraced her tightly. Yes, there's nothing like a mother's love.

Once we were all seated in the living room, I noticed Charlotte had a beautiful silver coffee and serving tray prepared with fresh coffee and homemade scones. Thomas and Charlotte sat across from Jason and Heather. Daniel and I sat in the large oversized chair together. It was very nice to feel him close to me again. He sat with his arm around me while I snuggled under him. I missed the smell of him, the wonderful smell of his cologne and his spicy scent. I missed the feeling of his warm embrace as his soft hands touched my face. I trailed off into my own thoughts when I noticed everyone's attention was on me. To my surprise, my eyebrows raised, I looked down at myself and then to Daniel.

"Julie?" Charlotte asked.

"You have a surprise to tell me?" Daniel turned to me with a quirky grin.

My mind wondered for a moment. How did I not hear what she asked me? I thought quickly as I looked at her.

"Dr. Miller?" Charlotte coached.

"Oh!" I said in exclamation. The conversation was one I'd hoped to have with Daniel in private. Since the puppy was out of the box, I might as well play with it.

"Well, I'd been having these nightmares." Daniel coughed out a little laugh and I nudged him in the ribs. "It turned out they were suppressed memories from when I was around twelve. The attack by the werewolf, according to Dr. Miller, was so traumatic I blocked the memory of the event. Anyway, after talking to Dr. Miller and Charlotte, I have my full memory back. I know everything about my father. I also know who I am. I know where I belong." Daniel's arms were around me squeezing me tighter.

*"I cannot tell you how glad I am. How proud I am of you,"* he whispered.

Thomas jumped up and walked over to me with his arms open. I left Daniel's arms and embraced Thomas. "Welcome to the family, dear. We have waited for this a long time."

"That's great!" Jason and Heather said at the same time sending me a warm smile.

I returned to my spot under Daniel's arm and pulled my feet under me. He was my safe haven. I never wanted to leave.

"I think this is totally amazing. So what'da you think of us Lycans now?" Jason asked.

"Well, I guess there's still a lot to learn. But so far, I'm kind of fond of one," I smiled proudly.

"So, when did you find out?" Heather asked.

"Actually Monday."

"Well, we have more news to discuss. Not to take the attention away from Julie's recovery." Thomas began. "I am sure Daniel has filled you both in concerning our werewolf problem around here."

"So how many people have they killed so far? How many are missing?" Jason broke in leaning forward with his elbows resting on his knees.

"At the moment, a total of six were found dead. Three are missing," Thomas said pouring himself a cup of coffee.

"So that means there may be three added to their pack?" Heather threw in.

"I tried to track them the other day. I only caught a scent of two. They are somewhere nearby. I found a police officer's body about ten minutes from here. The werewolves had pulled him from his car. I found his body behind the car where they killed him." Daniel added.

For a moment, everyone was lost in his or her thoughts. Casey appeared on the stairs. Walking slowly she went to Daniel first and hugged him tightly. Then she walked over to Jason and Heather.

"Hello again, Jason, Heather." She said hugging them both as they greeted her. Then she turned and sat on the floor next to the coffee table.

"So what have I missed?" she asked in her same perky voice. There was something different about her. I couldn't put my finger on it.

"Well, I think that we should at least go on a hunt to see exactly where they are holding up." Daniel suggested.

"I agree." Jason said.

Thomas nodded.

"Well, there's one thing we're forgetting," I added. I didn't realize with everyone's attention on me how uncomfortable I'd suddenly become. "I have Barney Fife and his Deputy Dog sniffing around my house."

"Oh, that is right. I went out early the morning after the storm to find out the where the werewolves were heading. Apparently our Sheriff found my tracks, so now they are looking for a pack of oversized wolves." Daniel added.

"Well, that's a bummer." Jason shot back. "How much territory do you think we have to cover?"

"The land tracks between Julie's house and here are around a forty mile radius." Thomas cleared his throat. "I figured we could split up." He stood and then laid a map out on top of the coffee table. "Charlotte, Casey and I could take the western area surrounding our house. Jason, you and Heather could take the corner on the East." He looked up toward Daniel and me. "Daniel, you and Julie will have the southern area around her house. We have until Sunday before there is a full moon."

"So what's the plan if we find where they are?" Jason threw in looking at the map.

"Set a trap." Daniel chimed in. "We will draw them out. Find a local point and wait for them."

"Okay then, when do we start?" Jason said wide eyed with excitement.

"All right, Irish boy, do not don your kilt just yet. We will have to be careful and move around the police. They are still combing the area looking for oversized wolves. Our best bet is to go out at night," Daniel stated.

"Tonight should be perfect. There is a half moon," I added. Everyone nodded in agreement.

"Tonight it is," Jason said. "So Julie, this will be your first hunt with Daniel?" The way he said it sounded more promiscuous than a regular question.

"I think it'll be fun," I said looking to Daniel. His face contorted into a frown.

"I would certainly like to be there for this." Jason said chuckling.

"Oh, no you most certainly will not my friend." Daniel shot back in a back-off tone. Feeling Daniel's body tense, my head snapped toward him to see the angry expression.

"Oh, it couldn't be that bad," I said trying to lighten Daniel's tense mood.

"Maybe it would be a good idea if they went on their own. At least for the first time." Charlotte spoke in Daniel's defense.

Heather glanced at me and gave me a wink. "You're going to enjoy it. Believe me. We'll catch you on the second run."

Daniel murmured something under his breath I couldn't understand. I reached over and just patted him on the leg. My heart stopped when I felt the strong muscles in his leg. I pulled my hand back and folded my arms to my stomach. My thoughts became harder to control than before. The desire I had for Daniel was greater, making it more difficult for me to concentrate.

Casey had been so quiet. A smile crossed my face when I glanced at her. She forced out a fake smile, but I could tell there was something haunting her.

My first hunt with Daniel, this would be exciting. Although, I had no idea what was involved. I was excited to be with him. The hunting shows on TV showed men going out in the woods with guns and walking around dressed in camouflage. How hard could it be? I glanced over to Charlotte. It was hard for me to imagine her walking through the woods dressed in camouflage and carrying a gun.

"Okay, so where are we going to round up?" Jason asked.

"Tonight we will head out around nine and meet back here. You do not think you two will get lost do you?" Thomas asked looking at Jason and Heather.

"She's got a better nose than me. I doubt it very seriously. I didn't marry her for her cooking ya' know." I could tell Jason was going to be a lot of fun. I was disappointed they weren't going with Daniel and me.

"Okay, everyone, to the kitchen for a real breakfast." Charlotte announced.

"Mom, actually I am a little tired from the plane ride. Besides, I want to check out the perimeter around Julie's house. Since no one has been there in three days, I want to make sure they have not tracked to her house."

Charlotte stared at Daniel for a moment. Her expression turned to concern. She glanced to me with a raised her eyebrow then returned to Daniel with a firm glare.

"You both better be back here tonight." Her firm voice commanded.

"I promise," I spoke quickly. The expression on her face told me exactly what I needed to know. Daniel and I would need to be careful in more ways than one.

"Jason and Heather, I will see you both tonight." Daniel said as we both stood.

"Okay, buddy." Jason said when he stood and took Daniel's hand followed by a manly shoulder hug. He gave Daniel a little wink and patted him on the shoulder. Daniel then gave Heather a glance. She nodded to him as if he'd asked her a question and she answered.

Daniel rested his hand on my back as I picked up my purse and keys, then we headed toward the door. He grabbed his luggage on the way out while I held the door open for him. The smiles we passed to each other were like two high school teenagers in love. I opened the trunk and he placed the luggage in. We laughed when he stole a kiss from me while sneaking the car keys out of my hand.

It was good to be with him again. The brightness he brought into my life was like a breath of fresh air. We chatted about different things while we drove to my house. Mostly how we missed one another.

He pulled the car in the front of the house. Climbing out the car, I stood for a moment and looked around. I thought maybe that I'd be able to stay in the house for a while. Daniel looked around the woods for a different reason.

"Come on, we need to put this stuff in house. I want to check out the area." He announced.

I unlocked the door and we walked inside. A light chime let me know the alarm system was still working. Pausing, I punched the code in and then there was silence. Daniel headed directly upstairs, while I walked out to the patio. Staring out the back, there were still a few branches that needed picking up from the storm. It felt good just to stand here and feel the cool breeze blow. The day was nice, and tonight was going to be a nice night to go out.

Consumed in my thoughts, I didn't hear Daniel when he walked up behind me. Placing his hands around my waist, I jumped. He rested his head on my shoulder and pressed his face against mine. He pulled me back to his body and held me close.

"So, you said you missed me?" he asked sheepishly.

"I think I mentioned something like that." Daniel met my playful response as he turned me around to face him.

He looked up into the trees as he shifted closer to me. "Well, I believe I remember the words a little clearer than you do."

I watched as his mouth twisted into a grin. "Well then, exactly what were my words?" I teased.

He drew his eyebrows together then his eyes dropped to mine. "See now that is the hard part. I cannot tell you." He leaned down toward me, his lips touching mine softly. "I *have to show you*," his voice whispered ever so softly.

"I think..." I murmured against his lips, "that someone said they wanted to check the perimeter?" I pulled back from the kiss.

"Well, okay then." His expression reminded me of a scolded schoolboy. I laughed a little.

"Besides, I want you rested for my surprise this evening." His expression changed into one of curiosity.

"Oh, that is right. Well, in that case, I guess I will have to rest then." He said releasing me. "I will see you in a few minutes." He turned and walked down the steps toward the path at the edge of the back yard.

There was no way I could properly thank Charlotte for her help yesterday in the prep work for this evening's meal. Charlotte and I spent two hours in the kitchen prepping the food so it would be ready to place in the oven to cook. I knew that for dinner to be ready by six, everything needed to be in the oven by four. Daniel will be resting. After we finished dinner, we would then go on our little hunting exposition.

I waited until Daniel was out of sight in the thick wooded area to return inside of the house. Looking down at my watch, I realized it was already eleven-thirty. Daniel would be back soon and resting. This would leave me with several hours to pre-occupy myself before starting dinner. Pausing and looking around the large living room, I stared at the television for a moment. Maybe a movie, I shoved the thought out my head as soon as I remembered it might keep Daniel awake. A book would be a nice substitute for a while. I had headed for my father's study. Walking into the study I looked at the wall covered with books. I glanced up, looking for a book which would keep me interested for a while. I had read most of the books on the shelves. Smiling I reached for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It may not be about werewolves, but it definitely would keep me in suspense for a while.

Satisfied with my selection, I walked back into the living room. Daniel was just walking in from the patio. The breeze that followed him in smelled strongly of his cologne. He stopped to look at me. He looked exhausted.

"Hey," he breathed.

"Hey."

"Well, I did not see anything that resembles our friends. We should be safe." He paused looking back out to the patio. "I um, think I am going to get that shower and take a quick nap."

The tone in Daniel's voice told me he was hiding something from me. It wasn't about the werewolves, it was more than that. I could tell Daniel was anxious by the way he'd become suddenly distant.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah." He turned his attention to me. "I guess I am just a little tired that is all," he forced out a fake smile. He walked past me and went up the stairs.

The seconds that it took me to make it to the sofa felt like hours. A strange feeling of dread washed through me. Was my heart in danger? My chest tightened at the sudden rush of anxiety. The obvious factor for my opinion could've been the way he walked by me, moving quickly without pausing, and no eye contact. For the moment, I felt as if he was trying to avoid me rather than the question in my eyes. The struggle I contended with was whether to confront him, or just let him rest and talk to him later.

A few moments later, the noise from the bedroom door shutting, shocked me out my self-induced anxiety. Immediately, I decided I would confront this. Setting the book on the coffee table, I took a deep breath and headed toward the stairs. With one foot on the bottom step, I swallowed hard and pushed myself to move my feet.

Opening the bedroom door slightly, Daniel was stretched out on the bed with his hands behind his head. He was wearing pajama pants and no shirt. My eyes couldn't help from tracing the muscles on his chest down to his stomach. He truly had a beautiful body. Slowly his head turned to me, not speaking he just stared at me.

Seeing the depth in his eyes burned something inside me. It wasn't passion, but pain. The tight feeling returned to my chest. Slowly I walked through the door without saying a word. Charlotte's words rang in my head. *You will not be able to distinguish what he is feeling from your own feelings.* The second that it took me to determine that I may be wrong, was the moment I instinctively knew I needed to do something. Something I've never done before.

Fear screamed in my ears when I inched closer to the bed. My hands trembled. I took a deep breath. My heart beat rapidly. I stopped at the side of the bed and closed my eyes slowly, inhaling and exhaling. I opened my eyes to see his eyes were still on me. His expression didn't change. Smoothly I climbed on the bed and moved closer to him.

Unsure of how to approach this, I swore I would do the best I could. There wasn't much experience in my personal file for a situation like this. I climbed over on top of him. Whether or not he could tell I was terrified, I couldn't see it in his eyes. His eyes never left mine.

Slowly, I moved my trembling finger to his face. I traced the cheekbone down to his jawbone. His chest expanded underneath me when he inhaled deeply. His jaw locked into place, the muscles tensed under my touch. My hand gently cupped his chin and I leaned down to his face. Gingerly, I touched my lips to his. There was no feeling of fire running through me. There was only softness in my heart. I pulled back from him slightly only to see that he was looking at me through those long dark eye lashes. His eyes were a clear hazel just like the morning I first noticed them. I placed my opened hand gently on the side of his face and kissed his lips once again. His lips parted to mine. Slowly and gently, I touched them. Moving my lips gently down to his jawbone, I traced the jaw line to his neck. He inhaled a heavy deep breath. His chest expanded underneath me again. His hands came from underneath his head and he placed them on the sides of my face. Pulling me back to his face, he held me firmly inches from him.

"Tell me something." His voice remained low and firm. It sent a sense of fear through me. My eyes widened at this sudden response. "Tell me how you feel." The tone was neither soft nor sweet.

Thoughts of fear ran through me. Had I gone too far? Maybe I should've taken those feelings seriously. I tried to pull back from his grip but he wouldn't let me move. His eyes searched mine for an answer.

"Julie." His voice came out deep and rough. "I need to know."

"I..." My words froze when a battle burst out inside of me. My heart told me one thing but fear held me back like a strong fortress.

"Why is it so hard for you to tell me?" he snapped, releasing me abruptly.

I sat back on him and stared into his face. The frown on his face showed me more than just irritation but agony.

"I'm afraid." The words staggered out my mouth.

"Afraid?" he repeated mocking me. "Afraid of what?"

"I," for the first time in my life couldn't answer his question. "I..." As hard as I tried, I couldn't do it. I pulled myself from his body and climbed off the bed. My heart ached in ways I'd never felt before. It was the worse pain that I'd ever felt. Was it my heart or his that ached this way?

"Why? Why is it so hard for you to tell me how you feel?" Daniel inquired behind me. "Julie!" He was off the bed and behind me. He turned me to him. "I can feel it! I feel it here!" he said as he hit his chest where his heart was.

My heart leaped up into my throat, tears filled my eyes and I froze.

"You do not know how all this is making me crazy! I need to know. I need to hear you say it!" The wildness in his eyes frightened me.

Fear tore at my soul, rippling down throughout my body at the thought of losing him. Deep within the essence of my heart, I gained the courage to fight that lie. I didn't want to lose something as precious as him. How long could I continue to run? How long could I continue to try to protect my heart from the dogs of hell? Here before me stood an angel. I stared deeply into the eyes of the angel who so swiftly stole my heart. It was my turn to face my fears, to stop running from the unknown. Deeply, truly, and honestly I knew I was in love with him. Doubt, if there had ever been one, shattered like broken glass. My heart would win this fight.

"I've never met anyone like you in my life." I began. "You," I paused. "Have shown me things I've never seen or experienced before." I shook my head trying to find the words.

"Daniel, you've brought something into my life I've never had before. The little things you've done which have touched my heart so tenderly. When you were gone for those three days I was utterly miserable." I took a deep ragged breath as hot tears dropped from my eyes. "Never in a million years would I have expected to find what I never even knew I needed in you. It's like you fill a void that I never knew existed until you came back into my life." The tears flowed freely from my eyes. "*Daniel, I'm truly in love with you.*" I whispered.

Daniel stood motionless for a moment. Without warning, he grabbed my face with both hands and kissed me. His lips pressed to mine with more force than he'd used before. My heart melted away. I'd fallen hopelessly from a cliff not knowing whether anyone would catch me. He pulled back from me.

"*I have always loved you,*" he whispered. His eyebrows drew together in a frown as he continued. "I never stopped and I never will." He stopped for a moment searching my face. "Julie, I cannot *breathe without you.* Everything I have ever wanted is within you. I never needed to search for anyone else. No one else could make me feel the way you do. No one ever will. You will always have my heart."

The swift wings of my angel had rescued me once again. I'd become a hopeless disaster when I poured out the contents of my heart. My body was limp. My breath had ceased. This was all new to me. Yes, Daniel had become my first love. After years of putting off the inevitable, time had caught up with me.

"Julie, I know all this is new to you. You just have to trust me. I will never hurt you. You just have to open yourself up to me. Talk to me; let me know what is going on with you. I want to know everything. Even things you think are not important. Sometimes you have a way of shutting me out without even realizing it," he said softly.

"But, downstairs when you first came in?"

"I had been thinking. There are a lot of things I have been thinking about." He said as he swept me up into his arms, carried me over to bed, and laid me down gently. He crawled over me to the other side of the bed and lay on his side facing me with his head on the pillow.

"Like what?" I asked.

"Everything. For one, you. I knew that you had been in a tragic accident and we swore to keep the truth from you. The truth of who you really are. Dr. Miller thought that if we were to press you, it might have caused more harm than good. I know you must be very angry with all of us."

"No, I'm not. It's just a weird feeling. I feel so embarrassed that everyone knew so much about me that I didn't even know." I paused for a moment. "Daniel, how much have I missed?"

"Well, there is a lot of catching up to do. There is still a lot you need to learn about who you are, and..." He paused laying on his back "us."

"Us?"

"Julie, there are things you need to understand about us, our relationship."

"Charlotte filled me in on parts of it."

"Well, it is a serious matter. We have to be very careful. I cannot help the way I feel about you at times. You cannot imagine how badly I want you sometimes. I know that I cannot cross that line. Everything will be lost to both of us."

"Daniel, what will be lost?"

"Everything. We will never be able to fulfill our destinies. When you find your mate, the attraction is unbearable. I did not believe it until now."

"So, if you give in to your desires you lose your destiny?"

"Something like that." He took a deep breath. "One thing we have to learn is to control our desires. Giving in to that type of desire before it is solemnized will forever leave us walking on the earth as creatures no greater than the werewolves. We will be like fallen angels."

"Solemnized? What is that, a marriage?"

"Yes and no. It is a union ceremony, which the Lycan counsel performs. A rite, so to speak."

"Daniel you speak of it as if we're not human."

"Then you heard me correctly. Julie, we are not human. We are Lycans."

"But my mother?"

"It was because of your father that you are what you are. If you have any doubts about this, it will be proven to you tonight."

"What am I supposed to expect tonight then?" I asked.

“You will just have to trust me. Please Julie, just trust me in everything.” His face turned to me. His eyes looked tired and I knew he needed to sleep.

“Okay,” I replied softly. “You rest. I’ll go and…”

“NO!” his voice rose. “Just stay here with me for a little while longer. Come here,” he held his arm up for me to snuggle under him.

I turned around with my back to him. He moved closer to me and put his arm around me, fitting my body to his. His breathing became softer.

“The closer we become,” he mumbled, “the harder it will be.”

He spoke incoherently. There was something to being a Lycan, which meant it was important to control your desires. Remembering the legends Daniel told me concerning the werewolves, they gave in to their desire for revenge. To kill and murder. Yes, we had to be stronger. The purpose of the Lycans is to kill the evil of the werewolves. My mind raced to put the pieces together. If we break these rules, then we have failed. We ourselves would become the creatures we were to destroy. Evil by nature.

In one eye opening moment, I realized that this life is more than what I’d thought. I was born into it. My stomach tightened in a knot. The words were there in front of me though the picture was still unclear. My mind reached deeper to the part that haunted me the most. It reached into the depths of my soul. There I felt warmth and smoothness. There was no longer fear. The wall of fear broke around my mind. The protection from all facets of unimaginable images that haunted me in my dreams at night disappeared. My heart reached a new level of commitment and love. With one deep breath, I rose from Daniel’s arms.

My eyes widened with new knowledge. Only now did logic and reasoning draw a perfect line together.

“Choice,” I whispered to myself. Glancing at Daniel, he was asleep.

The choices that we make are what define us. It separates us from the werewolves. I wondered back to my father. He chose a human wife. Charlotte had said there were severe penalties. What was it that my father lost when he made the decision to break the law? He broke it out of love for my mother. Why would this type of love carry such a high penalty? Pondering on the thought, I slowly laid back on the pillow so as not to wake Daniel.

My mind raced to figure out this type of mystery. The laws were set for a reason, I thought. If my father made a choice out of love to marry my mother, a human—then it hit me. Of course, she wasn’t able to be his mate. Pain swelled inside my heart for my father. All those years he must have spent with my mother, loving and cherishing her. Until I came along. This was his penalty. His choice made his penalty his sentence without even realizing it. His penalty was my mother’s death. How my father kept that grief inside of him for so many years I would never know. The choice he made affected the life of someone he loved so dearly.

Deep in my own thoughts, I heard the doorbell ring. Easing out from under Daniel’s arm I tip-toed to the bedroom door and sprinted down the stairs. The doorbell rang again.

Looking forward, I could see that it was Heather. She saw me at the foot of the stairs and smiled.

“Hi there,” she said. She held out a shopping bag in her hands.

“Hey. Come on in.” I stepped aside to let her in and glanced behind her. She was driving Charlotte’s car. I wondered how many miles Charlotte actually drove the car herself.

“I hope I’m not disturbing you. Charlotte wanted you two to have these,” she handed me the bag.

We walked toward the living room and sat down on the sofa. Her eyes darted around the house taking in the large room.

“I know,” I paused. “The glass walls,” I said smiling.

“Yes. I’m very amazed. Your home is absolutely breathtaking.”

“My father built it for my mother. She loved the woods and wanted to be able to walk through the house and see perfect views. Even in the cold winter months, the home is very comfortable. I guess my Dad had a good builder.”

“Truly.”

“So what do we have here?” I opened the bag and pulled out something that was a dark brown soft fabric. “A hooded cloak?” If I wear this I’ll look like the Grim Reaper.

“Yes. You’ll need it. There’s one for Daniel as well.” She pointed to the bag.

“Daniel’s upstairs taking a nap. I’ll give it to him when he wakes up.” I folded the garment neatly and placed it back in the bag. “Heather,” I began “I was wondering if I could talk to you.”

Watching her pixie-like face brighten, she looked elated as if I were asking her for a favor. I motioned for her to sit down on the sofa and watched her while she gracefully sat down. Her small frame sat straight with her hands folded neatly in her lap. She appeared too proper to match her personality.

## TEN

*The* aroma of food filled the kitchen. The duck was almost ready. The table was set. All I needed to do was finish the sauce. I glanced at my watch, it was close to six and Daniel would wake shortly. I wanted everything to be perfect.

“Something smells good.” I recognized the smooth voice immediately.

“Well, I hope it tastes as good as it smells.” I turned to him as a smile crossed my lips.

“So this is the surprise?”

I nodded. “I promised, remember?”

“Ah, yes. You did promise me you would cook dinner for me one day.” He walked toward me looking at the sauce. “So what are we having?”

“Duck with a Cognac plum sauce.”

His eyebrows rose. “Duck is my favorite. This is quite a delicate dish you are making for your first time. You must have had a good teacher,” he teased.

“Charlotte.” I smiled.

He smiled and nodded. “Yes, I guess I should have seen that one coming. So when do we eat? I am a little hungry.”

“Just give me a moment to finish the sauce and I’ll bring it out to you. Go ahead and make yourself comfortable in the dining room.”

Within a few moments, the sauce was finished. Carefully arranging the food on the dinner plates, I poured the sauce over the sliced duck. After a quick taste test of the sauce, I found it delightful. Grabbing both plates, I headed through to the dining room and I placed one of the plates in front of Daniel. He had opened the wine to let it breathe. He grabbed the wine bottle and poured a glass for me then him.

“Well, bon appetite,” I said as I held my glass to him.

“A toast. To the first of many dishes I look forward to you cooking. May the first bite be as lovely as you are.” He smiled.

My eyebrows met together, in confusion. “You do realize that was kind of lame.” I laughed.

“Well, I tried.” He laughed lightly, cutting into his food.

I couldn’t touch my food as I waited in anticipation for his critique. My focus remained entirely on his reaction. He let the food settle in his mouth. Slowly chewing, a smile crossed his face. My breath held tight when his eyes lifted from the plate to me.

“Truly, exquisite. This is absolutely wonderful.”

A long breath of relief escaped me. With high expectations, I dug into my plate. He was right the taste was incredible. I would owe Charlotte a big one for this.

“Oh, Heather came over and dropped off a couple of robes.” I watched him carefully. “She said Charlotte sent them over for tonight?” He nodded not taking his focus from his food.

I figured it wasn’t a good time to talk about my little girl talk with Heather. It would be something I would keep to myself. I appreciated her advice. It would be something that Daniel and I would have to work through on our own. Every situation was different because of the individuals. Daniel and I were definitely different according to Heather and Charlotte.

“You said you have a surprise?” I threw in.

“Oh,” he wiped his mouth with his napkin. “I almost forgot. An old friend called me the other day. He has just opened a new club in Atlanta tomorrow night. He has given me VIP passes. I thought it would be fun if we all went.”

“Club? Dancing?” I hesitated.

“Julie, I know you can dance. I have seen you.” He shot me a seductive smile.

“Yes, but, the place will probably be packed.”

"Yes, and I will be with you. Besides, it will be fun," he coaxed.

I rolled my eyes and sighed. "You know this means Casey and I are going to have to go shopping for a dress. Heather, I'm sure she didn't bring anything to wear."

"You are probably right. I guess I should take Jason for a shopping trip as well. My clothes would not fit him." Taking a sip of his wine, he looked at me again. "I have a pass for six, so if Casey has someone she wants to bring ..."

"I'll see."

Dinner was as I'd hoped Daniel was pleased and enjoyed the meal. He helped me clear the table and wash all the dishes. Soon we had the kitchen nice and clean.

We walked back into the living room. He grabbed the bag that Heather had brought over. Pulling out one of the robes, he handed it to me and pulled the other one out.

"Well, I guess we should get started," he said looking at his watch.

Confused, I looked at the robe and back at him. If we were going on a hunting trip in the middle of the night, I couldn't see the connection between the robes.

"Well? Strip off and put on your robe," he said casually.

"What?" I heard him clearly the first time, but it was more for my confusion that I had asked him to repeat his statement again.

He looked at me and then stared for a long moment. "Get undressed and put your robe on. Wear nothing but your robe." He said enunciating every word slowly and clearly.

Not sure, I went to the hall bathroom. I couldn't believe what I was about to do. How did this have anything to do with hunting? It was making me nervous. My hands trembled as I stripped down to the nude and wrapped myself in the cloak. Great, I looked like the Grim Reaper. I walked out of the bathroom, back into the living room to find Daniel standing in front of patio door with the robe on and the hood pulled over his head. I tilted my head slightly to the side. He looked like a Jedi Knight from the movie *Star Wars*. Halfheartedly I expected him to pull out a light saber and start swinging it through the air. He turned to me when he saw my reflection in the glass.

"Ready?"

"I guess so, Master," I stated flatly.

"What?"

"Nothing," I reminded myself it was going to be an inside joke.

"I want you to trust me," He took my hand in his. "I need to show you something first." He led me back to the bathroom.

Turning on the lights, he stood me in front of the mirror. Standing close behind me, he leaned down to my ear.

"Do you trust me?" His voice was soft and sensual.

"Yes." My voice trembled. "Daniel," I managed to recoup, "you aren't going to turn into a wolf, are you?" I tried to joke but it sounded a little strained.

"Ugh - No," he replied with a frown. "Now *trust* me," he whispered. I nodded without saying another word. "Close your eyes." I closed them and remained perfectly still.

Daniel moved close to me until his body touched mine. His hands started with my shoulders and then slowly moved down my arms. A warm feeling stirred inside me. With one hand, we locked our fingers together. With his free hand, he touched the side of my face. I trembled when I felt the warmth of his skin against mine. Slowly he pulled my hair back exposing one side of my neck. Gently, his face touched the side of mine. His lips touched my ear. His breathing was smooth and controlled. I shuddered when his lips touched my neck. They moved slowly up to my ear again. "*Julie*?" he whispered. "*Tell me, what color are your eyes?*" His breath on my ear sent a massive flame through my body. My heart raced. My breaths drew heavier.

"*Light brown.*" The trembling in my voice embarrassed me.

Slowly, his lips moved down my neck again. They moved to the base of my neck. My legs trembled. He released my hand and slid his hand around my waist to steady me against his body. I shuddered when I felt the muscles in his chest pressing firmly against my back.

"*Now...*" he breathed heavily against my throat. His deep voice cooed. "*Tell me what color are your eyes?*" I felt his lips open and press against my shoulder. His hot tongue touched the sweet spot on my neck, sending a fire into every nerve ending in my body. I didn't care at that moment what color my eyes were. "*Open your eyes, Julie,*" he breathed.

Slowly I opened my eyes and looked at our reflection in the mirror. Focusing on him, I was relieved he was still a human. I then glanced at myself and for a long moment, I couldn't believe the reflection in the mirror. Leaning closer I opened my eyes wider.

They were black. I blinked. I turned my head to look at Daniel, and I caught a glimpse of something shiny in the mirror. I turned back quickly. Still in disbelief, I blinked again.

Turning to Daniel I looked into his face for answers; all I could see was the same dark black eyes.

"How?" I tried to collect some manner of sanity. My hand reached up slowly to touch his eyelids as he closed his eyes.

"If I were to tell you, I did not think you would believe me. It was something you had to see for yourself." He smiled.

For reasons I couldn't explain, I knew the answer to the question I was going to ask. I believe it was more for the satisfaction of hearing the answer spoken out loud from Daniel.

"*Daniel?*"

"*Lycan.*" My breath seized to a halt.

In one second, the world that I knew disappeared. In that one second when I heard the words whispered so gently and sweetly, my heart stopped. In this new world, my heart started a new rhythm. The first breath I took was of a new beginning. Breathing in this new found knowledge, meant I was taking my first step into an unimaginable life. A life my father hid from me. Suddenly, as if someone had opened the doors to flood gate, my soul rejoiced. Everything inside of me came alive. In that one moment, life had new meaning to me. A new purpose birthed forth. I knew who I was.

Tears welled within my eyes, stinging my cheeks when they fell. Daniel's hand gently rose to my face, his finger ever so tenderly wiping my tears away. Softly as a whisper, his lips moved across mine gently parting them. My breath stopped. I gingerly touched the side of his face with my hand. My heart swelled tightly. There was no fighting the rush of emotions. The floodgates of heaven poured from my eyes.

Soon both of his hands were on my face holding me closer to him. His mouth found mine. His tongue touched the inside of my lips, inviting himself inside.

Slowly, he paused pulling back from me. In that moment, I could hardly speak because my heart was so full. He stared a long moment into my eyes. Then smiling he whispered softly. "*You have the most beautiful light brown eyes I have ever seen.*"

Somewhere in his tone of voice, I found a hint of humor, and managed to smile and then laugh. I turned and looked into the mirror to examine what he was seeing. My eyes were a soft light brown. There was an unprecedented glow about me. I turned quickly to him.

"You have to tell me everything!" My voice was electrified by my new found world.

He smiled down at me and hugged me. "I will. I promise I will never keep anything from you." Just relaxing in his arms I felt safe and warm. He stared at me in question.

"Okay, then we really need to talk." I was out of my euphoria. "I want to do something!"

"Like what?" Humor flickered in his eyes.

"I don't know! Something woofie!" Well, it was the only thing I could think of.

Daniel suddenly burst into a roaring laughter. I felt like a cheerleader at the homecoming game, and he thought it was funny!

"Okay then," He grabbed my hand guided me back into the living room.

He opened the sliding glass wall length door and we walked through. I heard the click behind us as Daniel closed it shut. We walked out onto the patio and down the steps. I followed him to the edge of the yard where the path began. He took me by the hand as we went deeper into the woods. We walked through the wooded area until we came out to the edge of the meadow.

"I hope you are not bashful," he said removing his robe. "If it bothers you, then turn away. There really is no other way to do this. Believe me, I have tried."

I wanted to turn away, but I couldn't. I guessed it was curiosity or a sense of excitement. Seeing his smooth, hard muscled chest made me want to walk over to him and run my fingers over it. I was afraid to ask what this nudity had to do with something woofie. Maybe he misunderstood what I meant, I kind of hoped he did. He had completely disrobed and my eyes widened. I gasped and turned away quickly. Okay this was going to be hard; well, bad choice of words. Difficult, yes, extremely difficult.

"Do not be shy, Jewels. Trust me." He said as he walked around behind me. Gently and slowly, he unrobed me. There I stood in front of him completely naked. The heart inside my body ran overtime, my mind was at a loss and Daniel stood only inches from my body.

His smooth hands touched my shoulders. Lightly, his fingers traced my neck down my shoulders, I trembled slightly. The heat that came off his body was exhilarating. He leaned his head to my ear and whispered softly. "*Are you ready for this?*"

That was an understatement. I tried to turn around and he grabbed my shoulders to keep me in front of him. "*That was not exactly what I meant.*" A soft chuckle followed his whisper. His lips touched my neck again, ever so lightly moving up to my ear. With his tongue, he pulled my earlobe between his teeth and gently bit it. My mouth opened and a moan escaped. "*Okay, now give in to your senses. Feel everything around you. The wind in the trees.*" He whispered softly.

Slowly, I gave into my senses. I heard the wind and smelled the air. My overwhelmingly strong desire for Daniel side tracked me. I tried to focus, but it was difficult. His hand slid around mine and he started walking.

"Give in to it, Jewels." He started to sprint. I ran with him. My breathing changed. Suddenly, I became aware of everything around me. We ran faster. I wasn't out of breath. A

surge of heat erupted from the center of my stomach and ran over my entire body. A cool rush followed. The cool rush became cooler until I trembled.

“Give in to it, jewels!” Daniel shouted as we ran down across the meadow.

My heart pounded loudly. I let go of his hand. Something happened inside of me. I wanted to be free, to let loose. I ran faster. The tremors ran throughout my body sending me into a sensation of bliss for a moment. I stretched my arms out in front of me and bolted into the air. My skin burned hot and fevered again. A blistering heat ran down the outside of my body. My outstretched arms caught my fall when I came down toward the ground. I landed and to my surprise, I was on all fours. Things looked pretty much the same, except I could see in the dark. I looked down at where my hands should have been and saw dog like paws. I raised my head and turned around to the noise of approaching footsteps. Instinctively, I turned quickly and a burst of air rumbled from my mouth. Surprised by the sound I made, I jumped back. Daniel was no longer Daniel but an extremely large black wolf. He walked toward me, his ears perked forward in a playful way. Somehow, I knew that he was letting me know it was him. I opened my mouth and what came out was not exactly words, more of an “Owe, moaw, moaw.” This frustrated me. I pulled back my head and looked at him. I could tell by his huff and short barks he was laughing. He walked closer to me and nudged me with his head. Turning, he bolted into a run. I followed.

There was no way I could explain the exhilaration from the run. We ran for miles. Suddenly, he stopped, his head went down to the ground and he sniffed. I threw my head up and sniffed the air. An odd smell filled the night air. The strong scent smelled of some type of rotten flesh. Instinctively a low growl rumbled deep inside my chest. Daniel turned around quickly and looked at me. He snorted once. We had just run into the scent of the werewolf. I knew we had to be cautious. He walked slowly ahead and I followed. Walking in a single file line we carefully listened while we moved through the thick forest.

The forest was dark, but we had no problem seeing. The images in his eyes were in my mind as well. We moved together stepping in the same motions. I felt something was crawling on me. It bothered me. I kept moving forward behind Daniel. Suddenly, I felt a slight sting, it was now itching. Whatever bit me now ran over my skin. I couldn't stand it anymore so I stopped. The only thing I could do was scratch at it, making matters worse. I moaned at the itch as I scratched. I bolted to my feet when Daniel stopped suddenly and jogged back toward me. I hit the closest tree I could find with a hard thud. The tree shook violently against my impact. I rubbed my back up and down it. Something had bit the crap out of me and I was in an infinite torture of itchiness. I moaned and moaned as I went back and forth against the tree. Daniel stared for a moment then snapped at me. My scent was now all over the tree. I released a low whimper. His ears perked forward as he walked around to my back. In a split second, I could feel his sharp teeth suddenly pinch down on my back where the bite was. He slung his head and rolled his tongue out two or three times. It was a bee. Big bad wolf, supposed to be able to kill a werewolf and can't even handle a bee sting. Bee sting, I thought quickly. I'm allergic to bees! Daniel snorted once again, I whimpered then his eyes met mine. I realized when the itching stopped, my skin was healing. I rolled my eyes at him as he went on into a jog and I followed once again.

We tracked the scent to an old barn where a fire glowed outside. I sniffed the air; there were at least three outside. I spotted the two vehicles I had seen at the grocery store parking lot the other day. I sensed the other two were be close by; they must be inside the barn. We had found them and needed to tell the others. Sunday night would be a full moon and we would have to act then. Daniel and I moved quietly through the woods retracing our trail. They would catch the scent and track us back to my house. We would wait for them in the meadow. Surely, they couldn't resist a match.

We were far enough away to break into a run. We ran faster than the first time, the new body was much faster and stronger. We arrived at the edge of the meadow, when I suddenly stopped short in my tracks. My head lifted up when I caught a scent of something else. Cologne, aftershave, pizza and I sneezed, somebody needed a good bath. The police officers, and probably animal control. Daniel turned toward me. There were three of them. Well, this was nice reunion. They were scouting for a pack of oversize wolves that have been killing people and here we are. I guess we hadn't figured this into our little equation. We needed to make it across the meadow and change. Sniffing the air, my eyes darted around the darkness. There were two of them near the house. The other was closer to the left of us. We both sprinted fast as light across the meadow to the edge of the woods.

I heard the police radio and someone say, “I think I just saw something.” I turned my head to see Daniel had already changed. This was good.

I wished he had explained how to change back. The two police officers moved quickly down the path. The flash lights moved side to side, creeping closer to their ultimate discovery.

My head raised and I looked Daniel then whimpered. He immediately grabbed my muzzle with both hands. “SHHHH” he whispered. “*You have to relax.*”

I tried to exhale and it came out in a snort. Then I jerked my head up when I heard the police officers say “Over here! I heard something in that direction!”

“*Listen to me. Just relax. Close your eyes and just relax.*” He whispered softly in my ear. Rubbing it slightly, I released a low moan. Before I realized what happened my body convulsed in a jerk. The force of the transformation was so strong it forced me forward into Daniel. He caught my sides with his hands, bracing me as he fell backwards on his back. I sat straddling him. We heard the police officers when they approached us. Daniel quickly grabbed me and pulled me to him. His hands locked on my head and pressed my face to his. His mouth was on mine kissing me hungrily. I let out a moan again. He raised his body up forcing me to a sitting position. His arm wrapped around me and with one hand in just the perfect timing, he pulled my hair back forcing me to arch my back. I couldn't distinguish the sound that erupted from my throat. My mouth was wide open, but it was a little weird. The two police officers rushed through the trees toward us. Their bright flashlights pointed directly at our faces. I could probably guess which one of the officers ran the flashlight up and down my naked body. Good old Blondie. Daniel pulled me closer to him. Now I knew what he was doing. I couldn't help from laughing softly. It was an embarrassing but clever move on Daniel's part.

“Do you mind?” Daniel said as his hand flew in front of his face.

“Oh!” The flashlights trailed away. “Um,” one of them started. I couldn't tell whether it was embarrassment or excitement. “We were out looking for those wolves and found tracks that led back here the other day. You two shouldn't be out here at night like this with those animals running around.”

“Well, officer,” he paused and looked at me still holding me close to him. “What can I say, she is an outdoors woman.” He said slapping my thigh. I glared at Daniel.

“However, if you could be a kind gent and let the lady and I dress, I would appreciate it.”

The police officers turned and walked away in the other direction, leaving Daniel and me in our awkward predicament. When I tried to move my legs trembled, followed by a tremor that ran through my body. Daniel tensed underneath me, immediately grabbing the outside of my thighs. The second tremor that ran through my body was from the hardness I felt between my legs. Dear Fate, Daniel was huge!

“*Please*, do not move.” His tone was deep and throaty. “Just be still for a moment.” He hissed through his teeth. I waited for Daniel to release his grip on my legs.

“Daniel,” I began. The transformation had sent something different through me. I was feeling feverish and weak, I still couldn't move. My body continued in its tremors.

Daniel grabbed my waist and gently lifted me from his body. He moved from underneath me quickly. Daniel reached around and handed me my robe. We covered quickly. When the tremors in my body stopped, we headed for the house.

Once inside I quickly turned to Daniel as he slid the door shut.

“Okay, so they are at the barn?”

“Yes. You noticed the scent. I am impressed. How is your back?” He turned to me.

“Better, the itching has stopped.”

“That was a close call,” he breathed.

“I know there were five of them. Then the police?”

“So they have added three to the pack. What are the police doing here this time of night?”

“Well, I guess since we were not in the house, and they already had my permission to search the area...” I trailed off into another thought. Turning to Daniel my eyes wide, “They know the wolves attack at night.”

“We need to tell the others.” He said walking toward the front door.

“Wait a minute! Don't we need to dress?” I shouted after him.

“No time! Come on!” The keys were already in his hand.

I darted off behind him after locking the door securely behind me. Daniel was already in the car and had it running. Fighting with the cloak, I managed to get it in and shut the door. The two police cars were still in the driveway. Daniel drove fast until we reached his house. I glanced down at the clock on the car stereo it was eight-forty-five. He slid the car to a stop in front of their house. We both jumped out of the car and ran for the front door.

Everyone was in the living room in the same type of cloaks we were wearing. I was still waiting for someone to pull out a light saber. Everyone appeared surprised by our rude entrance. Daniel bolted toward everyone and began running off into a tale of our findings.

My eyes darted around the room at everyone. I noticed someone was missing from the party.

“Where's Casey?” I said looking at Charlotte.

“She decided she wanted to go to the movies with a friend. This is hard on Casey right now.” Charlotte replied softly.

“All right then, so there are five total,” Thomas confirmed.

Daniel nodded.

“Well, that leaves us what, three days?” Jason tossed in. “We will have to wait then until the full moon and set our trap.”



Thomas turned to Jason. “These animals are not turning on a full moon.”

“What?” Jason breathed out in surprise. “You’re kidding, right? They’ve always changed under a full moon.”

Daniel sat down beside me. “Dad is right. They have been killing at random without a full moon. I cannot be sure, but they must be mutated or something. Anyway, the trap has been set. Our scent should be strong enough for them to trace it back to the meadow. That is where we should wait for them.”

“All right then, that’s the plan. We can’t kill them until they are in their true form.” Jason observed. “Daniel, you up for this my friend?”

Daniel nodded and looked toward Thomas. Thomas looked around at everyone and gave a nod. Everyone’s eyes lingered on Heather. She was the smallest one of us all. Jason noticed the concern on everyone’s face. He smiled.

“If you think for one minute that Heather can’t handle this you are in for a surprise. She is extremely fast and precise. I have never seen anything like it.” He placed his arm around her. A smile crossed her pretty face when she rested her head on his shoulder.

Suddenly, as if I was next in line everyone’s eyes fell upon me. I felt a sense of a strange sickness in my stomach. Daniel raised his head and noticed everyone’s attention was now on me.

“ABSOLUTELY NOT!” he roared. “She IS NOT going to fight.”

“Daniel!” Thomas retorted.

“NO!” Daniel shot to his feet.

“She can do it.” Jason threw in.

“NO! SHE IS NOT GOING!” His rose louder and filled with rage. His eyes darkened clearly showing he was losing it.

“Okay, let’s be reasonable about this,” I chimed in. “I may not know everything there is to know about this, but doesn’t it take two to take a werewolf down? We have to work as a team. We work together as one, right?” I shot toward Daniel who paced back and forth. Daniel was his father’s son.

“She’s right Daniel,” Heather said in my defense.

“No, it is too dangerous!” His eyes were now black as night.

“Daniel, please calm down,” Charlotte pleaded.

“It is not that easy!” Daniel shot back at her.

“Daniel, you and Julie *are* connected right?” Jason asked.

Daniel shot Jason a look that said “if looks could kill”. I couldn’t understand the conversation. Daniel stared at Jason for a long moment without saying anything. Suddenly, he turned and headed toward the other end of the house. In the distance, I could hear the door slam. I sat down in the large chair. Still, I realized how much more I had to learn.

My head dropped to my hands.

“Julie, it is not your fault,” Charlotte soft voice came closer.

“I don’t understand any of this. Just when I think I have a clue, there’s something that always seems to change,” I said looking up at her. She could see the hurt in my eyes.

“I think Daniel’s afraid he can’t control himself,” Jason added.

“I think you are right, love,” Heather added. “Julie,” she moved beside me. Her small hands took mine and her gentle face looked up into mine.

“See, there’s a bit more to it than the attraction between the two of you. A connection will begin between the both of you, the bonding. It happens naturally. However, you both have to release your fears for it to happen. I think we all can agree that you both love one another. We can all smell the scent. It is pure. You won’t have anything to worry about.”

She assured me in a sweet and tender voice.

“But, how do we make the connection like you are talking about?” Apparently, my question stirred a certain silence in the room.

“Lass, it takes a certain amount of control on both your parts. It also takes a certain amount of freedom and being open to one another,” Jason stated.

“I thought that, well, the becoming one part was the solemnized union.”

“Oh, no. That is something entirely different. No, this happens before then,” Heather stated. “You two have to bond in way that you are one with each other.”

“Thomas, Jason?” Charlotte said in a soft but firm voice now standing to her feet. “Would you please find my son?”

Thomas and Jason disappeared in the same direction as Daniel. A few minutes later, they returned with Daniel following. He still looked upset when he walked into the room.

Charlotte gave him a firm glare that sent chills down my spine.

“Sit.” She commanded Daniel. Immediately Daniel sat down on the sofa and placed his hands together as he leaned his arms along his knees.

“You are as stubborn as your Father,” she snapped at him. “This time, I am going to step in.” A new and bolder side of Charlotte that I had never seen before surfaced before everyone’s eyes. “Daniel, I know your Father has talked to you about this. I have mentioned parts of it to Julie already. I know you love her and she loves you.”

“Mom...” he tried to cut in. Charlotte snapped her head toward him. Her eyes flared, and he remained silent. We all did.

“This is her birthright, as is yours. You have to let go son. Look at your Father and me. Jason and Heather. If it is the fight you are worried about then get over it. You both have a destiny. Neither one of you can fulfill it if you cannot become one. Only together can you be undefeated. The laws say you fight as one.”

“We have been working on it.” Everyone could hear the strain in Daniel’s voice.

Charlotte looked at Jason and then Thomas. I could tell the irritation in her face. It was even more so apparent in Daniel.

“So what do we have to do?” I spoke up.

“There is nothing you can do,” Jason replied looking at Daniel. “It’s all on Daniel boy.”

Daniel’s eyebrow rose when he looked up at Jason. “So tell me Jason, how do you propose I do this?”

“Don’t hold back my friend,” Jason retorted.

“What if we cannot ...” Daniel shook his head.

“It has always been strength to weakness, son.” Thomas added. “I know it sounds cruel, but that is the way it is done.”

My mind raced. I looked to Heather for an explanation. She just patted my knee and smiled, assuring me everything was all right. Fear crept its way through me. What are our strengths and weaknesses? I wondered why Daniel was having a hard time with this.

“Daniel,” Heather broke in. “What if Jason and I are with you and Julie? Would that help?”

“No offense, but that would be really great!” Daniel said sarcastically.

I felt so helpless not understanding what they were discussing. The thought of coming to Daniel’s rescue was out the question. Still I wanted to try. The conversation was made me feel like I was in the back seat of a car and had no idea of where I was going.

Daniel was frustrated. My heart sank to the pit of my stomach. My thoughts ran back to earlier when we were in the woods running. Remembering the thoughts in my mind about what Daniel saw. I glanced toward him and back to Heather.

“Okay,” I took a deep breath. “Earlier, when Daniel and I ran through the woods, I connected to the visions in his eyes. It was as if I saw through his eyes.” I paused and waited for anyone to jump in. Surely, that would count for something, I thought.

Charlotte looked at Daniel and then Thomas. Thomas leaned forward and looked at Daniel.

“Did you feel her heart?” Thomas inquired.

Daniel looked down at the floor for a moment then his eyes slowly met mine. We held our eyes together for a long moment. He slowly looked back at Thomas.

“I am not totally sure.” He spoke softly and calmly. For the first time I could see a type of regret in Daniel. I wasn’t sure of the circumstances for his feelings.

“It’ll happen and soon.” Heather smiled looking at Daniel. I was particularly sure that everyone had noticed what he felt.

“Well, I don’t know about anyone else, but I’m tired. I’ve had an interesting night tonight.” It was the truth. I was exhausted. My body felt tired and weak.

“She is right. We have all had a long day.” Daniel followed. Standing up he walked over to me. “I am sure we will have this together by Sunday.”

Standing, my body felt a little stiff. My hand went to his arm, where he leaned down and helped me out of the chair. Charlotte’s mouth flew open and her eyes were wide.

“Wait!” She shouted and then took off up the stairs.

A couple of minutes went by, and she raced back down the stairs with a pill bottle. “Here, you are going to need this. Take two tonight and one when you wake up in the morning.” She said handing me the bottle.

“What is it?” I looked at the label and didn’t recognize the name.

“You probably won’t be able to move in the morning. Always after the first time of transformation your body starts healing itself. Your muscles and joints will be sore and you will not be able to walk for at least a day. The pain is excruciating. So do not plan on doing anything tomorrow but staying in the bed. Friday you will be fine.”

“You mean I’m not going to be able to get out of the bed in the morning?” Disbelief clouded my mind. I looked from Charlotte to Daniel.

“It is okay. I will be there for you. I am not planning to go anywhere,” Daniel said softly.

The new exciting life I looked forward to was about to have its first drawback. I would be totally dependent on Daniel tomorrow. We might as well be married. He was going



to have to take care of me like a geriatric patient. A few moments ago, I would have thought that I'd experienced the most embarrassing moment in my life when the police officer shined the flashlight on Daniel and me lying nude in the woods. The perfectly choreographed falsified sex scene in the woods, directed by Daniel should have been enough to last for quite a few years.

The visions of him helping me in and out of bed, walking down the stairs, and even to the bathroom shuddered my thoughts. Just for one day, I would be an invalid. Wondering if I was going to be incontinent was another thing; I felt a cold chill run down my spine. Surely, it wasn't going to be that bad. I was indulging in my own psychopathic delusions again. Tomorrow I would just be a little sore and stiff. There would be no need for Daniel to cater to me. I would be fine.

## ELEVEN

*There* is a certain time between dreaming and just before you awake. It is a level of consciousness, where your body is still asleep but your mind is fully aware of everything around you. Then you drift back into a dreamlike state and awaken, fully aware of what has happened in this new state of mind.

My eyes opened and I stared at the ceiling of my bedroom. Laying in silence, I allowed my mind to wander back to the moment before my eyes opened. I could sense everything in the room, including Daniel's presence when he tiptoed softly in to check on me. I even recognize the clothes he wore. This must be something new that had to do with being a Lycan. One thing that I definitely was aware of, I was changing.

Stretching my arms over my head, the muscles in my back ached and screamed at me for the extra stress I added on them. Quickly, I brought my arms down to my chest and wrenched in pain. My shoulder muscles and arm joints ached as if someone had disjointed me. Afraid to move my legs, I took a deep breath and pulled the covers back. So far so good. I moved my legs slowly to the side of the bed and rose to a sitting position. The muscles in my sides and stomach didn't agree with my brain at what I had just done. I fell back on my back. Working my way back up onto the pillows, I managed to sit up on the side of the bed.

Human beings are supposed to be intelligent creatures. We are capable of making rational decisions and precision thinking. Honestly, I don't think that I could use the excuse of being a Lycan for my irrational thinking. Humans, well most of us, don't take the words of an adult seriously. Like a small child who is told by its mother not to touch something that is hot, the child touches it anyway. What type of thinking is this? Does the child touch the hot item because of curiosity? Does this form a kind of discovery which the child has made in their own mind? Is this the type of thinking that is carried over from our childhood? When I managed to stand on my own two feet, I fell forward.

Apparently, my legs buckled under my own weight. Trying to break my fall, I grabbed at the first thing my hands could reach. The bedside lamp on my nightstand came crashing to the floor with me.

We laid there waiting in broken pieces. The lamp shattered along with my pride. Helplessly, I laid there on the floor, fully aware of the pain that increased all over my body. I closed my eyes and clenched my jaw when the sharp pains pierced throughout my muscles and joints. Tears formed in my eyes. I couldn't move. Irritated with myself, I remained motionless and face down on the floor.

I heard footsteps running up the stairs and across the hallway. They stopped at my bedroom door. My prince in shining armor arrived to rescue me. The moment wasn't one of happiness, but of dread and embarrassment. This was a lot worse than I'd ever imagined.

"Julie?" his voice asked, totally filled with fear. He ran toward my invalid body.

"Well, I guess when Charlotte said I wouldn't be able to move, I didn't take her seriously," I managed to say with my face plastered to the hardwood floor.

Daniel released a chuckle, then picked me up ever so gently and placed me back on the bed. Every place where he touched me hurt. I didn't want to let him know I was in such agony, but the expression on my face pretty much gave it away.

"I'll be right back with the pills." His face looked as horrified as I felt. I have never seen anyone move as fast. I managed to prop myself up on the pillow.

Looking at my alarm clock, it was afternoon. I slept for over twelve hours.

Daniel returned with a glass of water and two of the pills that Charlotte had given me. I gladly took them while Daniel adjusted the pillow for me so I was relatively comfortable.

"Can I get you anything else? A glass of iced tea. Are you hungry?" His voice was soft as silk.

"Daniel, how long will this last?"

"Usually twenty-four hours. Tomorrow morning it will not be as bad, at least you will be able to stand. I guess I should have warned you about that," he said sitting down gently on the bed beside me.

"Ya' think?" I shot at him. His face dropped to the bed. I was trying to make a joke and it didn't seem to come out that way. "I mean, I was just trying to lighten the mood."

His gaze slowly returned to me. "I just do not like to see you in pain, Jewels."

"I guess everyone has gone through this at one time or another." If I could keep my voice casual then maybe he wouldn't be so sympathetic. However, it was one of the many things that I loved about him.

"Yes, we all did. I remember the pain all too well and I know what you are going through. Mom said that it was far worse than childbirth. I could not relate to that, but for me it was like having the aches from the flu multiplied a hundred times."

"Well, for me, I would say getting hit by a bus and dragged down the street for about ten miles." I said and managed a laugh that which caused even more pain.

"Trust me the pills will help. I have made a smoothie for you as well."

"A smoothie?"

"Yes, it will help you. Your body is metabolizing at an extreme rate right now. It is repairing itself. The smoothie is high in protein and contains certain vitamins and minerals that will help you." His hand moved to touch my arm.

"Repairing itself?"

He nodded. "I will go and bring one up to you. Be back in a minute." He said patting my arm. I squinted and frowned at the pain in my arm where he touched me. "Sorry." he said and he dashed out the door.

Great, a liquid diet. I wasn't hungry, but all I wanted to do was sleep. The medicine was probably taking its effect. I realized something else was having an effect. I needed to use the bathroom. My bladder was ready to explode. This was the ultimate in humiliation. Daniel was going to have to carry me to the bathroom. Worse yet, help me off the toilet. I rolled my eyes and closed them tightly. Never again, I promised myself, would I have to go through this type of humiliation.

Daniel returned with a tall glass of what looked like a vanilla milkshake. He handed it to me. I grabbed it with both hands, afraid I was going to spill it. I smelled it. So far so good, it smelled like a vanilla shake. I reached for the straw and took a sip. Letting the thick liquid settle on my tongue for a moment, I swallowed. It was actually pretty good. It tasted more like a vanilla milkshake. I barely tasted the cocktail he had added.

"Not bad, huh?" He had read the reaction in my face.

"Not bad," I replied. My bladder stung, sending me the sharp signals it was full. "Daniel, I need to go to the bathroom." The hot fire flamed my cheeks told him it wasn't something I was comfortable asking him.

He just smiled at me as if everything was normal. Taking the drink from my hand, he scooped me up in his arms, and as gently as he could, carried me to the bathroom. Sitting me on the toilet, I paused for a moment and looked at him. He caught the hint, walked out of the bathroom, and closed the door.

Slowly I grabbed my panties and managed to work them down around my knees. I could hardly wait. It took forever to finish. Then I could feel the cramps in my bladder. I bent over holding my stomach. Bracing for the pain, I gritted my teeth and held the scream that tried to escape. A second later, it was gone. Sweat dampened my forehead. I was glad at least I'd taken a shower last night. There was no way that I would attempt such a feat in my condition. I finished and flushed the toilet, and pulled myself back together, preparing for Daniel to come back and get me.

"Okay," I whimpered.

He walked in and looked at me for a moment. His face held a curious smirk.

"What?" I said looking up at him. It hurt to even tilt my head up to look at his six foot four figure.

"Well, I was just thinking. Since we are already in here, do you want to take a bath?"

My eyes widened at his thought. He has to be kidding me. Then I frowned as the words came out of my mouth very quickly.

“ABSOLUTELY NOT!” Apparently, he thought it was funny.

He scooped me up again and returned me to the bed. Okay, this was as bad as I thought on the humiliation part. He pulled the sheets back over my legs and handed me my shake again.

“Drink. It will help.” He smiled.

Taking another sip, I realized that it was better than the first. “So where did you come up with this?” I asked taking another long sip.

“Jason and I discovered it when we were researching the effects of transformation on the body. The body begins to repair itself at a high rate of speed, requiring a lot more than what your cravings would cover.”

“Wow, a woofie smoothie.” It felt so good on the back of my throat.

“Julie, try not to be a comedian. It will only make matters worse.” His voice was cautious.

Finishing off the drink, I handed Daniel the empty glass with both hands. My muscles relaxed and the pain stopped shooting its lightning bolts.

“The pills must be working,” He sat down on the side of the bed.

I nodded. “Daniel, I am sorry for messing up your plans for tonight.”

“The club? Please, do not worry about it. We can go another time.” He tried to assure me with a smile.

“Well, I know how much that meant to you.”

His smile broadened, and then he pursed his lips and touched my hand. “You mean much more to me.”

For a moment, I considered what he was saying carefully. Somewhere deep in my heart Daniel had reached in and stirred more than just desire. Daniel showed me his heart. He had grown into a very handsome and sexy young man, yet his heart was more beautiful than I had ever seen. Instead of just telling me that he loved me, he actually showed me.

Since he came back into my life, I knew my life would never be the same again. The part that he opened within me would be a hopeless void if he wasn’t there to fill it. Even though I had told him the truth of how I felt, how could I show him? How could I return what he has given me? I knew in that moment, I couldn’t lose him. I wanted him forever. “So what do we do now?” I asked breaking through the warm feeling from his smile. I knew he knew exactly what I meant.

“I have considered a few options.” The look on his face was now serious. “You need to finish your last semester. I have the research clinic in Scotland.” He paused, looking out the window as if his thoughts had drifted.

“Well, I can take online courses. I’ll have to arrange for my things to be moved here. And...”

“Julie, you do realize that your life has changed, right?” His eyes never left the window. “You can never go back to being, well normal. There are laws you will need to learn to live by.”

“I know what I am. I know that my life will never be the same. I know that there are certain laws I can’t break. We may have to hunt a few werewolves here and there. I’m okay with that.”

He turned his head and stared at me for a moment, as if he was considering my statement. “You have no idea how dangerous this is. It is not to be taken so lightly.”

“Daniel, what do you want me to say about all this? It’s not that I have a choice. In a way, it may sound a little warped to you, but it does give me a sense of purpose.”

The reasoning had set in. All jokes aside, I wanted him to understand that this life meant something to me. Charlotte said that it was my birthright. No, I may not know what it’s like to kill a werewolf, or even fight one. Maybe this was the reason he was so cautious with me.

“Julie, I understand how you feel. I really do. It is just that everything is happening so fast for you right now. There is so much more.” His brows met in a frown. Not of anger, but one which was of concern.

“Daniel, we have time. Between you, Charlotte and Thomas I’ll be filled in.” I touched his hand trying to reassure him in the only way I knew how.

“No. We do not have time. We have until Sunday before the next full moon. Then...”

“Then...someone is going to have to show me how to fight.” I pushed in.

“No! I do not want you to. Julie, I cannot lose you.”

“It’s our responsibility, is it not?” I retorted.

His eyes grew darker. His anger drew near.

“Listen to me.” I leaned forward toward him placing my hands on each side of his face. The soreness in my joints made me wince a little. “If this is something we have to do together, then we will.”

“You are definitely more than what I expected,” he said smiling.

“And just what did you expect?” I returned his smile.

“You are a lot like your father. He never passed up a good fight.” He took my hands from his face and pressing them to his lips, he gently kissed them.

“Well then, let the Knight bloodlines live on,” I said and we both laughed.

“There is one thing.”

I raised one questioning eyebrow and waited. His lips curl into a grin.

“I guess we need to make everything final.”

“Final?” I blinked.

“Since we are going to be mates, will you marry me Julie Ann Knight?” He asked holding my hands.

Usually when a girl dreams of being proposed to, it’s an elaborate and romantic dream, where the man takes her out to an expensive dinner, or has a romantic evening planned. He kneels down on one knee and gives her a little black box that contains a beautiful diamond engagement ring. This, of course, was my idea of a perfect proposal. However, everything in my life for the past two weeks was different from anything I had ever dreamed. Why should this moment be any different? I sat on my bed, dressed in a nightshirt and could barely move. The agonizing pain rendered me helpless. The man that I had grown to love in such a short time, for whatever reasons, sat beside me and had just asked me to marry him.

It was as if destiny threw us together on purpose, and we didn’t have a choice. I knew in my heart Daniel was my mate. It was more than apparent. He was right, it was something that was going to happen and we just needed to make it final.

“You knew this was going to happen didn’t you? After all those years?”

He nodded. “How?” I asked.

Daniel paused for a moment looking down at our hands, then back to me. He spoke softly. “Some of us have certain gifts. Yours is your dreams. Mine? Well, it is hard to explain. There are certain things that I know will happen. I never know exactly when, but eventually they happen. I just have to sit back and wait for it. Like you.”

“So you knew when?”

“I knew when we were teenagers. I was eighteen and you were fourteen. It was the night of your birthday party when Casey had dared me to kiss you.” His expression changed to one of sadness. The event must have been a painful memory.

I thought back for a moment. That was ten years ago and he remembered it. Vaguely the memory came back to me. It was not the kind of kiss you would remember, at least not for me anyway. There were several friends over and we all were having a great time. Remembering somehow Casey had challenged me to kiss Daniel. Apparently, she knew then that her brother had a secret crush on me.

“When my lips touched yours, I had this *knowing* that you would be mine. I did not know when. After that I never wanted anyone else but you.” His voice rang the agony of years. It was as if a bell had been tolled. The sound of the heart rang loud and clear. The message was clear. The agony behind those years Daniel waited for love.

“Wow.” I breathed. “Do you do this on a daily basis?” His gift was now my focus. How could he have known such a thing, that I would be his forever by one single kiss?

“Sort of. It has become a way of life for me.”

“I thought life was supposed to be full of surprises. Doesn’t that take the surprise out of life?”

“Well, not really. It is a surprise when you know something is going to happen, yet a bigger surprise when it does. No, I guess I am grateful for the gift I have. It has brought me many nice things. Like you.” His voice was soft and velvety again. His eyes were dreamy as he looked into mine.

“Well, in that case, I guess I have to say yes.” I smiled thinking to myself that this man will be all mine one day. It was not the same *knowing* that he had, but it served its purpose. I knew this was sudden, but at this point what did I have to lose. Daniel did indeed love me. I knew without a doubt I was in love with him. He was a good man and somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew that I would never find anyone like him again. It was a good choice, if I had one.

“Good,” he said and gently kissed me. It hurt for his lips to even touch mine. “Sorry.” A slight redness appeared on his cheeks when he smiled.

“Well, I guess we have to decide on the details. How about April, next year? I need to finish college and then....”

“Jewels, April is fine. I would rather it to be earlier. Scotland...”

"I would rather stay here. I mean, Scotland?" I wasn't too thrilled with the idea of moving.

"It is very beautiful there. Rains a lot, but the fishing is good," he joked.

"Well, I..." I guess I was saved by the bell from my protest when the doorbell rang. Daniel left to answer the front door.

A few minutes later, a set of footsteps were heard coming up the stairs. The brief chattering of voices remained low and unrecognizable. Soon Daniel appeared in the doorway with Casey behind him. She stood there for a moment with a platter covered in plastic wrap. It didn't take long to guess Charlotte sent over food.

"Mom sent over beef enchiladas. She figured you two wouldn't be coming over to eat." She held the plate up.

"Here let me take those to the kitchen." Daniel took the plate. "Would you like me to bring you a plate back?" He paused and looked at me.

"No, I'm not hungry. BUT, I will take another one of those shakes."

Casey walked over to me with a glow on her face. Gently she sat on the side of the bed and smiled.

"So, you got your first run last night. How do you feel today?" She asked casually.

"Painful."

She nodded. "It always is the first time. Dad had to carry me around to the bathroom. There was no way I could walk. My whole body ached." She laughed.

It was good to see her smiling and laughing like her normal self. Her new relationship with Nathaniel must be going well.

"Daniel had to pick me up off the floor earlier." I laughed. "Of course, it wasn't nearly as embarrassing when he had to carry me to the bathroom to pee. Casey, I thought I was going to die!" We both laughed.

"Julie," she paused, her expression turned serious. "I want you to know that I'm happy for you and Daniel. I mean," she looked carefully over her shoulder, making sure no one stood in the doorway. "I'm really sorry for the way I've been behaving lately. I don't want you to think it had anything to do with you."

"Casey, I never did..." She held her hand up. Casey reminded me so much of Charlotte.

"No, listen." She spoke quickly. "Nathaniel is great, really. We get along wonderfully. I've never been so happy. He's," she paused and checked over her shoulder again. "Different," she whispered. "Mom and Dad would never approve of him. Julie, I just don't know what to do." Her eyes pleaded for help.

"What do you mean different?" There was a distinct change in Casey's expression. Her body became rigid. She'd been hiding more than just the relationship from her parents.

"I... I can't say right now, however, I promise you will know. Julie, he truly makes me happy," she pleaded. "Please don't say anything."

I nodded. "I promise. Eventually you're going to have to tell them if you continue seeing him."

"I know, but not just yet." She cut off when Daniel walked back in the room.

"Well, did Julie tell you the news?" he inquired as he walked in the room with the tall milky liquid that I craved. My mouth watered while my lips eagerly waited to wrap around the straw.

Casey looked over at Daniel when he handed me the glass. Again gingerly holding on to it with both hands, I couldn't wait to devour the milky substance.

"What news?" She turned to me with a quizzical look.

"We are getting married." Daniel declared and sat down on the side of the bed.

Casey's eyes widened with surprise. Her arms flew open as she reached for me. My heart leaped as I gripped the glass carefully preparing for the embrace. In a flash, Daniel's hands reached for the glass and locked his fingers around mine to steady it as her arms folded around my shoulders. Surprisingly, we didn't lose any of the milky contents. I closed my eyes while the pain from her hug ran through my body.

"I'm so happy!" she squealed. Backing off, she suddenly realized my pain. "Oh, Jewels, I'm so sorry. I forgot." She eased back away from me.

"It's okay." I lied. It took a moment to gain control of shooting pain.

"Way to go brother!" She punched him in the shoulder. "Mom and Dad will be so excited. Have you planned on a date?"

"Well, we have a lot to do, Casey," he said cautiously. "Julie needs finish college. Then we have to make arrangements for jobs, and I have the clinic in Scotland. We are thinking probably April."

"April, huh? Well, that will give Mom plenty of time to prepare. Oh, we're going to have to have an engagement party." Her face brightened. "Then plan the wedding, pick out dresses and oh, yes the wedding gown."

"Okay, you two. Let's just take this one day at a time please." I managed take another sip.

Casey had returned to her normal self. Maybe under normal circumstances I would've shared their enthusiasm. However, due to my condition, it was all I could do to maintain a conversation. The drugs had won the fight over the last few minutes. Planning a wedding wasn't my top priority of things to do at the moment.

Daniel and Casey chatted in a conversation all of their own. They hadn't noticed that I had dozed off at least a couple of times. It wasn't until I heard Daniel gasp and his fingers grabbed the glass that remained in my hands, that I fell asleep.

"Uh-oh," he said and grabbed the glass from my hands. "We almost had a mess."

"Sorry," I said weakly.

"Casey, come on, she needs her rest. I think the medicine is working." Daniel's voice trailed off in the distance as my eyelids became heavier. Closing my eyes, it didn't take long slip away into that wonderful thing called sleep.

## TWELVE

*It's* amazing how unaware we are of what we do and say while we're sleeping. A few people sleep walk, a few may talk and even a few people laugh aloud. Curiously, my suspicions are that it may have to do with whatever the individual is dealing with at that particular time in her or his life. For me, I'm pretty sure my theory was evident. There were many things I had to consider during the past two weeks, and now my life seemed to be going full blast into another direction. A direction in which I had no idea even existed. Such as finding out what I am, a Lycan.

My eye lids popped open and I looked around the bedroom. I must've been totally out. Lying on my side, I glanced up at the window. It was daylight. Slowly I released a casual yawn, and then stretched. I remembered what pain I endured and tried to be careful. To my surprise, there was no more pain. Another surprise when I relaxed back into the pillow, I felt an arm across my waist. Twisting carefully, I slowly looked at the bare arm and to whom it was attached. Daniel.

The first thought ran through my mind and I slowly pulled the covers up and examined the clothing. Yep, he was still wearing boxers. Checking myself, everything appeared intact. I didn't remember him climbing into bed with me, so I wanted to make sure that I didn't forget anything else that might have happened. Slowly moving his arm, I slid out from under him and planted my feet firmly on the floor. I wanted to see if this would work. Standing up slowly, my legs appeared fine. I actually felt great. A quick glance at the clock, it was seven-thirty. I took a step and was sure my body was whole once again. I headed off to the bathroom for a nice hot shower. The interrogation with Daniel would have to wait until after my shower.

Turning on the shower, I stripped down while waiting for the hot water. The water felt good against my skin. Shampooing my hair was a luxury. I felt like I hadn't showered in a week. My oily, sticky skin needed some serious attention. I would definitely have to change the sheets on my bed. I never wanted to leave the shower. Grabbing my shower gel, I suds up and rinsed, then repeated just to give me a little extra time.

The water ran a little cooler, so I rinsed and turned off the shower. Toweling my hair, I wrapped the bath towel around me.

Walking back into the bedroom, Daniel stirred. His head turned to where I stood with my towel. He looked absolutely sexy with his tossed black hair and the morning bristles that awaited a shave. Rolling over on his back, he pulled his long muscular arms up over his head and stretched. A heat wave ran over my body when I watched the muscles in his stomach tighten.

"Good morning," he announced.

My brain contemplated a few things other than answering him. Apparently he caught me at my guiltiest. A wicked grin formed on his lips while his hand traveled down his chest and across his stomach muscles. I never realized a six-pack could come in eight. I shook my head to try and clear my thoughts.

"Good morning," I managed to strain out. His soft chuckle caused a slight heat rush to my cheeks.

"So, I see you are doing better," he purred. The tones in his voice tortured me.

"Yes, much," I tried to say casually. "By the way, I was wondering..." and I nodded toward the bed. He knew exactly what I meant.

“You do not remember?” His voice was soft and sexy. Hearing the notes in his voice tingled in my ears. My body shivered. I shook my head. “I suppose you forgot that you screamed out my name last night?” He continued in his seductive manner.

I thought for a moment, considering the fact I had no recollections of last night. If something did happen, I had missed it.

“I did what?” I braced myself.

“Apparently,” he smiled, “you were having another bad dream. Your screams woke me up and I rushed in to check on you. I know what Casey meant when she said you scared her half to death. Julie, they were truly blood curdling.”

“What was I dreaming about?”

“I don’t know exactly. I was about to ask you the same question. You were screaming my name and telling me not to let him kill you. When I asked you who you said the vampire.” The humor was gone, and he became serious. “You said he had bitten you. You were fighting me so hard I had to struggle to try and keep you still. Honestly, I am surprised you do not remember it.”

Thinking hard for a moment, I still couldn’t remember anything about the dream. A vampire, well, why not? After all I was a Lycan and there are werewolves, so why not a vampire? I shook my head and released a soft chuckle. Daniel’s eyebrows rose in surprise at my laughter.

“I don’t remember any of it,” I smirked.

“Well, I just want to know who this vampire is so I can kick his ass.” Daniel had that quirky grin back on his face.

“I guarantee you will be the first to know.” I smiled and winked at him.

A sound that resembled a low growl came from Daniel. I raised one eyebrow and lowered my head. Peering at him through my eyelashes, I watched while quickly threw the covers off the bed and walked toward me. Taking me in his arms, he held me close to him.

“You know you are driving me crazy,” he growled when his lips ran up my neck to my ear.

*“And what do you think you have been doing to me lately?”* I whispered breathlessly while I dug my fingernails into his back. A deep groan escaped his throat. Something indeed had changed within me. My hands ran down the length of his back and circled up to his chest. Slowly, my fingernails grazed over his smooth chest. To my surprise, Daniel’s mouth open and his hot breath panted on my neck. He closed his teeth down on my neck. A sharp piercing pain followed by what felt like molten lava flowed throughout me.

An uncontrollable fire shot through my body. My body burned under an intense heat that I’d never felt before. My mind was no longer in control. The only thought was I needed him and now. Forcefully, I grabbed his face with my hands and pulled him to me. Our lips touched a brief second, and then a more aggressive hunger took over.

Daniel caught my face in his hands and held me inches from his face. His dark eyes were wild with desire. His chest expanded between us with heavy breaths. I knew he saw the same desire in my eyes. His hot skin tingled under my fingers. My hands pulled desperately on his shoulders lifting myself along his tall lean statuesque body. Fighting the pressure inside me, I wanted at a moment’s notice to tear into him. I was unable to fight the uncontrollable urge to devour every inch of him.

Daniel never took his eyes from mine. His hands left my face and grabbed my legs when they quickly wrapped around him. Taunting him, I moved slightly upward while I pulled his face closer to mine. Locking my body onto his, he pulled me gently down.

“No!” he growled. The vibrations from his chest excited me even more. My lips pressed on his chin and then moved down his neck. I wasn’t going to let go, I wanted more.

The savory taste of his skin lingered on my tongue. My teeth ached in my mouth. The smell of him excited my senses. The intoxication of his spicy scent sent shivers up and down my body. A breath escaped my mouth on his neck. His body trembled against mine while his fingers dug into my thighs. Slowly, I discovered a sweet spot. My mouth opened and my tongue gently ran circles around the soft spot between his neck and shoulder. Another vibrating moan escaped through his mouth and my body tingled under the vibrations. My teeth still aching, I bit down on the newly found sweet spot. An unfamiliar bitter and sweet taste filled in my mouth. The new taste filled my mouth, not from him but something from me released into his body. A pure ecstasy ran through me.

Daniel’s head fell back when he slammed me on top of the dresser. A low grumble came from his throat. I held on tightly. His hands grabbed my waist and pushed me away. Reaching for my hands, he locked onto them and forced me away from him.

“Julie!” he breathed. He tore away from me keeping me at arm’s length. His eyes were wild. I blinked a couple of times; still not comprehending what happened. My mind was not rational.

“Stop,” he whispered.

He held me firmly away from him for a few minutes, I dared not move. I watched him curiously, as I saw the blood on his shoulder from my bite. My eyes opened wide in horror at what I had done.

“Daniel?” I cringed and whimpered softly.

“It is okay,” he managed in between heavy breaths. “It will heal.”

“What have I done?” I trembled.

“Lost control. We both did,” he replied. He released me and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand to show me the blood on his lips.

I turned quickly to the mirror and slid off the dresser. A set of bites on my neck matched the ones I’d just given him. Four puncture wounds that were already healing. I opened my mouth and carefully examined my teeth. There was no evidence of sharp teeth or fangs. I turned toward him for answers.

“Your canine teeth. I had heard this could happen. Jason mentioned it to me. It is not going to leave a scar.” He said rubbing his neck.

“I...I’m sorry. I couldn’t stop. It was like something had taken over,” I whined.

“This is what I was trying to tell you. We have to be careful. It is an overwhelming sense of attraction and desire.”

“When will it stop?” I wrapped my arms around myself and shivered as if I were cold.

Daniel moved closer to me, pulling me in his arms he held me close. “I honestly do not know. I may not be strong enough to keep fighting this.” His lips gently kissed me on the top of my head. “Being awakened as a Lycan has sort of brought out an aggressiveness in you.”

“I’m sorry.” I muttered in his chest.

“Oh no,” he chuckled. “I like it. It just makes it harder for me to control myself. With that being said, I need to take a cold shower. We are heading over to see Mom and Dad.” He gently kissed my lips before heading to the bathroom.

The thought of having to discuss what had just happened with his parents gave me a sick feeling in my stomach. Dressing quickly in jeans and a loose cotton shirt, I grabbed a pair of brown leather sandals. I gave my hair a few brushes, and then I was ready. I decided to wait for Daniel down stairs.

It felt so good to be able to walk again. Just one day completely gone, I could move more freely than I did the day before. I felt very flexible and ready to tackle the world. Today I wanted to do something. I wanted to spend time with Casey and Heather and maybe do girl stuff like going shopping, lunch or see a movie. I had the whole day to myself and I wanted to at least keep a safe distance between Daniel and I so we could learn a little self-control.

Smiling to myself, I reflected on his words about the new aggressiveness. I kind of liked the “new me” more and more. The girl that had been sheltered and hidden from her past was gone. A woman had stepped forth into a new life. With this new life came many things I hadn’t dreamed of having right away. One of which was the handsome and desirable Daniel Maxwell. The drawbacks were the monsters of the night that needed to be dealt with soon enough. It was a blessing and a curse all at the same time. At any rate, I would take them both. My life’s path was not chosen, but given.

Daniel drove us to his parent’s house, and he appeared amused as he watched me. It was as though the world came alive around me. With my window rolled down, I inhaled the air blowing into my face. There was not a scent I couldn’t recognize. My sense of smell was incredible. The greens looked greener than normal. My eyes didn’t miss anything. I saw the squirrels playing in the trees. I heard several birds singing, blue jays, cardinals, and even doves cooing softly. For the first time, I felt like my senses had come alive. I felt the world around me and it was filled with so much life. Two weeks ago no one could have ever told me that this type of bliss even existed. To feel one with the world you lived in was incredible feeling.

Glancing over at Daniel I understood what I hadn’t considered in the past. Daniel wasn’t human; neither would a human appeal to him. I could see where this could be a lonely life for someone who wanted a mate. Charlotte mentioned there are not many Lycans, so his choice was limited. How could a human compare to the appetite, or even appeal to that of a Lycan? I reached over and touched Daniel’s hand when I realized how lonely he must’ve been for all those years he waited. Smiling, I also realized he never expected me to behave the way I did this morning. Knowing Daniel’s sex appeal, not to mention his manly endowment, I knew our sexual relationship would be dangerous on more than one account.

Arriving at the house, we found everyone in the kitchen, except for Thomas who had already left for work. Charlotte and Casey stayed behind to entertain Jason and Heather. I was sure that Jason and Heather did a very good job of entertaining Charlotte and Casey.

“Well, good morning sleepy heads!” Jason shot at Daniel and me.

“So how do you feel today Julie?” Charlotte’s soft motherly voice sounded with a hint of expectation in her tone.

“Actually great. I feel so alive. It’s an incredible feeling. It’s like I can sense everything around me.” I bubbled with excitement.

“Yeah, I’d say she’s got it now.” Jason shot Daniel a humorous smile. “So, um, did you survive?”

Daniel stared at Jason for a moment. “Barely.” He pulled back the shirt collar and revealed the bite marks that I left earlier this morning. Jason roared in laughter. “I told you.”

“Jason, I think you left out a few details. What you said was an understatement.” Daniel crossed the kitchen to the counter and pulled out a barstool. I walked slowly toward the bar stool beside Daniel. Rosa prepared two extra plates of breakfast items. I was definitely hungry and the food smelled more than appetizing. Sitting down next to Daniel, I realized he truly didn’t know what to expect from me. Step by step and experience by experience, we would learn together.

“So, Julie, do you have a matching set?” Jason was calmer, but still I could tell he was ready to let loose another laugh at any moment.

Slowly I turned and pulled my cotton shirt down below the bite marks on my neck. As expected, Jason roared another laugh. Heather smiled and placed her hand over her mouth to hold back her laughter. Their inside joke didn’t seem funny to me.

“Well, it appears you two have marked one another.” Heather managed to say with a straight face.

“Well, Casey tells me there is a bit of good news in our near future?” Charlotte chimed in trying to change the subject at hand.

“Yes,” Daniel began. “We have decided to get married. I think sometime around April.”

Charlotte jumped up from the table and hugged both of us.

“Oh! I am so happy! I have to make plans. We must have an engagement party, then, oh, we need to find a place large enough and...” She rambled on.

“Mom,” Daniel stopped her abruptly. “We have time to plan for all of the details. There are more pressing things we need to take care of first.”

“I’m wagering they don’t make it until April.” Jason shot in.

“December” Casey tossed up.

“No, I’m thinking September.” Heather joined in.

“Okay, guys, this isn’t a joke. I think Daniel and I can wait until April to be married.” Surprisingly, everyone including Charlotte shook their heads in agreement. I turned and looked at Daniel to see his reaction. He only shrugged his shoulders in response.

Apparently, I made the statement for my benefit. I remembered how I felt so out of control this morning. I knew I would have to be in better control of myself. Daniel would have to take a little more precautions of his own.

“I was thinking we could practice tonight.” Jason said breaking the momentary silence and changing the subject.

“That would be a great idea. Julie can learn how to work with Daniel.” Heather added with a smile.

“Practice?” I spoke up in between bites of food.

“Yes. We can go out tonight.” Jason added. “Casey, you up for the game?”

“No, I um, have plans to go to a movie with a friend.” Casey spoke up quickly.

“Well, I guess it will be just the four of us then.” Jason finished.

“You know what I would like to do.” I paused from eating. “I would like to go out and do a little shopping. Maybe dancing or something.” It appeared that I had said the wrong thing. Everyone chimed in at the same time with the same answer. “NO!”

Surprised by their reaction, I held my fork full of food to my mouth and stared at each of them.

“Julie, it is not a good time for you to be around humans.” Charlotte spoke softly coming to my rescue.

“I don’t understand.” I frowned. “I’m not going to attack a human. Right?”

“Well, dear, give yourself a little time to adjust. You are still learning to control yourself and you do not want to be exposed to humans. It is not that you would attack anyone. It is just... well... our eyes tend to give us away. In case you have not noticed, your eyes are very black right now. It may frighten people.” Her voice was back to that motherly tone again. “The colors of our eyes are linked to our change in emotions. When we are excited, our eyes will turn black and on a softer side they will be a light brown.”

“Oh.” Remembering the shock I had when I looked into the mirror at my black eyes. The image of someone else seeing those eyes would be terrifying. The chills still ran up my spine when I saw Daniel’s eyes turn black.

The rest of the morning, I stayed at the Maxwell’s. Charlotte and Casey insisted on making plans together for an engagement party, making a list for the invitations and setting the date for next Saturday night. Heather made suggestions for the party favors. Daniel and Jason discussed the clinic in Scotland. Mostly, how they were going to arrange for Daniel moving back to the States.

Daniel called Thomas and they briefly discussed over the phone opening a sister clinic here in the States. It appeared that Thomas backed Daniel’s idea, and now Daniel and Jason proceeded with plans to open the new clinic. Jason and Heather would stay in Scotland, and Daniel, much to my happiness, would remain here in the States. The new clinic would cost a lot of money to start up. Again, Thomas reviewed my assets and between Daniel and me, we managed to cultivate enough money for the new venture.

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Throughout the whole day, my attention was divided between an engagement party, a wedding plan with Charlotte’s newfound committee, and Daniel and Jason’s plans for the new clinic. My head pounded with a headache from Hell.

To my relief, Daniel and Jason left together to find a location for the new clinic. When the both of them started talking complex computer systems, analytical programs and more technical equipment I had never heard of, I became lost in the conversation.

Charlotte’s web continued to weave with the wedding plans. Charlotte, Casey and Heather had already planned the engagement party, the wedding and the reception. Charlotte handled all of the catering arrangements and the location. Casey and Heather had chosen the themes and colors. Occasionally I was asked for my input, smiling and nodding as appropriate.

Excusing myself from the business at hand, I desperately needed a break. I headed toward the patio and seated myself in the luxury of quietness. Easing myself onto the lounge, I placed one leg over the other and relaxed. I let the soothing sounds of the woodlands take me away from my stress.

Firstly, I contemplated the new research clinic with Daniel. It made sense to me to continue the research, which was of interest to my father. Biology is my passion and I did in fact enjoy its many facets. On the other hand, was I ready for such a challenge? Not to mention the inheritance of becoming a controlling partner in more than one of the million dollar corporations. The idea of traveling, making corporate and financial decisions frightened me. This was clearly something that my father had done very well. It wasn’t a skill that I’d learned from him. How was I to make any rational decisions that would benefit any one of these corporations?

Secondly, there was a wedding in my near future. Was I ready for this? Yes, I indeed appreciated Daniel and did love him. I’d already come to the conclusion that he would be a good choice. My father would’ve been proud of my choice to accept Daniel as my husband. In a small way, I felt that this union would be atonement for my father. Maybe in the same way, my father’s happiness could live through me.

Thirdly, there was still the question in my mind concerning Casey and her newfound boyfriend. She mentioned he was different. Different as in how? She never gave me all the details. What made Nathaniel so different that her parents wouldn’t accept him? I considered the obvious; he wasn’t a Lycan. If he were human, then I could see where Thomas and Charlotte would have their differences. The repeat experience of my father’s would surely raise some fur. I assumed Casey knew the story all too well. I knew Casey better than that. If Nathaniel were a human, Casey would’ve told me. She would have known if anyone, that I would’ve sympathized with her. No, I was sure this newfound romantic interest was neither human nor lycan. What else could he be then?

A rush of fear ran through me. What if Nathaniel was a werewolf? It would make sense why she would hide this from everyone. A werewolf would pose a tremendous threat to our families. They were the sworn enemies of the Lycans. There were only two days left before we formed a pack and attacked the werewolves. Casey was aware of this and it didn’t seem to bother her. If her boyfriend was a werewolf, then the thought of her family destroying him would send her over the edge. Pushing the thought from my mind, I left it alone with the conclusion that Nathaniel wasn’t a werewolf. I knew, in time, the mystery would reveal itself. For whatever the reason, I was aware of the need to be prepared for the inevitable.

Closing my eyes, I sank deeper into the lounge. Listening to the birds in the trees singing, I heard the wind gently rustling through the trees. I heard a car engine and the sound of tires crunching on the pavement when it pulled in front of the house. Daniel and Jason had returned. I stayed seated, remained quiet and listened.

Moments later, the patio door opened followed by the sound of approaching footsteps. I inhaled deeply at the scent. It was Daniel. A sense of thrill ran through me. Remembering to keep myself under control, I tried to suppress my feelings. The tingling in my body warned me he was close.

“How was your trip with Jason?” I asked casually, my eyes remained closed.

“Good. We found a building that be perfect for the new research clinic.” His voice rang out with notes of excitement. “So how is the wedding planning going?” He sat down on the lounge and pulled my legs into his lap.

“I think Charlotte has it all under control.”

He remained silent. His hands still gently rubbed my ankles, soothing my very soul. I opened my eyes to see the concerned expression on his face.

“You know, I understand that everything is moving fast for you. I can imagine how difficult this may be for you.” Pausing he looked down at his hands. Slowly his eyes lifted to mine followed by a slight frown. “Is there anything I can do to make this easier for you?”

“Well... there may be just one thing that you could do,” I teased.

Watching Daniel’s mouth turn into a grin only reinforced a smile on my lips. He rolled his eyes and dropped his head again. Raising his head slightly, his dark eyes peered at me through those luscious black eyelashes.

“I hope you realize are killing me.” His eyebrow lifted.

“Well, you started this,” I argued playfully.

“I guess the only solution is for me to stay a safe distance from you then. Maybe I should move back to Scotland until April.”

“No!” I snapped.

“Well, maybe I should stay with my parents then,” he continued.

“Are you afraid of the big bad wolf?” I teased again.

“Very.” His voice turned rich and deep.

“Daniel?” I breathed out.

“Yes?” he purred.

“You are doing it again!” I pulled my feet away from him and stood from the lounge. I turned to him and took his face in my hands. Leaning closer to him, I gently touched my lips to his. His mouth parted when my lips moved softly and smoothly. “*You may not have a choice next time,*” I whispered and let him go.

Quickly Daniel’s hands grabbed mine and pulled me back to him as he rose to his feet. Releasing my hands, he then placed his hands on my waist pulling me closer.

“I know exactly what you need.” He pursed his lips into a smile. “I know a quaint little French restaurant in Atlanta. The lights are dim. The food is great and you need a night out. We can take Heather and Jason and have a little fun for a change. No more talk of weddings, engagement parties or hunting werewolves.”

“So you mean we can just be human tonight?” I purred back at him.

Slowly leaning down to my face, his lips gently touched mine. “*As human as possible,*” he whispered on my lips.

Tilting my head back, I enjoyed the long sensuous kiss. Daniel had the effect on me that made me want to agree to anything. My hands wandered through his hair pulling him closer to me when the kiss deepened. Slowly we both came to a stop at the same time. Savoring the moment of the kiss, our lips smiled together while we looked longingly into each other’s eyes.

“*I think we might be doing better at this,*” he whispered.

“We’ll see.” I purred.

Daniel and I left his parents’ house and headed back to my house to change clothes. I chose a light and casual blue thin-strapped dress. Daniel wore dress jeans and a dark blue shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. He had let the shirt hang out over his jeans and opened at the top. I expected to see him on the cover of GQ magazine; he looked so handsome and sexy. I insisted he not shave and leave his evening shadow. It added to the sex appeal for the night.

We drove back to pick up Heather and Jason. I suggested that they stay with us for the night, since we had no idea what time we would arrive back home. The drive to Atlanta would take an hour and a half. Jason, of course, joked that he and Heather would be our babysitters. Daniel and I promised we would be on our best behavior. Somehow, I don’t think they believed us.

The drive didn’t seem as long with the music and conversation. Jason and Heather explained how they first met. Heather had moved to Scotland with her parents from America when she was a small child. Her father had taken a job with one of the local banks in Edinburg. Jason had accepted a job as a medical scientist in Dublin, Ireland. He and a few of his friends went fishing in Scotland. After a long day of fun filled fishing, they had decided to spend the rest of the evening at one of the local pubs. He saw Heather and it was love at first sight. They were married six months later.

The complications they faced weren’t nearly as difficult as the ones which Daniel and I faced. Jason had said they were immediately attracted to each other, but he had never seen such an attraction as Daniel and I shared. According to their knowledge, most Lycans know their mates immediately when they see them. My thoughts ran back to my teenage years with Daniel. I didn’t seem to have that sense of knowing like the rest of them. Daniel was sure I was his mate, but still it made me wonder if there was something wrong with me. Maybe it was because I was only half Lycan. The answer satisfied me. I kept my thought to myself and dared not speak that I didn’t have the attuned senses they did. Everything would work out as it was supposed to. This was what I believed.

Arriving at the restaurant Daniel pulled in front and let Heather and me out of the car. We waited while Daniel parked the car and met us with Jason. The elegant restaurant carried a very expensive appeal. Gold chandeliers with crystal globes hung throughout the restaurant. The lightly lit tables were dressed with a single globed candle. The impressive white linen tablecloth was accented with a gold trim. The tall chairs, cushioned with plush white seats and backs.

The waitress arrived with the menus. Giving us a few moments, we all ordered a different dish. We enjoyed fresh baked French bread with a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc. Daniel ordered as an appetizer Strawberries Romanoff which were fresh strawberries topped with a brandy cream sauce. For our dinner entrées, Heather and I ordered the Chef’s Specialty Chicken Friand, a puff pastry filled with chicken, mushrooms and a béchamel sauce, topped with a creamy mushroom sauce. Jason played it safe and ordered Rosemary roasted chicken. Daniel surprised us all and ordered a Quiche Lorraine. Somewhere there was a joke why real men don’t eat quiche.

The food was wonderfully delicious. We all tasted each other’s food. Daniel and I laughed loudly at Heather and Jason. They appeared to eat from one another’s plates more than they did their own. Several times Heather had warned Jason she would be removing a finger of his with her canine teeth. Our laughter became a little louder after another bottle of wine.

Several stories crossed the table of Daniel and Jason’s fishing expeditions. One of which was the story of how the big one got away. Not to mention how drunk they were one night when they thought they saw the Loch Ness Monster. Daniel explained it was the moon moving on the waves of the lake. Jason swore it was Nessie which had tipped the boat and caused him to fall into the lake. We all laughed when Daniel reminded his dear friend he had never seen such a brave heart when his friend pulled his trousers down to moon the so-called monster, just before he fell backwards out of the boat.

“Daniel,” Jason started in his Irish accent, “how many times do I have to tell ya! She was after me lucky charms!”

The roar of laughter erupted around our table. Heather and I wiped our eyes from the tears of laughter we shared. My sides strained and hurt from all of the laughter.

Winding down the evening and finishing our entrées, we all ordered the house coffee. A fresh ground French roast coffee, topped with fresh whipped cream and drizzled with caramel. The coffee was tasty as it eased our stomachs and cleared our heads for the return trip home. Daniel picked up the bill and we were soon ready to leave.

The trip back home was somewhat quieter as we were all full from a great dinner. A few kisses passed between Heather and Jason in the back seat of the car. Daniel’s hand reached over to mine and squeezed it gently. I locked my fingers around his and gave him a gentle squeeze.

Jason and Heather woke up as we pulled up in front of my house. We all left the car and headed into the house. I pulled off my shoes, and then showed them around upstairs to their bedroom. The final check before I left the two of them to themselves was their bathroom. I was satisfied to know the fully stocked bathroom would suffice. Before I returned to my room, I gave them both a hug and wished them a good night.

Walking into my bedroom, Daniel had already changed and lay quietly on my bed. I paused at the door to notice how adorable he looked. He was already under the bed covers with them pulled up to his waist. Smiling broadly, he reached behind him and fluffed one of the pillows under his head.

“Um, I thought you said something like you were afraid of the big bad wolf.” My right eyebrow rose.

“Oh, I am. Very afraid.” His voice was soft and seductive again.

Ignoring his last statement, I grabbed my nightshirt and headed into the bathroom. Slipping out of my dress and removing my makeup, I brushed my teeth then returned to the bedroom. Daniel was still in the bed and watched me as I walked over to the opposite side.

Pulling the covers back I eased into the bed and slid down until my head touched the pillow. Daniel immediately sighed and moved over toward me. His arms wrapped around me and pulled me close him. My hand went to his chest in protest.

“I thought you were going to be better about this. You mentioned something about not being able to control yourself, lately,” I purred.

“That was lately. This is now,” he said in a husky voice. “Besides, I have an idea how this might work for both of us.” His lips rested on my neck.

“Now I’m afraid,” I breathed out when his lips trailed from my neck to my jaw. Already I felt the blood heating in my veins when his lips reached my mouth.

*Morning* came with a new and refreshing song. My senses awakened before my body. I could sense only my immediate surroundings. There was no apparent danger so I relaxed. Within a few minutes my eyes slowly opened. Rolling over on my back I stretched to wake my sleepy muscles.

During my stretch, the body next to me stirred. Daniel rolled over on his side with his back facing me. Pulling myself back together, I gently eased my body close to his. I softly kissed his bare back while I wrapped my arms around his waist. His soft grumble appeared to be a protest from being awakened. Smiling to myself I held on to him.

Daniel had been such a sweetheart last night. Sleeping together wasn't as difficult as I had thought. I was satisfied that we both had our virtues still intact. His idea worked well for us. He had managed to figure out my 'hot spots' so to speak and stayed clear of them. Although he still remained particularly fond of the sweet spot on my neck, we tried carefully to avoid any mishaps.

I took special notice of the areas that I needed to stay clear of with him. Most all of Daniel's areas appeared to be in the red zone. Narrowing our research down to a few particulars, I managed quite nicely. Keeping it simple was the best approach for him. We of course came up with a game called hot, hotter and hottest. Using these signal words would be a warning notice before we were out of control.

Our experimenting lasted until way through the night. It was an interesting way to learn each other's physical limitations. The laughter between us made the game fun while we tested our code words. Choosing to ignore Daniel's at one point, I wanted to see how far I could go when he yelled out the word "hot". I persisted with the sweet spot I had found previously. I continued to tease him with my tongue until I felt my teeth beginning to ache. When he yelled "Too Hot!" I stopped and started kissing him to muffle his murmurings.

I was completely surprised to find his canine teeth had emerged and they were very sharp. Being pleased by my new discovery I continued with my experiment. My next venture would be to find out what happens if we both go past our controlled limits. The previous experience with him earlier on in the morning left me wondering what would have happened if we hadn't stopped. Only time would tell.

Daniel rolled over to face me. His sleepy eyes opened. Slowly a smile appeared on his face.

"Good morning." His morning voice was rough and husky.

"Good morning," I purred and then moved into his arms.

"Anything in particular you want to do today?" he asked, as he brushed the hair away from my face with his finger.

"Well, we do have house guests." I teased.

"You are absolutely right. Are you up for a little tag team tonight?"

I knew exactly what he meant. "Work on a little practice in before tomorrow night." I nodded and smiled at him as I watched his face light up. "Why not?"

"We have to make sure you are not going to take a tree out if you are stung by another bee," he teased.

"I believe," I paused twisting my mouth into a grin, "the tree is still intact." I retorted with a huff.

"Barely," he shot back. "I shudder to think of what you will do to me tonight," he purred.

"Hot," I purred smoothly back at him.

Daniel raised his eyebrows in surprise and a wicked grin crossed his face. Moving his hand to my chin, he pulled my face to his. Softly his lips moved over mine. His tongue softly traced upper lip which sent a rush of heat through my body.

"Hot?" he whispered.

"Warm." I muttered.

Slowly he moved his lips from my mouth to the sweet spot on my neck.

"Hot," I gasped.

Ignoring my warning, his tongue traced the sweet spot's boundary lines. My body erupted like a flaming volcano. My heart pounded wildly. His mouth opened to my neck and the point of his sharp canine teeth lingered on the sweet spot. I inhaled a deep and ragged breath.

"Hottest!!!" I breathed out my last warning.

In an odd masochistic manner I wanted him to continue. I grabbed his arms and dug my fingers into his biceps. The vibrations from the moan escaping his throat sent shivers through my body.

Last night we tested our boundaries and stopped when our warning signal had been made known. Maybe this was his way of getting back at me for pushing his limits last night.

Rolling me over on my back, he braced himself to support his weight away from me. Gently nudging his head against mine he continued taunting me with the sweet spot. The flames grew hotter under my skin. I opened my mouth and gasped when I felt his teeth as they pierced my skin. My body trembled beneath his. My fingernails dug deeper into the softness of his flesh. His spicy scent filled my senses, pushing me over the edge. A surge of excitement ran through me while a breathless moan escaped through my mouth. In an instant, I knew I was past my safety zone.

Daniel's body grew stiff when I felt the hot rush of fluid from the bitten area run throughout my entire body. The animal instinct had taken over my mind. Before he had time to react, my mouth grabbed his neck and the teeth that ached so badly closed down. Again the hot sweet fluid filled my mouth. In an instant Daniel grabbed me by my shoulders. His hands tightly gripped around me.

The low growl rumbled in his chest when he released me and braced himself on the headboard of the bed. My mouth found his as I squirmed my way back to him.

Aggressively the sweetness of our kiss grew intoxicating.

"Stop!" he said breathlessly against my lips in a moan.

"I can't.." I breathed helplessly. My hands charted areas of the unknown.

"Ahh!" he moaned when my mouth closed around his again. His scent drove me mad. I wanted him and all of him. My fingers gently stroked his hardness, he was ready and I all I had to do was-

With no warning, Daniel was ripped away from my aching body. I blinked several times as I watched him being dragged against his will to the front of the dresser by Jason.

Daniel's eyes were wild and black as midnight. I'm pretty sure mine matched his as well. I watched as anger and frustration appeared on his face. He struggled to free himself from Jason's grip. With a desperate attempt, I felt Daniel call me to him. In a flash of a second I was headed from the bed to him. I felt the need in him, pulling me, drawing me like a magnet. The rushing of hot lava flowed through my fevered veins. My mind was overtaken by the blind rage that welled within me.

Something I hadn't expected in my attempt to reach Daniel, a hand grabbed mine. Strong arms locked around me and held me tight.

"Let me go!" I growled through my teeth. My body trembled.

"Calm down, Julie!" Heather, the petite woman, had the strength of a hundred men inside that tiny body.

"Let me GO! He's mine!" My voice became rough and the vibration of my growl rumbled in my chest.

Glancing at Daniel, he still fought against the hold by Jason.

"Daniel! Get a grip-boy!" Jason shouted.

"Damn it! Let me go!" he roared. Glaring toward Heather, he bared his teeth which sent chills down my spine. "LET HER GO!" he demanded.

"Heather, get her out of here and quick!" Jason yelled in a fearful voice.

"NO!" I screamed when she pulled me toward the bedroom door.

"Come on, love, you need a little fresh air to clear your senses."

"Bitch!" I hissed loudly while I fought against her.

Dragging me past the mirror on my dresser my eyes widened in horror when I saw my reflection. My black eyes matched Daniel's. I opened my mouth to protest while she continued to drag me out of the room and noticed my extended canine teeth in clear view.

Daniel had slammed Jason into the wall hard enough to knock a picture down. The glass in the picture shattered when it hit the floor. Jason tightened his grip on Daniel.

"Oh-no, buddy, you aren't going anywhere." He growled at Daniel while his eyes turned into a dark black cloud.

The resistance with Heather was my priority. She somehow managed to drag me down the stairs through to the patio. Outside we stood by the swimming pool.

"If you don't stop fighting, we're going for a little dip!" She hissed in my back.

"Let me GO!"

"Okay," she said and then tossed me into the swimming pool.

The cold water of the swimming pool shocked me back to my senses. Swimming my way back to the surface I gasped for air. Stretching my arms, I swam back to the side and climbed out of the pool. I walked past Heather who sat on the lounge with a smirk on her face. I placed my face in my hands.

"Okay now?"

I nodded and sat down beside her.

*"We were okay last night. I don't understand what happened,"* I whispered, then raised my head to look at her small face.

Heather frowned a moment then her pretty face softened. *"Listen to me,"* she began softly. *"I want you to think back to what just happened. Do you remember how aggressive and angry you were?"*

I nodded. *"I didn't mean to call you a bitch. Why is this happening to me?"* I whined.

*"Okay then, tell me, Julie, when you wanted to get to Daniel so badly, what did you want to do to him?"*

*"I think that is an obvious answer."*

*"All right, then. Honestly, tell me how badly did you want him?"* She snapped at me.

*"Bad all right. I wanted him so badly my teeth were hurting."* I glared at her. *"I wanted to tear into him."*

*"Julie, you have to understand why there are certain laws we don't break. Did you ever wonder how Jason and I even knew to catch you two before it was too late?"* I shook my head. *"The perfumed scent you two gave off was so unbearably strong it took our breaths away. That is when we knew you two were in trouble and rushed in to save you from each other."* I stared at her in disbelief.

*"The problem is,"* she continued, *"in the state you two were in, if both of you continued and went through with it, you would have ended up killing one another. Literally."*

*"I don't think..."* She stopped me by shaking her head.

*"No! I mean it seriously. The passion turns into a rage. My sister who was dearly in love with a guy she'd met several months prior had the same problem. You and Daniel remind me so much of them. One evening he came over to the house and they went into her room. I remember the same strong perfumed scent. A few moments later it sounded as though they were tearing the room apart. It was later on in the night, I thought that they had left the room. So I went to bed, not giving much thought as to if anything was wrong. The next morning her door was still shut. I smelled something odd and decided to check on them. When I opened the door I was horrified. The walls were soaked with blood, and the two of them laid locked together on the floor in a pool of blood. They had torn each other apart and bled to death in the heat of their passion."* Her voice softened as the memory brought back the pain of her loss. *"Now tell me, is this worth it?"*

*"Daniel mentioned it was dangerous. He said that we could lose everything,"* I said softly.

The ultimate horror had hit me. I remembered on several different occasions I wanted to tear into him. How my teeth ached to touch the soft fleshy wonderfully scented skin. I wanted to devour every inch of him. I looked away from her as I remembered my reflection in the mirror. My eyes black, my teeth exposed and ready.

She nodded. *"He was right."*

*"What do we do then? Will it stop?"*

*"The only way it can be stopped is with the Rite, which is performed by the Lycan Council. The solemnized union will protect you both and save your souls. It is a difficult and sometimes painful purification process in which you are cleansed of the animalistic desires. You and Daniel can then share all the passion you desire."* There was hope in her voice that we would come through this. *"In the meantime, I would suggest you two do not stay in the same room by yourselves for very long. It has become entirely too dangerous."*

*"What about the practice tonight?"*

*"You will be fine. It would probably benefit you both. Jason and I will help you both as long as we can, but you need to be careful for yourselves."* She reached over and embraced me.

The patio door opened and Daniel and Jason walked through. Daniel's face was in pure agony when he walked toward me. Heather's body stiffened when she slowly let me go. I stood and walked toward Daniel when I felt her hand on my arm.

*"It is okay, Heather. I am all right now,"* Daniel said softly opening his arms to me.

I ran into his open arms as he embraced me tightly. His heart beat so hard I could feel it pounding through his chest.

*"I am so sorry. You cannot imagine how I feel right now."* The trembling of his voice made me realize he was on the verge of tears.

*"No, I'm the one who is at fault."* I cried into his chest.

*"I promise I will never do that again."* He held me back and stared into my eyes. *"Never again, do you hear me? I will never ever let that happen again. I do not ever want to lose you."* Tears ran down my face. *"You mean so much to me, Jewels. I would not be able to live with myself if I did something horrible to you."* Daniel's eyes lifted to Heather.

*"Heather, I am truly sorry for my behavior."*

*"Daniel, I understand. I'm not mad at you. Really. I'm just glad Jason and I was here."* Her smile assured us everything was fine. In my heart, I knew it was not a closed book.

The aftermath of our actions was truly saddening. The rest of the day Daniel and I stayed apart from one another. I was truly thankful that Jason and Heather had stayed with us last night. The horrifying images flashed back to my mind of her sister's and boyfriend's bodies. Never in a million years would I want the same fate to happen with Daniel and me. The thought of me actually killing Daniel in a crime of passion made me ill.

The dark veil had been lifted from my eyes. For the first time I saw through the darkness of the unknown. I saw a glimpse of the wonders of this new life. Yes, I indeed needed to know more of the laws. Apparently the first of the rules was almost broken. The future held the hope of redemption of our self-destruction. The purification process Daniel and I would have to endure would be, as Heather said, difficult and painful. In the back of my mind, I wondered if my father had considered this process when he married my mother. Since she was human, maybe he didn't have the same problems. My efforts would be double to ensure our success. I couldn't imagine if I was one hundred percent Lycan. Would our problems be greater then?

The road we traveled became harder each day. The closer we became, the more I learned the Lycan laws and how dangerous we had actually become to each other. This life must have more benefits because of the pain we endure. The purpose of Lycans is to protect humans. If we were protectors of human kind, then how were we to protect ourselves from each other? The answer was clear, choice.

The sickening feeling crept into my stomach again. Daniel and I both chose not to stop this morning. Even though our safe words were clear, we ignored them. How much different were we then from Adam and Eve? Eve's choice was to eat of the forbidden fruit, then give it to Adam. Proving to him she didn't die as God said they surely would. But in reality, they died spiritually. Surely this wasn't going to be the fate for Daniel and me. I chose another fate... to live. At all costs, I would make sure we never went through this again. No matter how badly I wanted him. I knew the consequences of my actions. I would deny myself the pleasure of the forbidden fruit and choose life.

~\*~

Nightfall came. The uneasy feeling I'd during the day remained. Daniel and I went of our way to avoid each other. It was a painful experience. My heart longed to embrace him, just to be able to wrap my arms around him once again. I never knew anything such as this could cause so much pain.

There were times we passed one another and didn't speak. Our eyes held each other's glance only momentarily. It hurt me the most to see the pain in his eyes every time he looked at me. There were no words we could possibly say to one another which would make the situation better. How long would we keep this going? The fear and tension grew inside me every minute of the day.

Tonight we would all go into the meadow, not as humans but as Lycans. I hoped as the moments grew nearer that my pain and feelings of guilt would subside.

The time came for the inevitable. Heather and Jason were both robed along with Daniel. I slipped into mine and we headed toward the meadow.

Once at the edge of the meadow, Jason and Heather unrobed in the darkness and transformed into their wolf forms. I wasn't surprised as I noticed Heather. She was still dainty even as a wolf. Daniel motioned me to go next. I closed my eyes to remember the sensations of my first time. My heart pounded loudly in my chest and was followed by a rush of pain. It wasn't physical pain that prevented me from changing, the pain was purely emotional.

Daniel walked forward to me slowly. I opened my eyes and gave him a blank stare. For a moment, he turned his head to the side and looked through the thick black wooded forest. The dark of the night had prevented me from seeing the expression in his eyes. Slowly he walked toward me reaching for my hand.

Fear burst forth from my chest and ran rapidly throughout my body. I jerked my hand away from him. My heart raced. I was without words. I realized in that moment I was afraid of him. I backed away from him slowly shaking my head.

*"Jewels?"* he spoke softly and cautiously taking another step toward me.

*"Stop!"* I shrieked. He was as surprised as I was by my reaction. There was no way to cover the fear in my voice. My body trembled with the excess of fear.

From what I could see of Daniel's face it appeared he had drawn into a frown. Dropping his head to the ground he pleaded one last time. *"Julie?"* His voice was soft.

For reasons I couldn't explain, I took another two steps away from him. My pulse rang loudly in my ears making it difficult to even hear him clearly. I watched as he turned slowly and disrobed. He was a wolf within a second, and gone to join Heather and Jason.

I moved closer to where they were in the open meadow. There was enough moonlight shining down to make out the vague forms of the wolves. When I found a good spot, I sat down and pulled my robe together under my knees. Silently I watch the three.

Heather and Jason moved identically as though they were in unison. She separated from Jason and circled around Daniel. She lowered her head in attack position. The attack didn't come directly from Heather, it came from Jason. Jason followed the movement of Heather, and they lined Daniel up perfectly for the kill. Jason in a blur of a second was in



Daniel's side with his teeth against the back of his neck. Heather charged Daniel and attacked his rear legs. The kill, I assumed. They gave a few quick snorts and short barks to let me know everyone was all right. Daniel stood up and shook. He turned his head toward me as if checking to see if I'd been watching. Soon the game continued.

After a few more attempts, Daniel managed to pin Heather down, but he still couldn't avoid Jason's attack. Heather moved too fast to let Daniel close to her neck. Intently I watched and learned figuring out the attack plan was always the same. Heather's bluff at the attack was only to distract Daniel enough to allow Jason the kill. She was using herself as bait. Cleaver girl.

Daniel anticipated the next attack by Jason. His unsuccessful movement ended as Heather attacked for the kill. This time Daniel quickly turned and met her head on. Rising on their haunches their heads locked into a rage of growls and snapping teeth. Jason made a quick rush into Daniel's side knocking him down on the ground. Heather quickly pounced on top of him still snapping her teeth. Jason circled around them, and just as quickly he dove into Daniel's neck. The kill again, I thought. My heart froze in my throat. For a moment, the attack appeared too real.

Heather and Jason moved away from Daniel. Daniel rose to his feet slowly. He took a slow step forward and appeared to be limping. I rose to my feet. My breath held in my chest. In a rapid jerk, Daniel changed back into his human form. Falling forward he went down on the ground. Quickly I ran back to collect his robe and ran to him. Jason and Heather had changed back and stood by his side.

My heart pounded with fear when I rushed to him. Standing in front of him I grabbed his face with my hands. I looked for any evidence of injury. His face was close enough to me that I could see him wince in pain. Heather and Jason helped him with his robe. As he raised his left arm he moaned in pain. Instinctively, my hands ran over his shoulder until I felt the wet and sticky blood.

"Daniel. You're bleeding!" I screamed.

Jason and Heather left to find their robes.

"I'll be okay, just give me a moment," he said weakly and then sat down on the ground.

"Let me see." I said pulling back the robe from his shoulder. There wasn't much I could see other than the dark patch of blood from the wound. "What do I do?" My voice filled with concern and fear.

"Nothing, it will heal in a few minutes," he spoke softly. "I did not mean to frighten you." The evidence of worry in his voice sent splinters through my heart.

"I wasn't sure how bad you were hurt. Jason had..."

"I was not talking about the attack." He stopped me abruptly turning his head to face me. "This morning. Julie, I saw the fear in your eyes tonight when I reached for your hand." He paused for a moment drifting back to that moment. Through the dim light of the moon I saw a frown on his face. "Your voice," he continued. "You were utterly terrified of me. Never do I want you to be afraid of me."

My response took longer than we both expected. I wanted so badly to say I wasn't afraid of him. The truth was, he terrified me. I opened my mouth, but couldn't let the lie escape my lips.

With a deep sigh he slowly and cautiously reached for my hands. Forcing myself to stay perfectly still, his warm hands gently touched mine. My whole body trembled in fear.

"I hope you know I would never hurt you."

"I..." Clearing my throat I tried to strain out the lie that wasn't meant to be. "I know you won't"

There was an odd expression on his face. One which I'd never seen before. He frowned slightly while he looked away from me. His hands trembled slightly on mine. Looking back to me again there was the agony of pain on his face.

"Tell me, what can I do? How can I prove to you that I love you more than my own life? What do I have to do, Julie? Tell me and I will do it," he pleaded.

My heart swelled in my chest and my breathing shuddered. There was no answer I could give him. I loved and adored him with all my heart. There was still the fear that intimidated me.

"*I will never leave you,*" he whispered.

His words burned in my ears sending an abrupt fire to my heart. My eyes welled with tears that threatened to fall. Surprised by my reaction, Daniel recognized the secret of my fear. His face brightened with the enlightenment of realizing the truth which went deeper than the fear of him killing me.

"*My God,*" he whispered. "*Julie?*" Slowly he turned and pulled me into his arms. The tears burned my cheeks as they fell.

Pulling my stiffened body next to his, he held me tight against his chest.

"It is not whether I would physically hurt you is it? You are afraid I am going to leave you." The burning returned with the pain.

"You pulled away from me." I sobbed.

"No, no, no. I did not mean for you... that is not what I was doing. I was not pulling away from you. I will never leave you." He paused and inhaled deeply. The next words that came out were ones I hadn't expected to hear. "Julie, your father did not mean to leave you. If he would have had the choice, Martin would have never left you, I am sure of it."

The words ripped through my heart. My head buried in his chest while the tears flowed freely. My body trembled as the sobs erupted from my mouth. For the first time, both of us realized that Daniel was my world now. How could I afford to lose him? There was no one else. Daniel had already become a part of my heart. The attachment was one that would rip my world apart if he were gone.

He gently kissed me on the top of my head and rocked me slowly in his arms.

"*Tell me what to do then,*" he whispered. His voice pleaded with me. "*How can I ease this pain I feel in your heart?*"

The words he spoke clearly set off bells in my ears. He felt my heart. We had bonded. I couldn't answer Daniel's question. I couldn't dare tell him what I needed from him was more than the air that I breathed. How could I tell him I needed something that only he could give me, even more than what he already had? To put us into mortal danger, this I couldn't do. My only answer was, "I don't know."

"Julie, I can feel your heart. I know what you need," he sighed. "If we were not what we are, it would be so easy for me to give that to you right now. I want to. I honestly and truly want to take the pain away from you. To soothe and satisfy you in the way you need right now, but we cannot take the chance."

"I know," I cried. "I'm just so confused right now!"

"I know. I know." He held me tighter to his body. "I cannot verbally express to you how much I love you right now. I just want to show you. It is difficult for me also, can you not see this?" His voice was tense, as his face showed the last cry of his plea.

Daniel's pain was as evident as mine. Were we damned by a curse we couldn't escape? Having to wait in agony and pain for a rite to remove the treacherous disaster of our animalistic side? What type of rite would be more painful and difficult than the pain we suffered in this very moment? In what way could I show him that I loved him more than my own life? If it meant I had to sacrifice my life for Daniel, then I would gladly do it. I would gladly die for him, that only my love may be proven in a manner beyond a cursed life. I was dying inside each second we were together. The depth of my love for him drove deeper than any curse could hold. If it meant my love would live on forever, then the fate that so cruelly wielded her sword would have to make the strike. I was prepared for the battle. There would be a place for us in this world we lived. I felt the burning in my soul enough to know this was true. I knew what I believed. There was no fate in whatever manner, which could hold a sword against my faith.

"I know." My voice trembled through the tears. I heard a long sigh as he gently touched my chin and tilted my face to his. His lips brushed gently over my eyes wiping my tears away. His fingers stroked the side of my face.

"*Daniel, I don't want to live forever without you,*" I whispered through my tears against his lips.

"*Who waits forever anyway?*" he whispered as his tongue touched my lips. Inhaling deeply he drew me closer to him.

My heart raced inside my body. There was no molten lava running through my veins. Only the pain of my shattered heart remained. It pointed me into another direction.

Pushed me. Pulled me. Hanging on a cliff high above the ocean I waited. His lips pressed down on mine. Like a wind from the ocean blowing against my face as I saw the approaching waves rush toward the bottom of the cliff. Ever so gently as a breeze touching my skin, Daniel's fingers traced my neck to my shoulder underneath my robe.

Pulling back slightly from the kiss he looked deep into my eyes. He was close enough for me to see his eyes had turned to a beautiful light brown. He turned and looked toward where Heather and Jason previously stood. I followed his eyes and knew what thought. We were alone. He turned to me and slowly shifted his body toward me. His right arm went past my waist. Slowly and gently he eased me down to the ground.

His finger traced my lips while he watched me intently. He moved closer to me, touching my lips again with a soft and sensual kiss. Ever so gently his fingers moved down the front of my robe to the zipper. My breath shuddered. The excitement which once boiled in my veins was blocked by the pain still in my heart. The crashing waves of emotions came all too quickly. I stepped off the cliff. Slowly he moved the material out of his way. Pausing he raised back on his knees while he removed his robe. I rose and met him with my arms around his neck. Carefully and gently he slid the robe down from my arms until it fell down to the ground.

We stared into each other's eyes for a long moment. I felt the wind from the waves crashing into my heart. The only ache I had was my heart which longed for someone to caress it and keep it safe. To protect my tender heart from the crashing waves. Daniel's mouth met mine again. Our kiss was tender and gentle. The tears gathered behind my eyelids as I held them tightly together while his hand traveled down my chest. My only wish was that I could disappear inside his arms, letting him take away this pain.

His hands cupped my breast, brushing his fingertips lightly over my hardened tips. The strong hands left my breasts, smoothly sliding down my ribs to my thighs. In one fluid motion, Daniel lifted me, placing me on top of his knees. A breath escaped me when his mouth claimed my breast. Involuntarily, my back arched against his arms when his tongue teased the ripened bud. Hot tears gently trailed down my cheeks.

Daniel's hands warmed against my back, pressing me closer to him. His mouth left the tiny tip, trailing hot kisses over my chest and down my stomach. Slowly his hand slid to the back of my neck where he pulled me to him, closing his mouth on mine. Claiming my mouth, the kiss became sensual as his tongue stroked mine. Fire flamed through my veins, but there was a difference. I knew I had to fight the rage, protecting what was mine.

My arms locked around his neck while our lips never left each other. With one hand he held me firmly in place while his other hand slid between my legs. A soft gasp escaped my mouth when I felt the soft feathering of his fingertips touch the outside of the womanhood which grew wet with desire. Tiny tremors pulsated throughout my body.

He pulled back slightly from the kiss. "Control," he whispered.

My mouth met his, this time I took the aggressive kiss, hungering for more. A throaty growl erupted from him when his finger slid inside of me, stroking softly the wetness which he brought me to. Pushing away for a brief moment, I smiled and echoed back his reminder "control". Eagerly I resumed the kiss.

The muscles tightened in his shoulders, tensing against my body. I broke from the kiss in a pant to see his eyes; deep brown. My hands cupped the sides of his face. Daniel was the most adorable man I'd ever known. Never would I want to hurt him. I loved him with my life. Suddenly, it felt like someone jolted me with a live bolt of electricity. Daniel's gritted his teeth, bearing against the pain. He felt it too. A second later it was gone. We stared at one another, realizing in that moment, our hearts had opened and joined to each other.

For the first time, I felt what Daniel was feeling, the absolute love he had for me. His love was truly greater than what I'd imagined. Daniel would die for me if needed. I grabbed his face and pressed my lips to his. The sensual kiss continued, exploring the depth of each other's mouth to the fullest. We truly felt the love and pain of one another. To soothe this pain, we knew exactly what to do.

In careful arms, he laid me gently down on my back. With one hand wrapped around my leg, he pulled it against his hip. His breath panted against my throat, teasing me with kisses and soft nibbles. His tongue teased the sweet spot, licking lightly until I moaned. I felt the pureness of his heart to love and satisfy me, also the strength he used to protect me from the rage which burned inside of him.

His mouth returned to my chest, then took my hardened brown tip into his mouth applying soft pressure with his teeth. My heart pounded with excitement when he placed my hand on the length of his hardness. He moved my hand softly up and down, until I figured out exactly what he wanted. I followed without question. A thrill ran through me when he released a deep throaty groan while he nipped at my chest.

Pure excitement shot through me. I wanted Daniel inside of me, all of him. It was an urge I couldn't deny. He chuckled softly. Slowly he left a trail of hot kisses and nibbles down the length of my stomach. A pant escaped me when his hands parted my thighs to his mouth.

My pulse quickened when Daniel's tongue licked and teased the tiny nub between my legs. I felt the same sharp thrill of excitement run through him when my mouth opened and I released a deep growl. My body flamed with fire, burning the outside of my skin. I drew a quick breath and held it when my body involuntarily gave itself over completely to him. When my legs trembled, Daniel stopped.

He moved his long lean and hard body over mine, positioning himself above me. Leaning down to me, his mouth claimed mine. His warm spicy scent took my breath. I felt a sudden dull pain when he entered me. The terrible pain ripped through his heart and he stopped.

"No... don't stop." I broke the kiss.

"But... I am too... and you are..." He stumbled for the right words.

I lifted my body to his, forcing him deeper. I bore down against the pain, when I felt his flesh fill me. Joy ran through me when I felt his excitement from the feeling of the heat of my body surrounding him; the tightness which enveloped him. Dear Fate, I even felt the excitement when he found the barrier of my virginity intact.

"Daniel... I will always love you," I whispered softly

"And I will always love you... forever."

He consumed my mouth again, slowly working with the space my body had already given him. An intense desire swept over me, I had to have all of him, it didn't take long for me to feel the same thought coming from him. His mouth left mine, and our eyes locked together while he entered me completely. An exhilarating rush ran through both of us. Daniel's body stiffened a moment, allowing the sting from piercing my virginity to flow over him.

He soon moved again, stroking smoothly and softly while my body took every inch of him deeper and deeper. I moaned and whimpered in between panted breaths. He continued in a rhythm of slow strokes while grinding harder against me.

My fingers clutched and pulled against the muscles in his arms while my world faded away. Arching my back, my mouth opened while short high pitched sounds strained from my throat.

Daniel's mouth claimed my neck, the sweet stop in particular. His mouth parted, inhaling a deep breath, I felt his canines bare down against my flesh. A soft growl rumbled from his chest when the venom flowed through his teeth. The rush of fluid immediately ran into my veins. Hot fever flamed over my skin. My alpha male had marked me, claiming me for himself, bonding me to him ... forever. It was the way of the wolf.

"Control," He commanded through gritted teeth.

Intensity filled my body, I couldn't hold back, and neither could Daniel. I gasped. His body trembled. My mouth opened. He gasped, feeling the wave of ecstasy that washed over me.

As if I couldn't take anymore, I felt the same violent wave flow over him, sending us both into a wild world of violent bliss. The hot rush from him filled me inside.

Daniel's sweat covered body weakened on top of mine. Slowly, he withdrew himself and laid on his back, drawing me into his arms. I pressed my head against his massive chest. Tears of joy trailed from my eyes.

With one finger Daniel lifted my chin to his. His eyes questioned my tears, but I knew he felt the joy and love I had for him. Never in my life had I experienced such a union of love. In his arms, I felt love, peace and joy.

"We did it." I smiled.

"Yes we did." He kissed my forehead and pulled me tighter against his chest.

## FOURTEEN

*The* softness of the night had settled inside of me. The annoying noise I heard again broke me from my golden dream. My eyes opened as I realized the phone was ringing on my nightstand. Daniel remained asleep. I squinted against the morning sun while reaching for the phone. Quickly leaning over him, I grabbed the phone. His body became restless beneath mine while his eyes opened and frowned.

"Hello?" I placed the phone to my ear ignoring Daniel when he reached for me.

"Julie, this is Charlotte. Is Casey there?" I heard the worry in her voice.

"No, she's not. Why?"

"She never came home last night. This is not like her. She always calls me. I called her cell phone and she did not answer. I think something is wrong. I am worried sick." The trembling in her voice was more fearful than I'd realized.

"Where did she say she was going last night?" I asked while giving Daniel a firm glare.

"She said she was going to a movie with a friend. I thought you might know the person that she has been going to the movies with. Hold on." She paused. I listened while the phone made a clicking sound when Charlotte answered the call waiting. Waiting for her to return I had to wrestle with Daniel's roaming hands.

"Stop... It's Charlotte." I whispered. Daniel shot me a wicked grin and pulled the sheet up as he leaned down and kissed my thigh. "Stop it!" My protest continued whispering as I pushed his head away from me. A low rumble came from deep within his chest. I raised my eyebrows and glared at him. "Daniel? Did you just growl at me?" I continued in a low voice. He chuckled and continued with his advances. I grabbed the pillow from behind him and shoved it in his face.

"Julie!" Charlotte returned. Her voice was tense and high-pitched. "Get everyone over here right now!" The alarm in her voice sent fear directly into my heart.

“What’s wrong?” My pounded loudly.

“Casey has been... Just come over here!” she streamed out in a broken voice. The phone clicked.

“Daniel, something’s happened with Casey. We have to go to your house right now. Charlotte’s very upset. Casey didn’t come home last night.” The words ran out of my mouth. The adrenaline from the fear made me light headed. I tried to control my breath, breathing in and out slowly.

“What?” he said and sat up in the bed. “That is not like Casey.” His playful expression had changed to one of concern.

We escaped the bed. A quick shower, dressing rapidly, Daniel and I moved in a panic. The thoughts that ran through my mind were pure horror. Remembering the recent events caused by the werewolves sent my blood pulsing through my veins. My chest tightened and my breathing came in gasps.

Tears formed in my eyes from the strain of my lungs losing air. My eyes widened as I grabbed my chest. I inhaled erratically while my lungs burned for air. I couldn’t breathe.

Daniel burst through the bedroom half-dressed, and ran to me with terror in his eyes. “Oh God!” he breathed as he grabbed me.

“I...” Blackness covered my eyes. Daniel’s voice came in and out. I felt his hands on my shoulders shaking me. In between my gasping for air, I heard Daniel yelling for Jason. Suddenly the floor fell away from me. The comprehension of whether I fainted or whether Daniel picked me up was undetermined. I only knew I was lying on my back. I felt a sharp pinch in my arm.

Slowly I felt a coolness running from the pinch through my veins. It ran throughout my body. My lungs relaxed, and my breathing returned to normal. Soon I saw Daniel and Jason standing over me. I was lying on the bed with Heather’s hand gently holding mine.

“What happened?” Seeing the horror in Daniel’s eyes told me something had gone wrong.

“Julie, just lie still for a moment. You had a panic attack. Jason gave you something to calm you down.” Daniel’s voice was controlled, trying to hide the worry in his voice.

The medicine took its full effect. I felt calm, very calm. I rose up on the bed as Daniel and Jason reached toward me. Feeling a little woozy, I still felt I was able to stand on my own.

“I’m all right.” I said waving my hand at the two of them. “We need to go.” I pushed myself up from the bed. Daniel grabbed me under the arm and we all headed toward my car.

Daniel drove like a bat out of hell toward his parents’ house. I sat in the passenger’s seat and fought the medication as the world swirled around me. I was undecided whether it was Daniel’s driving or the medication, which caused the trees to blur when we drove past them. Soon we made it to the house. I couldn’t have been any happier. The blur from the trees nauseated me.

Inside the house, Charlotte and Thomas lingered in the living room. Thomas paced back and forth on the phone. Charlotte sat on the sofa, holding a tissue between her trembling hands. Her red eyes were swollen from crying. From the immediate fear, it was evident something terrible had happened to Casey. I stumbled toward the sofa with Daniel’s assistance.

“What happened?” I asked fighting the ability to keep my speech.

Charlotte looked at me strangely, then at Daniel. Her eyes widened. I thought for a moment it was because of the medication.

“We had to give her a sedative. She had a panic attack before we came over here. What is going on with Casey?” Daniel interrupted trying to distract her from her obvious observation.

“Someone called early this morning while Charlotte was on the phone with Julie. They have Casey. They said if we want her back alive to be at the barn where you and Julie went the other night. They want the whole pack there, as they called it.” Thomas snorted. “Oh, and he said to be sure and bring your friends.”

“Werewolves?” Jason tossed in. Thomas nodded.

“What do they want with Casey? What do they want with us?” Heather sat down on the other side of Charlotte.

“Apparently, they felt we tempted them into a fight.” Thomas poured himself another drink. It looked as though another bottle of Cognac would be gone before the night ended.

“But why Casey? How did they know she had anything to do with the trail? How do they even know who we are?” Daniel paused thinking a moment. “What the hell?” His head jerked toward Jason.

Jason sent Daniel a blank stare. “‘Friends?’” Daniel mumbled as his eyebrows drew into a frown. “He said bring the whole pack and your friends? Has this thing gone rabid or something? What’d he mean ‘friends?’”

Thomas’s eyebrow rose, a look of curiosity crossed his face.

“Looks like there’s something else going on we don’t know about.” Jason responded. He stepped over to Thomas. “I think I’ll have one of those, sir.”

Thomas pulled out another glass and filled it to the top with the Cognac. He then poured another glass and looked over at Daniel. “Give this to your mother.”

“Maybe he meant Jason and Heather?” Charlotte spoke softly.

Daniel shook his head. “No. There’s someone else involved here.”

Thomas stopped, the glass rested on his lip when he looked at Daniel again. “I think you are right. Who was this friend that Casey had been going to the movies with?”

“I think he was someone she met at school.” I forced myself to answer keeping my voice from slurring.

“Do you remember any names?” Daniel looked to me for an answer.

“Um, Nathaniel...MacArthur. I think that is it.” I nodded feeling a little stupid in my condition.

“All right, let us see if we can find this Nathaniel.” Thomas said pulling out his cell phone.

He scanned down the phone and pressed a button. Placing the phone to his head, we all sat in silence while we waited.

“Nick? Hello this is Thomas Maxwell. I need a favor. It is an emergency. I cannot say right now. You are just going to have to trust me. Look, I need a phone number and address of a Nathaniel MacArthur. Yes. He is supposed to be a student at a local college. Yes. No, I cannot say. Excellent, I will owe you a big one for this. I will wait for your call.” He clicked the phone off. “Nick is a good friend of mine. He will find out who this Nathaniel is, and call me back.”

“Why would he want to take my baby?” Charlotte spoke out tears welled in her eyes again.

“I don’t think it has anything to do with Casey, Mom. I think it concerns the whole issue around the werewolves,” Daniel stated while he tried to keep his mother calm. “She’s is going to be all right. I’m pretty sure they will not do anything to her. They know if they did it would be a death sentence.”

Charlotte paused and looked to Thomas then toward Daniel. Something set their attention on Daniel’s words. I knew it wasn’t the conversation. The looks that passed between the two of them were more of shocked and confused.

“Daniel, I am so afraid for her.” Charlotte’s voice trembled.

“Casey’s a tough girl, Mom. I’m sure she is all right,” he assured her.

I knew Daniel’s words were only for his mother’s comfort. Daniel thought they must have harmed Casey in some way. I felt his thoughts.

Everyone in the room jumped when Thomas’s phone rang. He answered it immediately, holding it to his ear. “Wait...Wait” He looked around and motioned for something to write on.

We all scrambled to find what he needed. Heather pulled out a pen and paper from her purse and ran it to him. He nodded a half smile and returned to the phone. Writing on the paper, we all were held in suspense. He closed the phone and looked at the information.

“Okay, his name is Nathaniel MacArthur. He is twenty-four, moved here from Oklahoma two months ago. He signed up with the local college to finish his degree in Physics. He lives in Villianow, which is on Route 136. I think that is, what, forty minutes from here. I have his home address and phone number.”

“Dad, okay let’s be a little reasonable here. I don’t think we should all pack up and head over to this person’s house- just in case he is not involved in this. Heather, why don’t you call him and see what you get from the phone call.” Daniel handed her the cell phone and paper.

She paused for a moment then looked at me. “My accent is pretty heavy. I think Julie should do this. She has a gift that I don’t have.” She handed me the phone. I looked at her in confusion. Buttering up my nerve, I handed her the phone back. I reached into my purse and pulled my cell phone out. I had an idea and hoped it would work.

Punching the number into my phone, I waited for it to ring. Two rings and a voice came on the phone. I winced slightly as I heard the tone of his voice sting my ears.

“Yes, may I speak to Nathaniel please?” I asked in a soft tone.

“Yes, this is he. May I ask who is calling please?” The tone still stung my ear. I twisted my head to the side because of the pain.

“Nathaniel, my name is Julie Knight. I’m Casey Maxwell’s friend.”

“Yes, Julie. Casey has mentioned you. It is a pleasure to speak with you.” His voice was pleasant except for the stinging tone in my ear.

“Nathaniel, could you hold on for one second please, there is something wrong with my phone.” Everyone looked at me in surprise. I clicked the button to lower the volume on my phone and hoped it would take care of that tone I was hearing. “I’m so sorry. The reason why I’m calling is that I know Casey said she was going with you to the movies last night, and I was wondering if she’s still with you. She never came home last night.” There was a dead silence on the phone. I checked the volume quickly to make sure I hadn’t muted my phone. “Hello?”

"Yes, I'm here." His voice was better, the stinging tone was gone. However, the sound of his voice had changed. "I dropped Casey off at her car around ten o'clock last night. She was headed back home. I wondered why she hadn't called. She always calls me when she makes it to the driveway. I was afraid to call the house because I knew she hadn't told her parents about me. I would've called you Julie, if I'd your number. I know you two are close."

Nathaniel had no idea where Casey was located. However, there was something else I wanted to know that no one else needed to hear. I stood with the phone in my hand and walked out onto the patio closing the door behind me.

"Nathaniel, listen to me. Something has happened to Casey. Do you know if anyone might want to harm her or us? Do you know anything concerning Casey?" I persisted.

"No, I don't know anyone who would want to hurt her." He paused and inhaled a breath. "Yes, I know Casey's is a Lycan, just like you and her family. She has told me all about you. I promise you your secret is completely safe with me."

"That's all good, but..." I paused. "Someone has taken Casey. They aren't good people and we are going to rescue her tonight."

"Where?" I swear I heard a growl when it came through the phone. I wondered if...no, I thought...well, maybe.

"It's an old barn, miles behind my property. Past an old meadow behind my house. I don't know any other way to meet you there. Are you sure you don't know anyone that would cause her harm?"

"Julie, I promise you I don't. But I have a good idea that the werewolves are behind all of this." So he is aware of the werewolves, Casey must have filled him in more than I'd realized. "My brothers and I will be there. It appears I have a score to settle with the dogs...no offense."

"None taken. But... I think it might be a little too dangerous for you."

A chuckle came over the phone. "Nonsense. We'll be there. I've been to Casey's house and she has showed me your home. Please understand I care for Casey very much. I love her; I promise you if any harm comes to her I'll kill the beast with my bare hands." He hung up the phone.

My eyebrows rose slightly and looked at my phone. I hit save quickly and stored the number under N. I may need to call him again, I thought. Walking back inside I could tell the tension had grown in the room from my disappearing outside. Daniel glared at me. He knew my thoughts and I wasn't ashamed of them. He knew that I wanted to keep the secret between Nathaniel and Casey from his parents. I was afraid that Daniel already knew that something was different with Nathaniel, and hoped he wouldn't question me on this.

"All right." I began. "I'm positively sure that Nathaniel doesn't have anything to do with Casey's kidnapping. However," Daniel glared at me. His eyes darkened. The lack of trust Daniel had in me was frustrating. I tried desperately to ignore his loud thoughts. "He said that he dropped her off at her car around ten last night. She didn't call him when she made it home. He says he is worried as well."

"Did you pick up anything from him, Julie? His voice?" Heather asked.

"He's an honest person. I believed him, his heart is true." I kept the difference and suspicions to myself.

"*What is he?*" I heard Daniel shout at me through his thoughts.

I glared back at him. "*I don't know!*" I shouted my thought back to him.

"*YOU KNOW SOMETHING! You're keeping from me!*" He shouted his thoughts to me again.

"Stop shouting at me!" I screamed aloud at Daniel.

Everyone's eyes settled on me. They looked toward Daniel when stormed out the back door. I jumped when I heard the door slam. Looking at Heather and Jason I shook my head.

"Julie," Thomas began. "What is going on?"

"It's between Daniel and me. Look." I tried to regain my thoughts. "Nathaniel is all right, he is as concerned for Casey as we all are. He's truly a nice guy from what I gathered on the phone." I walked to the back of the house. "I need to take care of this." I headed outside after Daniel.

Once outside by the garden I saw Daniel pacing back and forth like his father. He was in a rage.

"Daniel."

Quickly he turned to me. His black eyes filled with anger. "What?" He growled.

"Why don't you trust me?" I asked calmly.

"I should ask you the same thing," he hissed between his teeth.

"I do trust you. However, my thoughts concerning what Nathaniel may or may not be are only speculations. I'm not sure."

"Do you feel that since I can hear your thoughts I can't understand you? Is that what you *really* think of me?" He spat out. The words seem to sting. "We're one, Julie. One mind. One heart. One Soul. One thought."

"Daniel, I do trust you. I trust you with my life. You know this!" I spat back at him trying to control the rage welling inside of me.

"Then who are you trying to protect? Casey? Nathaniel? Or Me?" Daniel drew his eyebrows together while his eyes narrowed.

"I'm not sure how to answer your question. I want Casey to be happy. I want you to be happy. Daniel, why are you doing this?" I pleaded with him.

"Because, I want you completely," he roared in my face. He moved to me so fast that I was unable to comprehend his actions. His black eyes filled with fury.

"Save your fury for tonight then. Use it for something good other than scaring the hell out of me!" I hissed at him feeling the same rage coming forth from me. I pivoted on one foot and turned to storm off inside the house.

"NO!" he growled loudly as he grabbed my arm. His fingers dug into my arm with an excessive force that hurt.

I whipped around startled by his attack. My eyes widened while I bore my teeth at him. "Get a grip!" I growled and involuntarily snapped my teeth at his face.

Surprised by my reaction, Daniel released me. He stepped back and allowed a few feet between us. His eyes softened. The colors from black to a soft brown melted before my eyes.

"Julie, I'm so sorry. I frightened you. It's just that I want you to tell me everything. Please. I don't want us to have any secrets." He pleaded.

I felt a cooling rush over me as I calmed down. The medication that I was given must have been burned out of my body when I had my wolf moment.

"Daniel." I walked to him slowly and then slid my arms around his waist. "I love you so much it hurts. My thoughts can sometimes be extreme. An exalted imagination if you will. They're not always something that needs to be discussed. Nathaniel has a sweet heart. I'm just as curious as to what he may be as you are. I don't know. I know he's not human."

"You're thinking he may be a werewolf aren't you?"

"Like I said, I don't know for a fact. I'm not leaning toward that thought. He's not afraid of the werewolves. He may be one of us, a Lycan. " I paused. "Please, don't ponder on this. We'll find out soon enough. Daniel, Nathaniel is not the one we need to be concerned with right now. Whatever he is, he loves Casey. How bad could he be then?" I pleaded with him.

Daniel's face softened when he realized my train of thought. Indeed, he was going to have to learn to understand my way of thinking. A smile crossed his face.

"You're right. I'm going to have to understand your way of thinking. Forgive me?" He grinned.

"Of course I do." I smiled and leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the lips. "Besides, you're already starting to sound like me."

"What?" He gave me a quizzical look.

I smiled. "You've started using your words like I do. Can't, not cannot anymore."

He chuckled softly. "I guess it's that bonding thing."

"Yeah, the bonding thing." I laughed.

We turned back to the house. "You know, you look kind of scary when you get pissed off," he said with a chuckle.

"Well, just keep that in mind next time," I teased. I laughed inside and I knew he could feel the laughter as he laughed aloud. Apparently I wasn't only woman enough, but was also enough of a she-wolf to handle him as well. Yes, I was beginning to believe we were destined for one another.

Returning to the house, Thomas was the only one that was waiting for us. The grim look on his face told us of the worry that went on inside his mind. He looked at us and poured himself another drink.

"Your mother is upstairs lying down. She took a sedative. This is too much for her to handle. Jason and Heather went out on a run together." He sipped his drink and motioned for us to sit down.

The feeling in the pit of my stomach told me that the next conversation was one that I didn't want to be in the room for. I sat closer to Daniel as I watched his father sit down in the chair.

Taking another sip of his drink, he began. "You know Charlotte and I have been together for thirty years. That is around two years before you were born." He motioned toward Daniel with his drink. "I believe if I remember correctly, I dated her a year before we were married. She is as beautiful today as she was when I first laid eyes on her. Our parents brought us up in a strict environment." He paused gathering his thoughts.

“Not one time did Charlotte and I break any of those laws. We met with the Lycan counsel before our marriage. The head of the counsel performed the rite. I must admit, it was the most terrifying and painful experience I have ever had to endure.” He took another sip and turned his eyes to us. “We knew what would happen to us if we crossed those lines before the rite had been performed.”

My heart thrummed loudly. I felt Daniel’s pulse racing when he reached for my hand and held it tight.

“It is not a normal occurrence that two Lycans can break one of the laws and actually live through it without the rite.” He looked from Daniel to me. “I think you know what I am talking about.”

“Dad, I love Julie.”

Thomas frowned slightly and shook his head. “Son, I loved your mother. Did you not think we would not notice the difference in you both when you walked into the room? You both smell the same. I guess what I am trying to ask you is, how did you do it?”

My mouth opened wide in shock. Daniel squeezed my hand to let me know it was not the kind of question his father was asking.

“I’m not sure. Julie and I were in a lot of pain from our accident the other morning. I understand we both knew how the attraction could turn into a rage. This was different. There was so much pain in our hearts; we were ready to sacrifice ourselves for our love. I would’ve truly died for her last night if that was what it took to take the pain away from her.” Daniel said straight forward watching Thomas as he carefully listened.

“Amazing. Truly amazing.” His face did not show disapproval but surprise. “Fate must have shined on the both of you last night. I am truly amazed. What you both endured last night was The Rite. The Rite to be joined together as one. The Rite is a self-sacrificing union. You are tested beyond your imagination. I cannot believe this.” He shook his head again. “There is definitely a purpose for the both of you. One which fate has already given to you. I expect to see something wonderful come from the union of the both of you. I truly do. There is something powerful that is going to happen because of the love you both carry inside.”

I sat in awe, breathless as I listened to his words. Daniel and I managed to complete The Rite on our own last night without the Lycan Counsel. According to Thomas, we have a fate. Satisfied I squeezed his hand and laid my head against his arm.

“Well, I must tell you what I told Jason and Heather earlier while you two were having your spat. Daniel, your mother is in no condition for this little escapade tonight. I am not sure she could change if she wanted to, and I am not going to take a chance on that. I cannot leave her alone. Son, please forgive me. I love my wife as much as I love you and Casey. My child is out there. Please bring her home to me safely. It will just be the four of you going tonight. Charlotte and I will stay at Julie’s house and wait for all of you to return. At least we will be a little closer. I will be listening carefully.” Concern filled his voice.

“Dad, I think we can manage. Just take care of Mom. I believe that Julie can handle this. She’s a lot tougher than I imagined.” He said thinking back to a few moments ago when I snapped at him. “Jason and Heather, well they’re not to be underestimated. I have never seen anything move as fast as she can. She locks onto a target and does not back down. It’s incredible.” I was impressed when Daniel bragged on his friends.

Thomas crooked his head to the side. “Do you realize, Son, that for the first time in your life you are using contractions?” Daniel smiled, and squeezed my hand. “I so wished I could have been there the other night,” Thomas continued, smiling as well. “I would have loved to see that tiny little woman take you down.” He chuckled.

“Hey, I heard that!” Heather said as she and Jason returned.

“She’s one of a kind.” Jason said kissing her on the cheek.

The next few minutes Jason explained they found a few scents of the werewolves. It appeared they were running a total of six now in their pack. Heather noted there was another scent around the house. A scent she had never come across before. She was not sure what it was. It was neither a werewolf nor a Lycan. She explained the scent had a certain smell like a lily or carnation. She said it reminded her of the flowers in a funeral home. The scents of the werewolves were a strong foul odor. It was the stench of rotten flesh. The scent I remembered all too well. In comparing the new found scent to that of a Lycan, each of our scents are different, but they are all pretty much the same. The scents ranged from a light spiciness to sometimes a fresh spice. Still there is that hint of spice in our scent that sets us apart.

Daniel looked at me as I was thinking I would keep the scent of the lily and carnations in my mind. He knew that the scent was probably Nathaniel. He had been to this house with Casey. Daniel’s eyebrows rose as his attention turned to me.

*“There is something different about him.”* Daniel thought. I nodded and left it alone.

Jason discussed tactics and our plans. Since we were going to be outnumbered we were going to have to be fast as we worked together. Jason suggested the best offense would be the best defense. Just as Heather baited Daniel last night, that is how I should move. Work on killing the creatures one at a time. Confuse them. Go for the hindquarters. In order to slow them down, we would have to injure as many as we could.

Daniel and I listened carefully as Jason explained that the werewolves were not as slow as what we thought. They were very fast. The only clear shot we have will be for the throat. Our teeth were sharp enough to tear out their throats and snap their hind legs in two. If we had to, we could take them apart limb by limb until we brought the whole pack down. The strongest points of the werewolves were their enormous mouths and teeth. He explained if by chance they were able to grab our throats, it would be the end. We would have to avoid the attacks to our necks at all costs. If we were bitten or scratched, we would heal almost immediately.

One of their plans, Jason suggested, would be to gather us inside the barn. This would be our biggest weakness. We can’t fight as we needed to in a closed in area. It was too dangerous. We needed to draw them into an open area where we had room to move.

My suggestion was to lure them into the meadow. They agreed with me. The question remained as to how we were going to do this. The werewolves have Casey, what we want. We didn’t have anything to offer them as bait. There had to be some way we could lure them.

The thought of a piece of my flesh being ripped from my body made me uneasy. Daniel squeezed my hand and gave me a soft look. I would be brave tonight. I could handle this. A proud smile crossed his lips. Daniel and I would fight as one tonight. It wouldn’t be as hard as I thought.

Jason suggested that he and Heather would go ahead, take a few gallons of gasoline, and hide them in the woods not far from the barn. Once we have killed all of the werewolves, we were going to have to burn the bodies. He suggested covering the trail we used with a light dusting of a chemical that would hide our scent. In case the police came by the burning barn and decided to use the dogs, it wouldn’t trace the scent back to my house. I totally agreed with that plan. I was tired of seeing the local authorities around my house.

Daniel suggested that if we could lure them to the meadow, we needed to collect enough wood and have a place ready to burn the bodies. If our plan worked. He suggested this was on my property and the police will not think anything of it if we have a bonfire. Jason threw in the option of bringing a cooler of beer for the party. We all laughed over his suggestion, and then agreed it would probably work. Just in case.

With our plan somewhat together, I let Jason and Heather take my car and run to the local convenience store to buy the beer and gasoline. They dropped Daniel and me off at my house so we could prepare the wood for the bonfire.

Daniel and I headed around the back of the house and through the woods. I tried to maintain my thoughts and it was hard. Daniel was concerned for me. His thoughts ran back to Casey and Nathaniel. Then he focused on Nathaniel, wondering what he was.

“Julie?” He began. I knew what he was going to ask me before it came out of his mouth.

“Daniel, I don’t know what Nathaniel is.” I said flatly.

“Do me a favor?” I heard him stop behind me.

“What?” I turned around to face him.

“Don’t you ever do that again?” He frowned. “It’s rude.”

I raised my eyebrows as in questioning “What?”

“Answering my question before I ask it. I do not like that.”

“I’m sorry.” I realized that it was a bit rude of me. “You’re right.”

“I was just wondering, if Nathaniel is not a werewolf or Lycan what could he be? You knew he had been to the house, and apparently the new scent Heather came across was his. So apparently he’s not human.”

“So, have you ever come across anything that smelled like that before?”

“No.”

“Well, I guess we’re going to have to wait until tonight to see what he is.”

“Tonight?” Daniel’s voice ran a pitch higher.

“Yes. He and his brothers are coming over.”

“Oh great! That is all we need. We can’t afford to baby sit whatever these things are.”

“Things?” I stopped and turned around to look at him. “Daniel! Nathaniel is not a thing. You don’t know what he is. Why can’t you just let this go?”

“Why would Casey involve herself with someone out of her line?” The words shot home.

“Does love have to be so stringent?” I kept walking.

“It does for us. She knows better than this.” He shot to me. The words stung.

“Like my father?” I retorted. Apparently he forgot I was the product of a non-Lycan love. He remained silent.

We walked down through the meadow to the other side, looking for any dead trees and tree limbs we could find. I heard a crunching noise and I saw Daniel carrying a dead tree to the pile. My eyebrows rose. Looking around I saw a smaller dead tree. It had fallen over on another tree. Walking toward it, I grabbed it with both hands. Apparently, I had put more force on it than needed, the tree snapped from the ground like a toothpick. It should’ve been heavier, but it was very light weight. I pulled it away and walked toward the pile Daniel had started. He looked surprised as I tossed the tree on the pile. I smiled and went back to my search.

Within a few minutes, Daniel and I managed to compile enough dead wood for a huge bonfire. Jason and Heather returned with the gasoline and then headed off down the trail. Daniel and I worked the flammable fluid in the center of the pile and around the edges. Our job was complete. We headed back to the house. Daniel stopped in front of me.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Take a deep breath,” he commanded.

I inhaled deeply. I smelled his warm spicy scent, the trees, the grass, and a light fragrance. “What is that? A light fragrance.”

“It’s your scent. The one I took from you last night. You carry my scent now.” He sounded so sad.

“Daniel?” I walked toward him. “This is the spot we were given by fate. The spot that I swore my love and my life to you.” I said and then lovingly wrapped my arms around his waist.

“I know, but ... I kind of miss that scent.”

“You know, I just had an idea. Now that I have your scent I think that is part of the reason we don’t have that animal instinct anymore.”

“I think you’re right,” he agreed casually.

“So, does that mean you aren’t attracted to me like that anymore?” I teased.

Daniel looked at his watch. “I’ll answer that question when we make it to the house,” he purred.

“I like the way you think,” I purred back.

Daniel and I raced back to the house. Silly as it was, we wanted to test our theory. We were after all scientists and this would be another one of our science experiments.

Daniel took my hand and pulled me into the bedroom. Grabbing me in his arms, he gently kissed me. His lips ran across mine, teasing me. My heart raced and my blood boiled. Slowly he ran his lips from mine down my neck to the sweet spot. Running his tongue over it lightly, teasing me until a moan escaped my mouth. I didn't have the same urges as before. A sense of desire welled within me, but not the flaming fire down my skin. His hands ran up my back to the base of my skull pulling my head to his. His kiss was deep and passionate. I felt the moan rumble in his chest. Again, the excitement ran shivers through my body. My hands traveled across his body and underneath his shirt. My fingernails gently glided across his chest. His hands moved to the sides of my face holding me away from him. Looking deep into his eyes, they were a soft brown again. I smiled.

“Okay?” he asked

“Okay.” I replied.

I leaned forward, pressing myself into a kiss. Moving from his mouth, I found the sweet spot on his neck. Tasting it again, I realized my theory was right. I didn't have the desire to tear into him as I did before. Instead, all I wanted to do was soothe him and satisfy his needs. Caress him and love him. Yes, whatever happened last night we left in the meadow. I tested one more time, as I gently pressed my lips to the soft spot. To my surprise, he moaned again. The vibrations excited me. I liked this feeling. I backed away from him and looked into his eyes. They were still a soft brown.

“Okay?” I asked breathless.

“Okay. I think we are all right. Your theory was right. It was the combination of our scents together that was driving us mad,” he said smiling.

“Mating scent. That is what Charlotte called it.” I smiled. “But, I um, still have a little issue right now.”

His eyebrow rose slightly over his left eye. He knew exactly what I meant. “*Let me see what I can do about that.*” He purred in my ear softly.

Apparently, we were both right. We were fine. We were rid of our curse and could love each other, as we needed to. The desire for love was as strong as the fire’s desire was. I thought it funny as the old saying goes, you play with fire you get burned. This was a true statement for us. Our love was strong enough to quench the dangerous rage that burned within us. We could enjoy each other the way love was meant to be.

## FIFTEEN

*Darkness* battled within the light in the sky as I sat on the patio in my robe watching the sunset with Daniel. We held hand in silence while we gazed into the brilliant colors of the sky. The red embers glowed as they warmed the sky like a painting. I felt the coolness of the night when the darkness took over the day. The time had come.

The sliding glass door opened as Jason and Heather walked out to join us. I could tell by the strong spicy scent that they had an evening like Daniel and me. Jason to my surprise walked out in an Irish kilt. Daniel’s face brightened while he fought back a laugh.

“Jason? I’m so afraid to ask you this question. But why are you wearing a kilt?” Daniel held onto the laugh.

“Well, I come from a long line of Irishmen. I’d say it’s a wee bit of a family tradition. We McLaughlin Clan have always gone into a battle wearing a kilt,” he announced proudly donned in his Irish accent.

“Jason, please tell me I’m not going to have to watch you sacrifice a poor animal and drink its blood before the battle tonight.” Daniel barked out a laugh.

Jason steadied himself squarely on his feet and adjusted his kilt. Looking at Daniel, he smiled. “No, but ‘ya might see me dance ‘round the fire naked tonight.” Jason winked.

The roar of laughter continued. Yes, tonight would be interesting to say the least.

I looked up in the sky and saw the full moon. I knew this night was going to be the beginning of something. Of what, I didn't know? My only hope would be that I carried the same sword with me as the night before. Daniel squeezed my hand when he stood and helped me to my feet. We all headed off the patio and through the back yard to the wooded area. Walking silently through the woods I tried to keep my focus. Ignoring Daniel’s thoughts I had to keep mine contained. I didn't want to have a panic attack worrying about Casey again. I managed to push all the horrific thoughts far away from my mind.

Reaching the edge of the meadow Jason and Heather stopped suddenly, and then turned toward Daniel and me. Heather’s face was different. There was something disturbing her. The frown on her face was evident as she sniffed the air, indicating something was wrong. I sniffed the air. A hint of fear shot through me. The scent was strong. It tickled my nose when I inhaled. I turned toward Daniel. He knew exactly what thought. Lilly and carnations like Heather said. Nathaniel.

We moved slowly, Jason and Daniel guarded Heather and me. Neither of us knew what to expect. I listened intently when we entered into the meadow. There in the distance I saw four figures walking through the woods to the center of the meadow. Daniel’s body stiffened in front of mine. I wanted to have a better look, so I moved over slightly to look around him. He pushed me back again with his arm. Frustration consumed me. The quick glimpse I had wasn’t enough to satisfy me. I touched his back slightly; he then released his arm to let me pass. His body remained tense when his hand drew to my arm ready to shove me behind him again.

The four strangers walked into the meadow under the full moonlight. It was amazing how the light of the moon appeared to radiate from their skin. It was as though they were almost glowing in the dark. My eyes widened when I watched their slow and cautious approach.

“Julie?” A voice called out. I recognized it immediately. The same tones I heard over the phone which stung in my ears were like a high-pitched musical note mixed within his voice. The background tones wouldn't normally affect humans in the same way it affected Lycans, however, with his voice raised the effect on us was like a silent whistle to a dog, painful.

“Yes?” I called back while Daniel’s hand tensed around my arm, squeezing it too tightly. He, of course forgot his own strength. “*Stop*” I whispered to Daniel. I turned back toward all of them and watched as they immediately stopped. Amazing, did they hear that whisper?

“Nathaniel?” I asked.

“Yes. May we come closer? It’ll be easier to talk.” He asked. I noticed Daniel, Jason and Heather had a hard time with his voice as well. It was clearly annoying when he yelled. It appeared that we could only take his voice in a low tone. What kind of person was this Nathaniel, I wondered.

“Yes. I was actually talking to Daniel when I told him to stop.” I took the chance they did hear my whisper.

“Oh. We thought you meant for us to stop because we surprised you.” He said as they started walking toward us again.

Daniel drove me crazy with the thoughts which ran through his head. His overly protective nature annoyed me. He had a problem with Nathaniel. A low growl rumbled from him as they neared. The floral smell, which exuded from their bodies, was fairly interesting. Daniel’s senses ran wild. He had an uneasy feeling concerning them. I imagined if he were a wolf right now, the hair on the back of his neck would be standing up.

“I’m Nathaniel.” The youngest of the four stepped forward and held out his hand. He was tall with blond hair and what appeared to be brown eyes. His attraction surprised me. He was absolutely the most beautiful man I had ever seen. His beauty was unreal.

Daniel released another low warning growl. This time it was meant for me. I pushed him aside and stepped forward to greet Nathaniel. Daniel moved out with me not trusting this strange smelling person.

“Nathaniel, it’s nice finally to meet you.” I extended my hand to touch his. Nathaniel’s hand touched mine lightly. Surprised I jumped slightly, realizing almost too late, that I would have to catch Daniel. He felt the fear rush from me as I watched him lunge forward. I turned quickly, his body slammed hard against mine. “*Get a grip!*” I shot the thought in my mind to him. Daniel relaxed enough as not to be to intimidating.

“I can understand the uneasiness.” Nathaniel began. “I’m sorry I surprised you.”

“No, I just hadn’t expected your hand to be so cold.” I replied hoping that I hadn’t offended him.

He laughed softly. The tones rang lightly in my ears. “I suppose I should have warned you of my hands ahead of time.” Looking back to the others, he stepped aside so I could have a clear view of them.

“This is my brother Richard.” He continued.

Richard was different from Nathaniel. The family resemblance was clear, but at the same time Richard’s beauty captivated me. The same pale skin, only Richard’s dark brown colored hair set them apart. His dark blue sweater couldn’t hide the well-built and formed body. Toned and tightly muscled, a truly exquisite specimen of the image of man. No, more like a Greek god. There were no other words I could use which would describe the beauty that my eyes beheld. Richard in his early thirties, I guessed, was the most breath taking man I’d ever seen.

“My closest friends, I call my brothers, Lance and Raphael Dupree. I guess you could say we are blood related.” Nathaniel continued motioning to the other two men.

Lance and Raphael were definitely brothers. They both had the same dark sandy brown hair and shaped face. They appeared to be in their late twenties, not too much older than Nathaniel. Lance was a little more on the stockier side than Raphael. Raphael was taller and lean. One thing other than their pales skins, they were all very beautiful.

“This is Daniel, Casey’s brother.” I motioned with my hand. “And this is Heather and Jason McLaughlin.”

“Irish?” Nathaniel nodded toward Jason. I was guessing it was the war kilt that gave Jason away.

“Borne and bred.” Jason retorted.

Nathaniel chuckled a little. “I suppose we should answer the obvious question first.” He said with his attention now on Daniel and me.

From the corner of my eye, Daniel’s body stiffened. He glared at Richard. Daniel’s thoughts ran wild with jealousy, primarily because Richard’s attention was focused on me. Daniel carefully watched him and noticed his never left me from the time I stepped in front to shake hands with Nathaniel. Richard’s interest was very clear to everyone around. I tried to ignore his jealous thoughts and concentrated on Nathaniel.

“We are not human as you probably guessed.” Nathaniel continued.

“I figured as much. I know you’re not one of us, a Lycan.” I spoke softly.

“You would be correct. We are not werewolves either. We are actually vampires.” He said as a matter of fact.

Jason and Heather tensed and released a loud gasp. Daniel drew in a breath and bent forward shoving me behind him with his arm. The other three behind Nathaniel bent forward in a crouching position. They were prepared for an attack.

“Oh stop it every one of you!” I was simply sick of this. I pushed Daniel’s arm out of my way. “We’re not going to harm you Nathaniel, nor your brothers. I speak for each of us when I say we are a little startled. I’ve never met a vampire and frankly didn’t even know they existed. They were only legends and stories.”

“Touché,” Nathaniel chimed. “We were not aware that such a thing as a Lycan existed until I met Casey. Imagine my surprise.” He chuckled. “There are two things I can tell you that we have both in common. Firstly, vampires and werewolves are mortal enemies. Secondly, I love Casey as much if not more than you do.”

“How can you love my sister? You don’t even have a heart!” Daniel hissed.

My heart dropped into my chest by his reaction. I noticed Daniel could feel the sadness that gripped my heart by his outburst. I painfully noticed when Nathaniel dropped his head as if Daniel’s words cut through him.

“That is not entirely true,” he sighed. “I do have a heart. It may not beat as yours does, but I assure you I have all the strong emotions just as you when it comes to love.” The sadness in his voice pulled at my heart.

Appalled at Daniel’s outburst I wanted to confront him, but I understood this was a shock to him. His sister was with a vampire. It was a shock to me as well.

“Nathaniel, I’m not holding what you are against you. You have to understand, what little we know of vampires comes from the stories that they feed off of humans.” I spoke up quickly.

“We don’t hunt humans. My brothers and I try to live peaceably among humans. There are other ways we obtain what we need. Just as you eat animals to survive, we do also. There are a few other vampires out there that are like us. We didn’t choose this life but have learned to live with it.” His eyes traveled to all of us. “I hope you can understand we’re not your enemies.”

“I agree with Julie.” Heather shot in. “Nathaniel does have a pure soul. He’s telling the truth.”

“All right then. I trust my wife and what she sees. Nathaniel, you and your brothers are welcome to join us tonight. It appears we’ll need your help. So how much experience do you have in killing werewolves?”

“I would say around a few hundred or so years worth.” Raphael, the tall, well-built sandy brown-haired vampire spoke out.

“Well, I guess that settles it then.” I hoped Daniel would leave his thoughts of Richard alone for a while.

“Okay, here’s our plan.” Jason began. “We can’t fight in close quarters. We have to be in the open. Our plan was to somehow to lure the werewolves here.”

“Wait a minute.” Daniel spoke up. “Bring your friends?” He turned to me.

Thinking back, I remembered what he mentioned. “We have a problem then.” I started. Everyone shot me a strange look, like I’d lost my mind or something. “Casey’s Mom received a phone call. Telling us to bring the pack, meet them at the barn and bring your friends. We didn’t know what they meant at the time. I’m guessing they meant you. This is someone who is planning on all of us showing up there.” I rambled on.

“No one knows who we are. The only person who does is Casey.” Nathaniel’s expression turned to concern.

“Nathaniel, someone knows you are linked to Casey. That someone is a werewolf. Think. Why would someone go after all of us?” I tried to find a reason while my mind ran through several scenarios.

“It’s late. Since they are expecting us to show up, I wouldn’t want to disappoint the creatures. We will go and lure them here to the meadow.” Richard spoke up. His deep sexy voice tingled in my ears.

“What about Casey?” Jason tossed in.

“She’s how we will lure them here. We’re much faster than werewolves. Nathaniel will go in first and take her away from them. He can carry her back here luring them directly to you. Then once in the meadow we can all take them down.” Richard’s plan sounded precise and clear.

“Sounds good to me.” Jason agreed.

“Okay, Casey’s parents will be in my house. Take her directly there. They will be expecting her. You’re going to be a surprise for them, so please don’t be offended.” I pleaded to Nathaniel. “Follow the path back to the house. The patio door is open. If she is hurt her Dad will call Dr. Miller.”

“We’ll try and keep them from following you to the house.” Jason nodded to Heather.

“I guess that leaves you and me to confront the head on attack then?” Daniel looked to me.

“Don’t worry; we’ll do our share of the fighting. Hopefully we can take out a couple of them before they end up here.” Richard spoke directly to me.

“Well, let’s get to it.” I felt we needed to start somewhere.

“See you in a few minutes.” Nathaniel turned and they all disappeared through the woods.

I turned toward Daniel, taking note of his concerned expression.

“I don’t like that Richard.” He huffed.

“Because he has a thing for me?” I teased.

“I better be the only one that has a *thing* for you!” He growled. “Besides can a vampire actually have an erect...”

“Daniel!” I shot at him in surprise.



“Well, I was just wondering.” He shot back.  
“Rumor has it, they are huge.” She laughed and darted off changing into her wolf image.

Jason roared loudly with laughter as he followed her changing into his wolf image. There was no way I could contain my laugh when I looked into Daniel’s astonished face. I unzipped his robe and slid it off his shoulders. The shock remained on his face. Smiling I slipped out of my robe.

I turned my head slightly to the side. “Darling, you have nothing to worry about.” I purred and then burst forth into my wolf image. I padded down the field with Daniel not far behind me. We moved into the woods where we had previously searched for the firewood. I sat down on my haunches and waited for Daniel to come to my side. We waited. My ears flicked a couple of times when I heard Jason and Heather on the opposite side of us across the meadow. A couple of short barks let us know they were in place and ready.

Daniel’s body stiffened. His breathing stopped while his ears perked forward intently listening to the vampires. He snorted. The vampires had made a confrontation with the werewolves. I listened carefully. Daniel’s hearing was far better than mine. I raised my head and sniffed the air. I couldn’t smell the werewolves. The only scent I could pick up was the one of the vampires. He snorted again. A low growl rumbled in his throat as he dropped his head. A warning someone was coming and fast. I raised my head again and sniffed the air. Vampire.

Standing to my feet, I peered through the woods. A flash of something glowed against the moonlight moved quickly into the meadow. It was Nathaniel and he was headed toward the house with Casey in his arms. Daniel’s head lowered while he let out another low growl. Turning my head, I saw Jason and Heather move out blocking the path behind Nathaniel when he flew past them. Daniel jerked his head up and nudged me with his shoulder. I could smell it. The werewolves were on their way. Three of them fast approaching.

Daniel and I moved cautiously. They would aim for Jason and Heather. The sickening stench grew heavier as the three werewolves came fast through the woods to the open meadow. The horrible creature was exactly as I remembered in my dream. The hair bristled on my neck when they slowed down. Apparently, they caught our scent. One of them turned toward where Daniel and I stood. The other one quickly approached Jason and Heather. The third creature lingered in the center as if expecting an attack.

Daniel and I bolted from the woods with lightning speed. I heard his thoughts clearly while fixed my eyes on my prey’s ankle. Daniel made a pass by the huge horrid creature and snapped off its right hand. Before the creature had time to react, I’d already taken off its left foot. The taste in my mouth was utterly the worse taste I’d ever experienced. They taste as bad as they smell. Quickly turning we flanked the single creature.

This one was not as surprised by us. Cautiously Daniel and I moved around, circling it. I kept a close eye on the damaged one. It managed to balance itself on the remaining limbs. A loud roar came from the damaged one, it wasn’t exactly happy we dismembered it. Watching the one in front of us, I lowered my head, giving Daniel the signal of my attempt to attack. My prey’s attention locked on me when I bolted into a charge. I flew into the air. Before I had a chance to make contact with my prey, a hard thump hit my ribs and I fell to the ground. The air had been knocked out of my lungs. I yelped in pain when I felt the sharp claws of the damaged one rip into my side. Turning my head to the side, I snapped ferociously at this creature. He was on top of me, his mouth snapping its huge teeth backed by the powerful jaws toward my neck. I knew I had to get to Daniel; he had already made another pass at the one creature, distracting its attention away from me. He wasn’t thinking clearly, as his concern was on me. My hind feet pushed the damaged creature off me. I stood quickly. My sides stung and burned from the torn flesh. The smell of my own blood filled my nostrils as it poured freely from the open wound.

In the distance, other werewolf roared while either Jason or Heather yelped in pain. The battle had to be going better for them than it was for us.

Keeping my eyes fixed on the damaged creature we both limped in a circle facing off one another. Both damaged. At least I still had all of my members. I planned to take another part of him off before he had the chance to kill me. Daniel yelped in pain from behind me. He growled angrily while I heard his teeth snapping. I couldn’t help from turning my head. Daniel was on his back and blood poured from an opened wound in his shoulder. My heart raced. He needed my help. My mistake, I took my eyes off my prey. I moved too slowly, I felt the pain of teeth in my shoulder. I yelped out in pain.

A flash of white flew by my face and then I felt the flesh tear from my shoulder. The weight of the creature was gone. I was determined to move. I needed to get to Daniel. I turned quickly to see Richard locked into a battle with my attacker. My attention turned back to Daniel. Ignoring the pain in my sides, I launched forward with all the strength I had left. I landed onto the back of the wiry haired werewolf that had Daniel pinned down. Locking my teeth into the fleshly part of its neck, I closed my teeth down. The soft flesh felt much like I was biting into a too ripe peach. I wished it tasted the same. I jerked my head back while its head rose in the air. The ripping noise was evident when I pulled part of the creature’s neck from its body. Daniel reached under the neck and clasped his teeth around the tendons. The bones crunched loudly between Daniel’s strong jaws. The stinky creature fell sideways. I sniffed the creature to make sure it was dead. It was definitely dead.

Glancing around, I saw Heather and Jason finish off their kill. Richard had torn the head from my attacker. Pretty handy and useful, these vampires. I limped over to Daniel. He appeared to be all right except for the nasty gash in his shoulder. My body stiffened and I growled when I saw two more figures coming through the woods.

“Don’t worry, it’s Raphael and Lance. They are bringing the bodies back here.” Richard announced. I watched while the vampires dragged three bodies to the wood pile.

Daniel burst forth in his human form. He went forward onto the ground. The wound on his back had already begun to heal. Jason and Heather changed and brought our robes down to us. I exhaled slowly and closed my eyes. My body lunged forward and I fell to the ground. I heard someone behind me gasp. For a moment I couldn’t move.

A cold hand clasped onto my shoulder. Daniel’s head rose quickly. I saw the excitement on his face when he jumped to his feet. “Get away from her!” He roared. I couldn’t understand what was wrong. Daniel rushed to me. Heather and Jason suddenly moved between Richard and Daniel. Standing, I turned to look at Richard. His eyes were wide and his teeth glared in the moon light. His brother ran to him and pulled him back.

Richard glared down upon me. His expression changed when his eyes roved over my naked body. Heather moved to my side and quickly robed me. Now I understood what Daniel meant. Richard had saved my life. I owed him that much.

“I’m sorry.” He said quickly. “Please... please forgive me. I have never smelled blood like yours. It took me by surprise. I honestly didn’t intend to harm you.” He pleaded.

“Just keep your distance from her.” Daniel roared loudly. I touched Daniel on the arm to let him know there was no need for his rush of anger.

“It’s all right. I can understand. There is no harm done.” I tried to sound grateful without any fear. “Thank you for saving my life.” As soon as I said the words, I felt the dread in Daniel’s heart. He wasn’t happy this vampire saved my life. He was absolutely repulsed by it.

“Your wounds? They are very bad.” Richard pointed a pale finger toward me.

“They are fine. Most of them have already healed. Lycans heal quickly.” I forced out a reassuring smile.

I turned around to find the werewolf that Daniel and I killed. It was the blond boy I saw in the grocery store.

Looking past Richard, Lance and Raphael had piled the three bodies on top of the wood. Daniel and I walked over to them. These were the other three I’d seen in the grocery store parking lot. I moved toward the one Richard had killed. My breath caught in my throat as I stared in disbelief.

Daniel walked past me and stood. He looked at me in the same disbelief. Lying at our feet was a person that we both knew well. I couldn’t believe that my assailant was none other than Dr. Frank Miller. The longtime friend and partner with my father.

“Dr. Miller?” I looked at Daniel.

He shook his head. “He was a Lycan. I don’t understand.” Daniel turned toward Richard. “Any ideas as to why this all came about?”

Richard shook his head. “Not sure. When we reached the barn, Casey was restrained. They were all waiting for you guys to show up. I think we gave them a surprise they hadn’t banked on. We took out three of them while they were changing. During the confusion of our attack, Nathaniel grabbed Casey and headed this way. The other three changed quickly and shot out after Nathaniel. I don’t know any of these men.” Richard motioned toward the bodies with his head.

“Casey?” Daniel turned toward the house.

“You go ahead. We’ll take care of the bodies.” Jason looked to Daniel.

Daniel and I moved fast back toward the house. Even though our injuries healed quickly, the pain lingered in my sides when we moved. We ran through the back yard and onto the patio. It was so much easier running as a Lycan.

Daniel and I approached the living room, we found Casey lying on the sofa. Thomas stood over her while Nathaniel knelt on the floor holding her hand and rubbing her head. I looked around for Charlotte. She was nowhere to be found. Daniel quickly ran to his sister.

“I had to take Charlotte home and sedate her. She is sleeping quietly.” Thomas stated toward me. I nodded my head and understood why when I looked at Casey.

Bruised and battered from an apparent beating, Casey looked horrible. She burned with fever. Fear ran through Daniel when he turned toward Thomas. He quickly looked over Casey’s bloody body. When he picked up her arm, I felt the fury in his heart. His hand went to her neck and gently pushed her head to the side. His eyes widened.

“She has been bitten by a werewolf.” He announced.

My heart drummed loudly. Nathaniel released a loud gasp. Thomas nervously paced the floor.

“I have tried to call Frank and cannot get him on the cell phone.” Thomas spoke in a weak voice.

“Don’t bother Dad, he was one of them.” Daniel replied sourly.

“What?” Thomas breathed in disbelief.

“What do we do now?” The tone in Nathaniel’s voice clearly showed his fear.



Daniel remained quiet a moment as he began thinking. "I need Jason." He said.

"I'll go get him." I turned and moved toward the door.

"I'll go. I can get there faster than you." Nathaniel shot past me.

Touching Daniel on the shoulder, I looked glanced down at Casey. She was badly beaten. Her face and body was covered with bruises. She came in and out consciousness due to the pain and high fever. The apparent agony she endured troubled to all of us. Within a couple of minutes Nathaniel returned and sat Jason down on his feet.

Jason moved quickly toward Casey. Examining her carefully he noticed the bite as well. "She needs an anti-virus." He turned to Daniel.

"We've never tried this on a Lycan before. It's only for human use. The DNA is different." Daniel responded tensely.

"Daniel, the only other option is to make a serum for her and I don't think we have time. She has been bitten today. We have only three days before it is too late. If we decide to do this we need to draw blood and process it." Jason returned.

"It's a better option than gambling." Daniel reminded his friend.

"Okay, we need equipment. Our computer systems are in Scotland. It would take at least one day to get the blood there, one day to process it and one day to make the serum. Not to mention another day to get it here. Where does that leave us now?"

"Wait a minute." I began. "Daniel, you said that the Lycan saliva contains an antidote for humans. What about our own kind? Listen; in our Lycan form when we are bitten by a werewolf it does not affect us right? Our bodies burn the venom out of our system. If we are in our human form and are bitten, well it takes over our human side. Right?"

Daniel and Jason looked at one another for a long moment. Jason looked at me then back to Daniel again.

"I think I see where you are going with this." Jason began. "One of us could turn into a Lycan and bite Casey and inject the anti-venom into her blood." He considered the option and he looked to Daniel. "Daniel, I think it might be the best chance we have."

"What if it does not work?" Nathaniel shot in. "Then what happens?"

"Casey turns into a werewolf in three days." Daniel replied flatly when he noticed the increasing agony on Thomas's face.

"Look, we can do this." Jason began. "Draw the blood before the bite, then draw a second batch afterwards. Send it to the clinic in Scotland. They process it and call us with the result of their findings. We will have at least one day to make any decisions or prepare for the worst." Jason said now standing up looking at Daniel.

"Wait!" I jumped in. "My father has a clinic in Chattanooga. It's about a forty-minute drive. There's a lab in the back of the clinic. It's where he and Dr. Miller worked on several different occasions. He took me there one weekend while I was working on my research paper in college. "

"All right then, do you have your medical kit?" Daniel asked Jason.

Jason nodded. "In the car. I wanted to be prepared either way." He quickly left to retrieve the bag.

Daniel looked at me. "Julie, I know your father's computer system is linked to the one in Scotland. Do you know how to access it from the clinic?"

"I'm not sure. We'll find out." I replied softly.

Jason returned with a black medical bag. Sitting it down on the coffee table, he opened it. Pulling out the necessary equipment, he prepared for the extraction of Casey's blood. Wrapping the rubber band around her arm tightly he waited a moment. It was as though everyone thought the same thing when they turned and looked at Nathaniel.

"Um, is this going to bother you?" Jason asked as he held the syringe in his hand preparing to draw the vial of blood.

"I will be fine." Nathaniel returned as his body stiffened.

Jason injected the needle in Casey's arm and drew the blood into the vial. Daniel made the label for the vial. Jason handed the vial to Daniel. Holding a cotton type tissue to her arm, he applied pressure. Daniel capped the vial and placed the label over it.

"Okay, Daniel it's your turn. Your DNA matches Casey's; you should have a better chance at this than I would." Jason removed the blood spotted cotton from her arm.

"All right, we're going to need a little more room. Someone is going to have to hold her while I do this." Daniel explained.

"I will do it." Nathaniel walked toward Casey.

Jason and I moved the coffee table out of the way while Daniel prepared for the change. In an instant, he changed into his wolf form. Nathaniel gently picked up Casey in his arms.

Nathaniel and Daniel centered themselves in the large living room. Daniel walked slowly toward Nathaniel and tilted up his large wolf head.

"Nathaniel." I spoke quickly, hearing Daniel's thoughts. "He doesn't have a good angle for the bite. It has to be precious where the werewolf bit her." I walked over to them. Gently I pressed her head against Nathaniel's neck leaving the exposed bitten area accessible. Nathaniel tilted his head to the side to allow a clearer contact of the exposed skin.

"Perfect." I stepped away from them.

Daniel moved closer and bore his sharp canine teeth. Nathaniel winced when Daniel's massive head neared Casey. I watched Nathaniel carefully, noticing the battle inside of him. Daniel's teeth bore down on his sister.

Nearly trembling myself, I felt what Daniel did when the venom from his teeth flowed into her flesh. My eyes darted back to Nathaniel. His lips pulled back exposing his vampire fangs. I knew the scent of her blood drove him mad. Nathaniel did well to control himself, I was very proud of him.

Daniel backed away from Casey. Jason grabbed my arm and we retrieved the sofa back to the center of the room. Daniel burst forth in his human form again and robed himself quickly. With a mixture of concern and agony, Nathaniel gently set Casey down on the sofa.

Walking toward Nathaniel while he backed away, allowing Jason to finish his work. I touched him lightly on the shoulder, his eyes lifted to mine.

"*You did a wonderful and brave thing Nathaniel,*" I whispered.

"*I do love her,*" he whispered back. "*More than life itself. If that means anything to a vampire.*" His voice broke in the whisper. The tone in his voice reflected a moment of pain from Daniel's previous comment about how could a vampire love.

"*Love is a powerful thing. It holds no boundaries, not even for a vampire.*" I assured him in a soft whisper.

A gentle smile crossed his beautifully pale face. He knew I understood. In that moment, a softer side came to the surface. I understood why Casey had fallen for him.

Ironically, there was an odd sense of how much they were alike. Ironical, Who would have ever guessed; a Lycan and a vampire? However, as different as they were physically, the personalities were the same.

"We need to get her to the bathroom and cool her body down with ice. She is burning with fever." Jason stated.

"Upstairs." I motioned while Nathaniel moved quickly to pick up Casey again.

We all stood and watched while he gingerly and tenderly picked her up in his arms. He turned toward me while I headed up the stairs. We entered the guest room which was the closest to my bedroom. Nathaniel laid her body across the bed. Giving him a gentle smile, I touched his arm.

"She's going to be all right." I tried to assure him. "I need to clean her wounds. They're not healing properly."

"Julie!" Jason yelled. "We need ice!"

"Ice maker in the freezer!" I shouted back.

"Not enough!" Daniel yelled.

Nathaniel stood, immediately he pulled his shirt off over his head. My eyes widened when I got a good glimpse of his pale body. No wonder Casey was crazy about this guy.

"My body is cold enough to chill her body." He stood before me completely undressed.

Climbing into the bed, he pulled her body to his. Wrapping his arms around her, he laid motionless.

"Never mind the ice!" I yelled back to Jason. "Problem solved!"

I ran into my bathroom, grabbed the towels and wash cloths. Passing by an antique pitcher and washing bowl, I stopped. I grabbed the pitcher and bowl. Running back to my bathroom I rinsed the pitcher and bowl out and then filled the pitcher with water. I returned to the bedroom to find Nathaniel still holding Casey close to his body. Setting the bowl on the nightstand, I filled it full of the warm water and saturated the washcloth.

Gently I wiped the blood away from her face. The darkened bruises, didn't tell complete story of how badly she had been beaten. Rinsing the washcloth, I wiped away the blood from her neck and shoulders around the bite wound. A type of liquid oozed from the bite mark. Leaning forward I sniffed the yellowish goo.

"Ugh." I jerked my head back and place my hand to my nose.

"What?" Nathaniel's tone had become tense again.

"It's the werewolf venom. Apparently, the idea is working. It's weeping from the bite wound." I rinsed the cloth in the water again. Glancing over to Nathaniel, he remained motionless as a statue.

Cleaning her body to the best of my abilities, I removed her clothes. Nathaniel and I managed to slip her into one of my nightshirts. I pulled the sheet over both of them.

Glancing toward him again, Casey was safe in the arms of her vampire lover.

"Nathaniel, can you tell when her body temperature becomes normal?" I asked softly. He nodded. "Get some rest for yourself."

His eyes never left Casey. "We don't sleep. You can turn the light off if you wish. I'll stay with her. If there's any change during the night I'll let you know."

“All right.” I considered the new fact, vampires don’t sleep, how interesting.

I walked back down the stairs and noticed Jason prepared the two blood vials for transport. Exhaustion took its toll on me. My stomach tied into a knot from the lack of food not to mention the remembrance of the foul werewolf flesh. Trembling I sat down on the sofa.

Thomas left, returning home to check on Charlotte. Daniel was in the kitchen. The sliding glass door opened, Heather and the vampires entered the house. Each of them appeared to have a shocked look on their faces when they saw me for the first time in the light. An uneasy feeling swept over me when I saw the surprise in Richard’s eyes. I tried to force out a smile but my stomach suddenly became unsettled.

“Are you all right?” Richard asked.

“Just exhausted.” I replied.

“You probably need to eat something. It will help.” His was voice soft and charming. The deeper tone was sexy and very appealing.

“Of course.” I pushed myself from the sofa.

The room went black and without notice, the floor move from underneath my feet. In an instant, I felt cold arms around my body as I was eased back on the sofa. Gently Richard released me and then dashed to the opposite side by the fireplace.

“I’m sorry,” I placed my hand to my head.

“I’ll get you something,” Heather ran toward the kitchen.

Daniel returned with Heather, carrying a tall glass of the vanilla smoothie. His eyes narrowed when he noticed Richard. Daniel seated himself beside me while he placed the glass in my hands. I took a drink. Yes, just as I remember. I turned up the glass and drank the entire contents. Wiping my mouth with my hand, I handed the empty glass to Daniel.

“Another,” I said.

Richard appeared to be amused by the way I devoured the milky liquid. Already I felt the effects on my body.

“Amazing,” Richard breathed out. “What were you drinking?”

“Oh, it’s something that Daniel and Jason came up with. It tastes like a vanilla milkshake,” I spoke nonchalantly.

“I can actually see the difference. You were a little green there for a moment. Now I see the color has returned to your beautiful face.” His voice carried a seductive tone. His eyes darted to Daniel when he entered the room to bring me another glass.

Keeping my focus on the glass, I ignored Richard’s comment. I tried to contain my thoughts to prevent any further conflict between the two of them. Richard’s interest in me was obvious. It was also obvious to Richard that I was Daniel’s mate. After seeing how Richard handled the werewolves tonight, I really didn’t want to think of what would happen if he and Daniel went into a battle.

Half way through the second glass, I felt much better. The nausea dissipated. Jason returned to the room. The Irish whiskey must have put him in high spirits. The smell of it lingered along the room.

“Well, I believe we’re gonna take a shower and get a wee bit o’shut eye. Daniel?” Jason looked toward Daniel.

“Yes, it’s very late. Where is Nathaniel?” Daniel looked around the room.

“He is upstairs with Casey. Apparently, his body is cold enough to bring down her fever.” I spoke softly hoping Daniel wouldn’t be upset.

“Really?” Jason inquired.

“Yes, our bodies as you have determined are cold to humans and,” Richard paused looking at Jason, “Lycans. It is probably the best for her. Nathaniel can determine when her fever goes down and remove himself from her.”

“He might fall asleep and forget,” Daniel shot out.

“We don’t sleep,” Richard replied. Something about his voice bothered me. Apparently Heather noticed it too when shot a strange glance toward me. “She’ll be completely safe with him.” He looked around to his brothers. “We should go.”

“Richard.” I stood.

His lifted, watching with curiosity as I walked toward him. His body stiffened at my approach as if I had frightened him. I extended my hand to him. “I want to thank you again for saving my life.”

Richard paused a moment looking at my hand, unsure whether to touch it or not. Slowly his pale hand went to mine. There was a slight electrical current that shocked my hand when I felt the cold hand grasp mine. My eyes widened in surprise. His lips curled into a wicked grin. Taking my hand to his mouth, I heard the gasps behind me.

He gently pressed his cold hard lips on my hand, “The pleasure was truly all mine.” Turning he left in a flash out through the patio door, his brothers in tow.

Turning around, I found Daniel glaring at me again, Heather’s mouth had dropped open, and Jason’s eyebrow was raised.

“What?” I breathed out.

“Clearly, you don’t know when a man’s flirting with you,” Heather admonished.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, he’s not a man,” I huffed as if I hadn’t noticed anything.

“The hell he’s not!” Daniel snorted.

I shook my head and walked toward Daniel. It was late, I wanted to take a shower and go to bed. My hand brushed over his face while I walked by him. Sending him a quick thought, he jumped up from the sofa and followed me up the stairs.

“We’ll see you in the morning,” Daniel trailed behind me.

The evening ended with victory. The pack of werewolves that terrorized our area had been defeated with the help of our new friends. I shook my head in disbelief of the strange events that had surrounded my life the past few weeks.

The house remained quiet again. Heather and Jason retired to bed. Daniel was already asleep when I walked into the bedroom. I decided to check on Casey before going to bed. Quietly, I walked into the bedroom. Nathaniel was dressed and sitting on the bed beside her. Intently, he watched her every movement.

“*How is she doing?*” I whispered.

“Her body is fighting the werewolf venom. It’s still coming out of her body. The smell is not as strong as before. Her fever is down for the moment.” He spoke softly as his eyes never left her. I knew he truly loved Casey.

“I’ll see you in the morning then. Good night, Nathaniel.”

My heart was touched by the amount of love he showed for Casey. Walking back to my bedroom I eased into the bed. I laid my head on the pillow and pulled the sheets over me. Focusing my eyes, I felt Daniel stirring next to me. His arm went around me while his body crept closer to mine. Soon he was asleep again. I closed my eyes and let my mind clear while I drifted off to sleep.

## SIXTEEN

*The* day started in a rush. Daniel woke me early for our drive to my father’s clinic in Chattanooga. I checked in on Nathaniel and Casey before we left.

Sometime during the night, Nathaniel had Jason to give Casey something for the pain. After the medication took effect, she slept soundly and her fever appeared to be under control.

Daniel was a little more pleasant to Nathaniel this morning. Maybe it was the fact he saw him in a different light. Daniel realized how much alike he and Nathaniel behaved when it came to the women they loved. I believe this is what softened Daniel’s heart toward Nathaniel. Daniel saw him as a man in love, and not a vampire.

The drive to the clinic was tedious. Daniel’s thoughts contemplated calculations and theories based on his previous research. I tried to block his thoughts from my mind, and keep my thoughts on something other than the vampires.

My fascination with the vampires was difficult for me to hide. The pale-skinned extraordinarily beautiful men had a certain air about them. I wasn’t sure if it was the overconfidence of who they were, or a certain sex appeal they possessed that bothered me.

“Thinking about the vampires again?” Daniel tossed up. My thoughts continued further than I expected.

“Yes.” I figured I would be honest. “Don’t tell me you’re not the least bit curious about them.”

“Professionally speaking, yes, I am interested in them.” Daniel’s voice was calm.

I looked at him for a long moment. “You want to know how it’s medically possible for them to exist.”

“Let’s be honest here. You can’t tell me that you’re not thinking the same thing,” he said glancing over at me.

“I find them fascinating.” Turning my head, I looked out of the window as he drove.

“Maybe a little too fascinating,” he shot at me.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I turned quickly to look at him. Daniel’s tone came across with a hint of jealousy.

“All I’m saying is I think you might be just a little more interested in them than say the average person.”

“The average person doesn’t even know they exist. Try again.” I could tell where he was going with this conversation.

“Just don’t let your fascination control you. Richard seems to be highly fascinated with you. I didn’t like his little gesture last night. If he was such an honorable vampire, he wouldn’t have flirted with you like he did.”

“Daniel, I don’t think he knew we were together.”

“Oh, I think he did.” Without warning, he turned off the road and headed over to a small shopping mall.

“Where are you going?” I asked holding onto the inside of the car as he wheeled it into the shopping center. I tried to read his thoughts but he had somehow put the thought from his mind.

Pulling the car in front of a jewelry store, I got the idea. I looked at him and shook my head.

“You know you could just piss on me and that would probably do the trick,” I said shaking my head.

“Well now, see that is where you are wrong. It would only work if he were a Lycan.” His voice purred with a wicked grin on his face. Jumping out the car, he ran around and opened the door for me.

I stepped out and he grabbed me by the arm as we walked into the small jewelry store. The sales clerk, a lady who appeared in her mid-forties looked up as we walked toward the diamond rings. She was dressed in what appeared to be a nice expensive dark blue dress suit. The dark blue appeared to accent her tanned skin, making her blond colored hair stand out.

“How may I help you today?” She approached the counter in front of Daniel and me.

“I’m looking for an absolutely beautiful engagement ring,” Daniel said pondering over the rings in the display.

“What price range do you have in mind?” she asked him.

“I don’t,” he said squarely.

“Well,” she paused unsure how to take him. “We do have a lovely selection of rings that start around five thousand.” Daniel raised his head and narrowed his eyes.

“Do you have anything else?” he asked as a warm smile crossed his face.

“I see. We do have another selection for around one thousand.” She returned his smile.

Daniel glanced toward me. I tried hard to fight the smile that formed on my face. The sales person had no idea what Daniel’s intentions were. She apparently underestimated his idea of a price range.

“Julie could you wait in the car for a moment?” he said pulling out his cell phone.

He gave me a wink before I turned and walked out of the store to the car. Outside I leaned against the car and waited for him to return. Inside the store, I could see him leaning over the counter. The sales clerk left momentarily returning with a large black box. Daniel appeared to be looking closely at the items she showed him. It was hard to see exactly what he was doing because his back faced me.

A moment or two later he pulled out his wallet. He waited at the counter watching the sales clerk. She returned to him with a huge smile and handed him the receipt and a small box. He turned and walked with long strides out of the store.

I was still leaning against the car when he walked up to me and got down on one knee. He opened the box and held it up to me.

“Julie Ann Knight will you marry me?” he asked with a seriousness that I had never seen before.

Unfolding my arms, I looked at the ring. It was astonishing, appearing to be a ten-carat diamond in a beautiful princess cut setting. He took the ring from the box.

“Yes,” I breathed, then giggled.

Surprised by my giggle, he smiled and slipped the diamond on the ring finger of my left hand. I looked it over on my hand. The ring was truly beautiful. Glancing at him, he could tell I was pleased. I threw my arms around his neck and squeezed him tightly.

“I love you, you silly man.”

“Well, I figured I needed to do something to put these hound dogs at bay,” he said chuckling. “You can’t trust anyone these days.”

“Well, this should do it,” I laughed. “We have got to get to the clinic.” He nodded and opened the door for me.

Within a few minutes, we had arrived at the clinic. Arrangements needed to be made for the equipment and office supplies, not to mention the building itself. Not exactly something I wanted to deal with at the current time. The edges of my heart still remained tender from the loss of my father.

Grabbing the key, I unlocked the front door. Daniel held tightly to the box with the two vials of blood. Walking through the office, we headed quickly down the hall to the back. I unlocked the second door. My hand wandered on the wall until I found the light switch. Clicking it on, the room lit up. Daniel walked in behind me and closed the door.

The room was large with three sets of computers and various kinds of medical equipment for testing. I knew Daniel felt right at home. He was already familiar with most of the equipment. He immediately turned on the equipment he needed. I went to the computer systems and turned on each one.

“Can you find the link to DalMar?” he asked while setting up for the blood samples.

“Give me a moment.” I sat down at one of the computers and searched the programs. Nothing. Rolling the chair to the next computer, I typed in a new search. “Got it.”

“Great.” He ran over to the computer. I moved aside while he typed in the security codes. The screen flashed twice and DALMAR INDUSTRIES SCOTLAND appeared.

A voice came over the computer. “Hello, Dr. Maxwell. How may I assist you today?” A computer generated female voice asked.

“Hello, CARA. I will need to access the GNI file number FC103-1,” Daniel said while he prepared the test samples of the first vial.

“GNI File number FC103-1 open. Preparing to run computations,” the voice said.

“CARA. Computer automated research assistant?” I asked staring at the screen.

“Yes. Lovely, isn’t she? CARA and I go back a long way,” he teased.

“Lovely,” I agreed flatly.

Daniel moved toward another machine and placed the test strips inside. Pushing a few buttons, the machine started. Daniel ran back and set up the second run of test samples.

“CARA access code L.Y.C.A.N. file marked Knight.” Daniel spoke while he continued working quickly.

“File Dr. Martin Knight project Lycan accessed. Would you like me to access the blood sample data banks?” she asked.

“Yes. Samples are already being processed.” He paused for a moment. “Julie, how much do you know about DNA modification?”

“Very limited. Just the basics I suppose,” I said intrigued by the computer screen.

“Overriding the central computer systems. I have access,” CARA stated.

“CARA, I need a full diagnosis of the blood sample. Compare lysogenic bacterial level to that of the GNI prophage cystinuria levels. Full screen grid.” Daniel had already prepared the second set of samples.

“All right, you know there are four bases coding genetic information in the polynucleotide chain of DNA. Adenine, cytosine, guanine and thymine.” He kept working as he talked.

The computer screen flashed and there was a black screen with what appeared to be a DNA strand rotating. The blue and green DNA and RNA rotated and light yellow dots formed around the DNA side of the strand.

“Locating lysogenic bacterial levels. Comparing GNI prophage cystinuria levels. Computation complete, Dr. Maxwell,” the computerized voice stated as another screen popped up on the side.

“CARA, I am loading the second set of samples,” Daniel said while he loaded them into the system.

Amazed at how fast the computer had compiled all the data, I sat motionless. Daniel moved beside me and glanced at the screen reading the results. His eyebrows rose while he carefully examined the data.

“Cytosine?” I asked looking at Daniel. “Cytosine is the chemical base that is pyrimidine coding genetic information in DNA and RNA.” My attention turned back to the computer screen when it showed the percent totals of the levels.

“You would be correct. CARA, I need a full diagnosis of the lysogen levels.” Turning toward me, he continued, “Since Lycans are basically the product of a gene which is

carried from birth, Jason and I have isolated the gene. We located a bacterial strain. This strain contains a hyper mutable phenotype which is unable to replace uracil with thymine in its DNA."

"Okay, wait." I thought aloud. "If the uracil appears in the DNA by mistake then the result would be that the strain begins to undergo a much higher rate of mutation than the other bacterial strains. The Lycan gene is a provirus? But what about the purines?"

"Yes. Purines appear in the DNA, which is carrying the hereditary codes. We discovered that in our Lycan DNA, it is considered a virus similar to lysogenic bacteria. The lysogen is a bacterial cell whose chromosome contains the integrated viral DNA. The Lycan gene. The bacterium contains in its genome the DNA of the Lycan virus which is lying dormant, passively letting itself be replicated by the bacterium, then when the bacteria replicates its own genome it is then unable to reactivate and destroy the bacteria at the time of the virus's choosing." Daniel's attention was back to the computer.

My mind was trying to comprehend the logistics. Frowning slightly for a moment I glanced back to the screen.

"So what you are saying is this bacterium is a virus which has the capability of inserting its DNA into the genome of the host bacterium for long term dormancy, so that the bacterium replicates the viral DNA along with its own and passes it to its offspring?" I added.

"Yes. It then chooses when it wants to reactivate and finish its lytic cycle. Basically, at a certain age or when there is a certain type of mental stress or stimulation. Like an awakening. The individual can then turn into a Lycan." He glanced at me then back to the screen.

My mind drifted back to that first night I turned into a wolf. I remembered the adrenaline rushing through me. I remembered the familiar feeling of the fire blazing over my skin as I changed. Even to the beginning when Daniel had my blood boiling with his tender yet seductive taunting.

"So you seduced me into a Lycan?" I breathed.

"Well, um..." He paused. "I didn't think it would hurt if I tried a different approach." He looked up from his work with a sly grin on his face.

I wondered if this was what I was going to have to look forward to with him the rest of my life. I smiled to myself, realizing this was another one of the many things that attracted me to him. It was just his way.

"If Lycans are hereditary, then where would that leave the werewolves? I mean, you said if a person is bitten by a werewolf they can turn into a werewolf." I asked changing the subject.

"Yes. We discovered the werewolf venom acts as a type of lysogenic virus once it enters into the human host. In theory, we believe this is the reason for the mutations." He paused staring at the screen. "All right. The mutation began here." His finger pointed to the yellow dots along the DNA strand. "CARA, are the new samples ready?"

"Compiling data," the voice replied.

I thought for a moment. Lysogenic, this was a bacterial virus. Mostly hereditary.

"You are looking for a suppressed bacterium on a cellular level? Hereditary?" I asked looking at the screen.

"Yes. The lycan gene is a provirus. Keep up, Julie. The effects of the werewolf venom are similar to bacteria. Remember, I said that if the host carried the gene they would turn, if not they would die?" He rambled on.

"Yes." My mind was still lingering on the concept of a provirus.

"All right, the werewolf bacterium thinks that the lycan gene is a related host. See the cystinuria levels are sky high here. Meaning there is a cellular mutation." Daniel pointed to the screen.

"Computation complete." The computer screen flashed again now showing another set of the DNA strand.

"CARA, search and automate lysogenic gene 112 and isolate cystinuria levels."

"Lysogenic gene 112 found. Gliotoxin levels high."

"There!" he said excited by his findings. "It worked. Unbelievable. The Lycan venom contains high levels of gliotoxins. You were right. The gliotoxin is the substance that acts mainly against certain viruses by preventing the replication of a virus. When we introduced the Lycan venom into Casey, it worked on the cellular level to protect the cells from the werewolf venom. The Lycan venom is our antidote." He looked at me with his eyes wide. "Casey is going to be fine!"

Sitting in the chair my mind whirled. I could see the excitement on Daniel's face. I had a sense of awe from seeing my idea actually come to life in scientific terms. It was only a guess. My heart leaped inside my body. It hit me that Casey was going to be all right. I was so excited I jumped out of the chair and threw my arms around Daniel.

"I think you are going to make a good assistant," Daniel teased.

"Okay, but I wouldn't want to interfere with your plans with CARA," I smiled.

Daniel looked around the room again and I could see the expression change in his eyes. "What are you going to do with this clinic?"

Pausing for a moment, I knew what he was thinking. A few modifications and Daniel could open up a new office here. It would be a perfect location with the benefit of saving us both a lot of money.

"It's yours." I reached into my pocket and handed him the keys. "Consider it an early wedding present." I smiled.

"You read my mind. *Literally*," he purred as he leaned down and kissed me.

"I'll bring Jason over and we can start a few layouts. Let me clean up here, and we will be ready to go."

Another question brewed inside my head. "Daniel? I remember you saying that a human couldn't carry a Lycan child. They both would die."

"Dr. Miller and Martin came up with a sort of vaccine to give your mother. It allowed her to carry you throughout the pregnancy. When you were born, her body shut down completely. It was a risk they were willing to take," he said softly.

Remaining quiet for a moment, the words flowed to my heart. Why were they so desperate to have a child if it meant the chance of losing my mother? I knew the question in my mind would probably never have an answer. Only my father and mother knew the true answer behind all of this.

Daniel cleaned up while I shut the computers down. I decided to organize the files my father had lying around on the desk. One folder caught my attention. There was a disk inside marked "Miller Project" with several documents. One in particular was a contract with the United States Department of Defense. Glancing over the contract, my mouth opened.

"Daniel?" I spoke softly.

"What's wrong?" Alarmed by my voice his head snapped toward my direction.

"I think I've found something that you need to see." I held the file in the air. "Dr. Miller had prepared a type of experimental serum that he was planning on selling to the Department of Defense."

"What?" He walked toward me and took the folder from my hands. Carefully glancing over it himself, his eyes widened. "I can't believe this," he said looking over the entirety of the documents attached. "He was using the werewolf venom. I recognize the codes." He shook his head.

"Why was he going to sell werewolf venom to the government?" I asked.

"Because of the power of its regeneration. Apparently, he has found a way to combine the Lycan and the werewolf venom into a type of vaccine." He paused again. "I remember something a few months ago. He called the clinic in Scotland. Miller wanted us to cross-reference the vaccine with the project your father developed. We tested Miller's vaccine and sent him a letter stating the vaccine was highly volatile. He wanted us to modify the vaccine for military use. To be used in the field during war."

"So basically," I began, "he was going to sell the government the venom to repair the soldiers who had been mortally wounded?" He nodded.

"Yes, he said that because of the war, he would have enough soldiers to experiment with. Your father was against this. I remember Martin said he would have no part of this and wanted Miller to drop it. DalMar pulled out a month ago."

"Right before my father's death," I added. "Daniel?" I looked at him.

His eyes met mine. We both knew that it was a possibility. Dr. Frank Miller had a motive for killing my father. He was the only one that stood in his way. With Martin gone, the project could continue. A question remained unanswered.

"He must have tried the vaccine on himself," I reasoned. Daniel nodded.

"Makes sense. If he couldn't get our backing, then he had no test subjects to prove his theories."

"But, why come after all of us then?" I asked.

Daniel thought a moment and shook his head. "I'm not sure. Possibly because we were a threat to his success. With Jason and me out of the way, no one would argue against his insane ideas to the government."

"But the vampires?" I added.

"No idea. They did not know him. It may have something to do with Casey and Nathaniel," he said taking the folder. "We need to get back to the house. When Casey does come out of this, we need to ask her a few questions. I am taking this file with me."

Leaving the clinic, we headed back to the house. Daniel was in his own thoughts again as was I. My thoughts were on how my father's friend betrayed him. A werewolf attacked and killed him. Dr. Miller was a werewolf. The picture became all too clear. The question remained in my mind concerning how did he know of the vampires. We didn't

even know vampires existed until last night. It was a surprise to us all. There was a reason, a plan he had for trying to kill them. What did they know?

“You know you are going to blow a fuse?”

“Sorry, I guess I got carried away.” I smiled.

“I understand,” he said when we passed the exit sign for Fort Mountain. “You know,” he continued. “I’m beginning to think those old myths of Fort Mountain are true.”

“Which ones?” I knew he was thinking about the many stories told of the nearby mountain.

“Well, you remember our fathers telling us of the local stories of how the wall was built?”

The story was one I knew well. I remembered our fathers telling us the logical version of how the great wall was built by the Welsh to protect them from the onslaught of Indians who were following them up the Alabama River. The ancient wall protects the highest point of the mountain, extending 885 feet, seven feet high at its tallest point and up to twelve feet wide.

“The Welsh?” I added.

Daniel shook his head. “No. Dad had told us another story. I’m guessing the reason you did not hear about it was that you were unaware of the Lycans. The Indians who lived here described a people who came to visit. They were fair-skinned with blond hair and blue eyes. They called them ‘moon-eyed people’, because they could see better at night than by day.”

“Vampires,” I stated, listening closer to the tale as I watched Daniel nod his head.

“The Indians didn’t know these were vampires. It must have been the ones Nathaniel spoke of, the good guys. The vampires explained to the Indians of the creatures that followed them. The vampires were not running from the Indians. It was a great evil. The wall was hand built by the vampires. They worked at night building the wall. During the day, the Indians performed religious ceremonies over the wall. By placing a certain spiritual power in the wall, it became impossible for any evil to cross it. It was a warning to all who were werewolves. Since people didn’t believe vampires or werewolves existed, they came up with their own theories.”

“Dad,” he continued as I listened, “said before the Indians left, they chose a group of people who arrived later to become the guardians of the wall. The guardians protected the humans and the wall against the werewolves. The Lycans were then created. A specific line of Lycans would stay guarding the wall throughout their lives and bloodline.” He paused for a moment and looked at me. “Julie, our forefathers were the original bloodline. We are the last of that sacred bloodline.”

“You knew the vampires existed?” I turned to him. He nodded slowly.

“It was unclear at the time. Legends and old stories become fabricated over time. We had never seen a vampire. It was just now that I put the pieces of the puzzle together. Now I realize we have an obligation to fulfill. I was thinking. How does an October wedding sound?”

“October? We’re already in August.” I glanced back to the road again.

“Julie, I want us to be married as soon as possible.” His voice sounded a little tense. The look on his face warmed my heart and I couldn’t say no. If there was anything that I could do to make him happy I would.

“All right, October then.” I watched as his face brightened with a huge smile. He reached over and took my hand placing it up to his mouth he kissed it.

“October.” He repeated.



Jason was walking down the stairs when Daniel and I returned to the house. Charlotte and Thomas were already there. Charlotte appeared to be better than she was last night.

“How is Casey doing?” Daniel asked Jason.

“Great. She is still in a little pain. I just gave her something else for it. Other than that, she is doing great. It appears that her fever has subsided. Thank goodness we had Nathaniel here. Did you... whoa. Would you look at that?” Jason paused and reached over and lifted up my hand to examine my new engagement ring. He smiled and nodded his approval. “Where was I? Oh, yes, it was a good thing that Nathaniel was here.” He glanced over to Thomas. Thomas looked back at Jason without speaking. “Did you find anything?” He turned his attention returned to Daniel.

“She is going to be fine. It turns out the Lycan bacterium works as an antivirus against the werewolf venom in our human state. I had CARA save the information. I will take you over there and show it to you. It is truly amazing how it works,” Daniel said walking toward Charlotte.

“Oh, I am so relieved,” she cried out. I walked over Charlotte to give her a hug and show her and Heather my ring.

“There is one more thing.” Daniel turned his attention toward Thomas. “Julie found a file in Martin’s office. Apparently our friend Dr. Miller intended to sell a serum he labeled as a vaccine to the Department of Defense.”

“He was going ahead with his plan then?” Thomas said with a shocked look.

“Yes. I’m guessing since DalMar wouldn’t back him, he decided to try the vaccine on himself, turning himself into a werewolf,” Daniel added.

“I’ll wager this was the reason why he wanted us to modify the serum,” Jason added.

“I also believe that once Martin had figured out what Miller was going to do, he probably shut the project down. Here is the evidence.” Daniel handed the file to Thomas.

“You think Dr. Miller killed Martin then?” Thomas said looking through the file.

“Yes. Without a doubt.” Daniel’s voice was firm.

“Then why would he drag all of us in to this?” Thomas sat down with the file in his hand.

“My suspicions would be to clear all of the evidence. He would consider me a threat because of what he knew I would inherit from my father’s death. There was a threat that with my father gone, Daniel and Jason and I would begin to put the pieces together,” I chimed in.

“Well, that still leaves the question of Nathaniel and Casey.” Jason sat down beside Thomas and looked over the file.

“I think I might be able to shed a little light on the subject,” Nathaniel said as he began walking down the stairs. “I apologize for eave’s dropping. You mentioned the name Dr. Frank Miller.”

“Yes, do you know him?” Daniel asked.

“I recognized the name. It didn’t make sense to me until I heard your story. My brothers and I moved here from Oklahoma. It was a few weeks ago, before we moved. We had gone hunting...” Nathaniel paused for a moment as all of us eagerly awaited for a new light to shine forth.

“I was in the woods and had tracked a deer. After my kill, I heard what sounded like a couple of wolves having a disagreement. Every now and then, you would hear packs disagree in a fight or two. As I was finishing, I heard a yelp. This was not a normal wolf yelp. Curiosity set in. I left the deer and proceeded in the direction of the noise. Once I arrived, I found something of a surprise. It was a werewolf holding a naked man. He had just killed him. At first, I thought it was going to eat him, but it didn’t. It dropped the lifeless body on the ground and turned in my direction. Staring at me for a moment, I knew it probably couldn’t determine what I was. Then I heard more coming. I guessed it was more werewolves, so I left.

“When I met Casey for our first date, I took her to a nice restaurant for dinner. A man walked over to the table and spoke to her. She introduced him to me as Dr. Frank Miller. I remember the way he looked at me as if he knew me. Most humans do not react that way to our kind. Their first impression is usually one of curiosity as to what we are. His was different.

“My answer to your question is since I was connected to Casey, he probably figured if we all came together, the puzzle would be solved. To draw me out, he used Casey.” Nathaniel stood motionless as we all were in awe as the picture unfolded in front of our eyes.

My heart welled tightly inside my body. I wanted to be by myself for a moment. Walking past Nathaniel, I went out to the patio and closed the door behind me. Leaning on the railing, I looked out beyond the trees. Tears formed in my eyes. I understood what Daniel meant when he said that we are spiritual creatures. Dr. Miller made his choice by greed, turning himself into a werewolf. “*No better than a werewolf,*” I remember Daniel saying. Hot tears fell down my face. I couldn’t let the feeling of revenge come over me. Nevertheless, I was glad justice prevailed.

The door opened behind me and I inhaled deeply. The warm spicy sent told me it was Daniel. He was concerned.

“Are you all right?” Standing beside me, he leaned against the railing. His face showed the concern he felt in his heart.

“Yes,” I said. Turning to him, I looked into his eyes. “Daniel, do you think it’s a bad thing that I’m glad Dr. Miller got what he deserved?”

Daniel frowned for a moment and looked down at his hands. Letting out a sigh he reached for my hands. “It’s no more than what I would do. Remember I told you there were laws that we can never break.”

I nodded. “Killing out of revenge,” I said.

“Yes. It would make us no better than a werewolf. We have to avoid things like hate and revenge. They bring us to the dark side of our nature. He knew the rules, and decided to play against them. Fate dealt her hand.” Remembering the night Daniel and I were together. I trembled.

"What about us then? Did we not challenge fate that night?" I turned to face him. "What kind of future does fate hold for us now?" My eyes searched his for some manner of hope. Had fate planned our future? It was a question which rang out loudly in my mind.

"A beautiful one. Remember what my father said, fate shined on us that night. We survived because of our love. A type of love you would die for." His hands went around my waist and pulled me close to him. He held me in his arms. "If there is one thing that I do know, there is a purpose for us and it is a beautiful one."

My head rested against Daniel's chest as my arms wrapped tightly around him. To stay like this forever was a fate I could accept. His hand brushed my hair back from the side of my face as he kissed me gently on the top of my head.

"Don't worry. Everything will be as it should." His voice was soft and full of assurance.

"My father was a good man. He never did any wrong to anyone." Tears formed in my eyes again. "Look what fate served him. He lost my mother in childbirth. Now a close friend took his life. How is that fair?" I pulled back and stared at him.

Taking a moment to consider my questions, I watched as a slight frown formed on his face. He turned his head slightly to the side and stared deep into the forest.

"Julie, there are a lot of things in this world we live in which are not fair. Fate is not fair." His eyes softened as they returned to me. "We live for a purpose. Sometimes our fate has already been decided for us. We have to believe everything happens for a reason even though we don't know what that reason is. We have a duty. If we are to die in the line of duty, then we have served our purpose.

"Your mother's purpose was giving birth to you. Fate brought us together. We are together for a purpose, Julie. Never forget this." His voice was soft, as his soft brown eyes looked deep into mine.

How could I argue with something that brings so much pain and yet so much pleasure in one moment? Looking into Daniel's eyes told me that through the burning pain I had endured, something beautiful came forth from the ashes. It was a love that could conquer all. The type of love that endures until the end of time. Still in my heart, there were the uncertainties of this life we have.

*"Have faith my love,"* he whispered when his lips touched mine.

A smile crossed my lips. Yes, I could only hope the best for the future.

"You know we're going to have to make our new friends feel welcome," I said smiling.

"Well, I have been thinking about that. I suppose we'll be seeing more of them."

I nodded my head. "We really should make a good effort. I don't think Thomas is exactly happy with Casey's choice."

"Dad is a little old fashion. I'm sure Nathaniel will grow on him. He seems to be doing a pretty good job with me," Daniel said smiling.

"I'm proud of you." I smiled and leaned forward to kiss him. "And Richard?"

"Let me take one of them at a time." He smiled. "I promise I will try."

Daniel was indeed everything I needed. My love for him ran deeper than I could ever imagine. I wrapped my arms around his neck and held him tight. Feeling our hearts beat together was an incredible feeling. My heart was his as his was mine. Pulling back slightly I gently touched my lips to his.

*"I love you so very much,"* I whispered as I gently kissed him.

*"I love you, too,"* he whispered back in between kisses.

Pulling back from one another with smiles on our faces, Daniel took my hand and we went back into the house. Charlotte had already gone back upstairs to see Casey again. Nathaniel, Thomas, Jason and Heather all were in the living room.

Thomas had a grim look on his face as he looked over at Daniel and me. He held up a document from the folder toward Daniel. "You need to read this."

Daniel walked over and took the document from his father. Glancing over it, his eyes widened as he slowly sat down beside Thomas. Concerned, I walked over and peered over Daniel's shoulder.

"A few weeks ago I was visited by a young man named Brendan Phillips. The same one in the folder. He had contacted me about placing a malpractice suit on Dr. Miller. Brendan says that he and his friends were on their way home one night. A large animal crossed in front of the road. He swerved his vehicle and ended up hitting a tree head on. He said the next thing he remembered was Dr. Miller being there and then the ambulance." Thomas took a deep breath and continued.

"Brendan said Dr. Miller saved their lives that night. However, he had been complaining of headaches ever since. Brendan is a Navy Seal, here on leave visiting family. His medical doctors in the Navy checked him out and said there was nothing wrong with him. He said it was difficult to believe them, since he had also been having nightmares each night since the accident. The nightmares are of werewolves."

"Miller used Brendan as an experiment," Daniel said looking over the papers.

"I did not know this," Thomas said shaking his head. "The young man was extremely upset. He does not know what is happening to him."

"Dad, what if he turns?" Daniel said with a look of horror.

"We don't know what Miller has done to him. I suspect he will contact us. Worse yet, we might get a phone call from the US Department of Defense. Miller has created a mess, and we are all tied to it," Thomas finished.

"What if he does come looking for us? If I were him, I would be pissed," I said looking at Thomas.

"Being pissed is just one of his problems. Werewolves have a tendency for hatred and revenge. It is a good possibility he would come after all of us," Thomas added.

"He wouldn't know he couldn't take all of us out," I added.

"True. Still, once he has been completely taken over, he will be filled with blood lust and rage." Thomas had begun to worry now.

"Thomas?" Charlotte said softly as she came back down the stairs, concern and worry in her voice.

Thomas raised his wearied eyes to his wife. It was evident he searched for the words to comfort her. He held her gaze for a moment before he commented.

"Do not worry, dear. Please." He paused. "Let me worry about this young man. If there is any threat, we will take care of it."

"What if something happens again? I cannot bear the burden of losing one of my children, Thomas," she pleaded.

"Mom, I will be right here." Daniel tried to sound convincing.

"What about Casey? Where were we all when she was abducted?" she protested.

"It's not the same, Mom. Dr. Miller could have seen her town, and offered to take her to lunch. As a lifelong family friend and doctor, Casey trusted him implicitly. We all did. She would have gone with him without a second thought. Brendan Phillips will not have that same access or opportunity, particularly after we warn her," Daniel said soothingly.

Charlotte nodded. The whole room went silent. We all debated our options. Jason finally spoke up.

"Well, we can't worry over what we don't know. If this guy does change and comes after us, we can take care of it then. Until then, I suggest we not worry about it." Jason was right.

"Dad, if he does happen to show up, I think we could help him. With everything I found out today, there is a chance I may be able to reverse the process."

"Son, it is very risky. However, I trust you. If this Mr. Phillips does show up to my office, I will refer him to you. Our welfare depends on this," Thomas spoke softly.

"My brothers and I will assist you in any way we can," Nathaniel spoke up.

Thomas and Daniel looked at one another then toward Nathaniel. Daniel and I remembered Richard's one on one attack with the werewolf. The vampires were stronger and faster than the werewolves. The attack was absolutely ruthless and flawless. Their centuries of experience killing these creatures could benefit us all. I only hoped Thomas could put aside his narrow-minded views to see the opportunity which had presented itself.

"Well," Thomas directed his attention to Nathaniel. "I feel this is a discussion Charlotte and I would like to have with you and Casey."

"Sir, I can understand your apprehensions concerning our relationship. I assure you I completely respect your daughter. If there is any way I can apologize for my behavior in this situation I will gladly do it. I'm in love with Casey. She is my life now. If there is any danger to her life, I consider this a danger to mine as well. She, as well as all of you, have my brothers' protection." Nathaniel spoke in a way that showed an amount of authority and confidence. His words showed wisdom beyond his apparent age.

Thomas raised his eyebrows and looked to Charlotte. I was sure he was looking to the reasoning side of the family for her response. Her eyes looked into Thomas's in a way it showed a plea.

"I want my daughter to be happy." She spoke softly. "This needs to be a conversation we have with the both of you in private." A warm smile crossed her face.

Nathaniel nodded as he understood. "If you will excuse me then, I hear Casey." He turned heading up the stairs.

"Well, dear," Thomas said looking again to Charlotte, "I believe we should return home as well." He held his hand out for Charlotte.

"Jason, we need to take a little trip. Heather? Julie?" Daniel straightened up with excitement in his eyes.

"You all go on ahead. I am going to take a break and relax by the pool." I said walking over to Daniel. Reaching up I gently gave him a slight kiss.

"All right, then. Try not to get a sun burn." Daniel grinned as they followed Charlotte and Thomas out the door.

For the moment, I had a few issues I wanted to consider by myself. I headed up the stairs to change into a swimsuit. Walking past the guest room, I heard Nathaniel's smooth voice speaking to Casey. There was so much to consider. I knew that Casey and Daniel were the only hope of carrying on the long line of Lycans. If Casey chose to stay with

Nathaniel, her line would end. It would be up to Daniel and me to carry on the line.

Still, my only hope was for Casey's happiness was that her parents could agree with her decision. Who better to protect their daughter than a mysterious vampire?

Again, I could feel the turmoil inside my own body. This thing called fate was ringing loudly in my ears. Casey had the responsibility of over a century running through her veins. The Lycan bloodline, to protect humans from the creatures of the night. Maybe it wouldn't be as bad as I figured. A Lycan fighting side by side with a vampire? It could happen. She would still be living her destiny. There was a slight possibility this union could work.

Daniel had said to just have faith. Putting my belief into the possibility everything would work out as it should. I inhaled deeply and exhaled as I realized he was right. Even if this Brendan Phillips reappeared in our lives as a werewolf, everything would work out as it should. Maybe Daniel and Jason could find a cure for him and reverse what Dr. Miller did to this young man. The only thing any one of us could do at this point was to wait for Fate to play her hand. We would wait.

## SEVENTEEN

The doorbell promptly rang at noon. I had forgotten the housekeepers were coming. I ran to the door. The three women came into the house half-heartedly smiling toward me. Lilly, the oldest of the women, a short slightly overweight red head, glanced down at my hand noticing the large diamond ring. She looked at her daughter Tina, the youngest, who appeared to be around eighteen. The girl was attractive with shoulder length brown hair and brown eyes. Her complexion was smooth. Tina glanced at my ring as well. Her eyes widened when she saw the large diamond. The last of the women entered the house, Leslie. Leslie was as attractive as her sister. She had long blond hair she kept in a ponytail while she was cleaning. She didn't appear as impressed as her mother and sister over the obvious display of wealth.

Realizing I still had Nathaniel and Casey upstairs, I mentioned to the women to do the downstairs first. Taking the opportunity to warn my guests, I dashed up the stairs.

Knocking on the door slightly I heard Nathaniel's voice. "Yes, come in, Julie."

Opening the door, Casey sat up in the bed. Her bruises completely healed and the color had returned to her skin. She looked wonderful.

A broad smile crossed my face. "Well, don't you look like a breath of fresh sunshine." I walked toward her with outstretched arms.

"I can say I feel much better." Her tan arms reached around my neck and squeezed tightly.

"You know," I gestured toward Nathaniel, "he has stayed right here with you the entire time."

Casey's smile widened and her eyes sparkled when she looked into his face. Then suddenly her expression changed to one of concern. "Mom and Dad?"

"They know about Nathaniel. Casey, why didn't you tell me? You know I would have understood."

"I wasn't worried about you. It was Daniel. I was afraid he would've noticed it. It was only a matter of time before you two bonded. Julie, I'm terribly sorry, but I just couldn't take the chance. We needed time to figure out how to tell Mom and Dad," Casey said softly.

"Well, they know now," I replied.

"Nathaniel and I have decided we will stay together no matter what they say. I know they are awaiting the dreaded conversation. His brother will be here shortly to pick us up. We're going to talk to Mom and Dad and get this over with." Casey's voice sounded fearful.

Charlotte and Thomas may be old fashion but I believed they were reasonable. Charlotte was the heart of the family and Thomas was the leader. I could see in Casey's eyes she was in love with Nathaniel. They had made their choice. In any case, regardless whether her parents agreed to the union between the two, Casey would be with Nathaniel. A new destiny waited for the two of them.

"I wanted to warn you," directing my attention to Nathaniel, "the housekeepers are here. I wasn't sure if this would be a problem for you."

"No, but I do need to go home for a moment and change my contacts," he spoke softly.

"Contacts?" I asked looking from Casey to Nathaniel. "Why would a vampire wear contacts?"

"We wear tinted contacts to protect our eyes from the sun," he replied.

"I thought vampires couldn't stand the sun."

Nathaniel chuckled. "Well, actually we do have a problem with the sun. Our eyes are extremely sensitive to it. The sun hurts our eyes, almost blinding us, making it difficult to see in the daylight. Vampire eyes are a light crystal blue, contrary to what the legends and folklore state. It has been only in this century when we discovered the use of tinted contacts. Most of us, until then, needed to wear sunglasses to protect our eyes from the sun. It, however, does not burn us as the movies portray. I suppose this is where all the legends began about vampires coming out at night." He raised his eyebrows as if collecting a reflective memory. "Well, in theory I suppose, they were right. Centuries ago, vampires did only come out at night."

"Well then, Casey, help yourself to my clothes. I need to check on the housekeepers," I said heading out of the door.

"OMIGOD!" Casey screamed, pointing at my hand. I smiled and walked back over to show her the ring. Casey grabbed my hand, and held it up for Nathaniel to see as well.

"Wow, my brother has great taste."

"You're impressed by that small thing?" Nathaniel asked with a grin on his face, winking at Julie. "It is a most exquisite bauble."

"Bauble' your cold ass! It's beautiful. I hope you two are always happy."

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Blue-eyed vampires, the story Daniel had told me made sense. I thought for a moment, the vampires might have built the wall on Fort Mountain. Shaking my head, I knew in my heart the truth now.

For the first time in a long time, I would have the house to myself again. Jason, Heather and Daniel had returned to the clinic in Chattanooga to run more tests. Casey was well again. It appeared like everything would be back to normal. Is there really such a thing as normal anymore? I wasn't sure how to answer that question.

For the moment, I was going to have a normal day. I went to my room to find my new swimsuit. A day by the pool was exactly what I needed. Tomorrow I had definite plans for enrollment in my online classes and moving my belongings back here. Then maybe I would have a little time to think about looking at a wedding dress. I glanced down at my hand and looked at the beautiful engagement ring again. Yes, I needed to take time and enjoy the moments fate had brought me.

The housekeepers busied themselves with dusting and vacuuming. I placed the swimsuit wrap around my waist and tossed a towel over my shoulder. Walking down the stairs, I pulled my hair into a ponytail and proceeded to the pool. I was near to my exit and the doorbell rang. I turned around and my heart fluttered slightly as I realized it was Richard standing at the front door. He looked up as he saw me walking toward the door.

"Good afternoon," Richard announced in a smooth voice when I opened the door.

For the first time the opportunity had risen to have a good look at him. He was more breathtaking in the daylight than he had been under the moonlight. The beautiful features in his face were even more appealing, the smooth skin over the well-defined cheek and jawbones.

Richard wore a loose cream-colored short sleeve shirt over a pair of kakis. His sandy brown hair was slightly wind-blown from riding with the windows down. I glanced behind him to see what kind of car he was driving. His choice of cars impressed me. He was driving a new black Mustang Cobra with dark tinted windows. It suited him perfectly.

"Good afternoon," I replied. "Please come in. Nathaniel and Casey will be down shortly. Could I offer you something to drink?" Pausing a moment at my offer, a grin crossed his face. "I'm sorry. It is a habit. Southern hospitality." I quickly added, realizing too late it wasn't the proper question to ask a vampire.

"No need for apologies. It is a very hospitable offer." His smile widened. "A very tempting one nonetheless." The seductive tone in his voice had an erotic effect on me I didn't like.

A long moment passed before my blushing actually diminished on my cheeks. The heat lingered on my face. There was no way I could hide my slight embarrassment.

Glancing over at the housekeepers, I noticed their attention was on Richard. The glances between the women only confirmed the obvious attractiveness he possessed.

"Would you like to wait with me on the patio?" My polite voice trembled. I knew I needed to move him away from their view.

Richard wasn't the one I worried about being the attacker. Three women appeared to have a particular interest in him. I'm not sure they noticed his pale skin or even cared. They were probably too busy admiring his beautiful features.

Richard was different from Nathaniel. He possessed a sultry and compelling property Nathaniel didn't have. The way he spoke to me sent signals to every nerve in my body. Maybe I was more sensitive due to being a Lycan.

"Nathaniel tells me all of you wear tinted contacts," I began.

"Yes." The tones in his smooth voice tickled my ears when he spoke.

"May I ask you a few questions?" I felt like a kid in a candy store.

He nodded. "You are curious about me? I'm impressed." His eyes slowly traveled from my face to the ring on my finger.

"Well... yes," I stuttered. "I mean *you are* a vampire."

"And *you are* a Lycan." His left eyebrow rose. "Tell me, Julie," as he leaned back in the chair placing his arms on the armrest, "what do you fear the most about vampires?"

Taking me aback for a moment, I had to think. He just took control of the conversation. This unnerved me. The obvious answer would be the way I saw him kill a werewolf the other night. The second had to be his seductive nature.

"Are all vampires so seductive?" I blurted out trying to avoid his question.

A wicked grin crossed his face. "Is that what you are afraid of? My seductive nature?" He laughed lightly. The gentle tones in his laugh sparked an overwhelming response in my body.

"Well, you should be afraid of it," he warned while his facial expression changed to serious.

"So is that your secret weapon? You seduce your prey?"

"Obviously, you seem concerned about my seduction methods. Tell me Julie, do you feel as if I am seducing you?" He leaned forward.

At that moment, a sense of fear ran through me. I caught my breath and fought hard to regain my composure. "No, actually." I lied.

"Hmm." He sat back in his chair again. "I appeal to you do I not?"

Great. I felt as though I was a fly caught in a spider's web.

"I believe you appeal to a lot of women," I fired back, my head motioning to the housekeepers.

His smile broadened. "Then would you give yourself freely to me?" The question flowed from his lips with a certain amount of authority and assurance.

"No! I'm in love with Daniel. We're going to be married and he is the only man I want." I exclaimed firmly, astonished by his boldness.

Richard remained expressionless. The confidence he had in himself unnerved and frightened me.

"What if I told you that is a lie? Would you believe me?"

"NO!" I shot back. "I do love Daniel and we are getting married."

Richard stood up from the chair and with a quick fluid motion he stood behind my chair. Leaning his head closer to my ear, I felt the coolness of his breath on my neck.

"*See a vampire knows instinctively about its prey,*" he whispered while his lips touched my ear. "*The wants,*" his lips moved down my neck. "*The desires.*" I felt the coolness of his tongue touching the sweet spot on my neck tracing over the previous bite marks left by Daniel. A sense of thrill ran through me when my body shivered under his touch.

My body weakened while the sultry tones in his voice sent tremors down my spine. Fire wielded in my veins when his cool lips moved up to my jaw. My heart raced, pulsed the fevered blood through my veins against the touch of his lips. It was as if my blood tried to kiss the lips of this vampire. My body betrayed me, even my own blood turned against me, yielding completely to this inhumanly beautiful vampire.

"*To satisfy,*" he whispered. Then cool floral scent of his breath lingered on my face. My eyes closed as I exhaled, fighting the cloud which had covered my mind.

My mind was at a loss. I became intoxicated with need and desire. Fighting hard against my body, my will had to be stronger than this. Suddenly he returned to his chair. I found myself clutching the armrests tightly with my hands. Slightly embarrassed by my erratic breathing, I managed to pull myself together.

"All right, you made your point. Vampires are seductive. Don't ever do that again to me." I warned.

Richard laughed. There was one true statement about the vampire legends. Vampires were definitely, without a doubt, dangerously seductive. In a few words and gestures, they had their prey agreeing to anything.

"Don't worry. I promise I will not harm you or make you do anything against your will," he purred with a wicked grin. "I believe I have answered your questions."

I nodded still trying to shake off the intoxication. Taking a moment, I tried to clear my head. Glancing up, I noticed Casey and Nathaniel standing at the patio door.

"I think they are ready for you." I motioned toward the door as Richard followed my eyes.

He stood and smiled warmly to me. "Again, it has been a pleasure Julie. I hope to see you again."

Much later than sooner I hoped. I simply smiled and nodded. My thoughts still wavered. I remained seated while he walked toward Casey and Nathaniel.

I loved Daniel. I knew it in my heart. Shaking my head, I pulled myself back to reality. The vampires are dangerous. Richard purposely put his spell on me. If he wanted to pursue it, he could have. I would have no choice but to give in to what he wanted. He was right when he said I should be afraid of his seductions.

I stood and dropped my wrap. A good swim was what I needed right now. Jumping into the water felt good. My senses were refreshed and soothed. After a few laps, I decided to dry off in the sun and work on a suntan. Climbing out of the pool, I dried off and laid my towel across the lounge. Lying back, I closed my eyes. The warmth of the sun caressed my skin, warming my senses and soothing my soul. The wind lightly breezed over my body. It wasn't long before I drifted away on the lounge.

Not sure where the dream began, I found myself in the middle of what appeared to be an eighteenth century church. The partially filled church composed of people dressed in their best attire for the setting. The pews were actually benches. I guessed that it must be a small country church.

No one noticed as I stood in the back of the church while observing what appeared to be a wedding. There in the front of the church Nathaniel stood in the position of the best man. He wasn't the pale skinned vampire I would recognize.

His sun bleached hair accented his warm golden tan. It made for a very distinct difference compared to the vampire I knew. After I made the connection, I realized he wasn't a vampire. He was still attractive, but not as beautiful as Nathaniel the vampire.

The woman who stood in the position of the maid of honor was dressed in a long light blue dress. She was average height and attractive. Her dark brown pulled into a bun, leaving a few strands of hair loose accenting her oval face. She had a perfect figure and posture.

The bride and groom turned to face one another. The groom was tall with sandy brown hair and the same warm golden tan that Nathaniel had. It was Richard. He was still attractive but like Nathaniel, he wasn't the beautiful vampire who I knew. This was a different Richard. A gentle smile crossed his face when his hands reached for the veil of his new bride. Slowly he pulled the veil back to reveal his bride. I gasped.

The bride who stood before him was my double. I stared in disbelief while she looked lovingly into his eyes. Everyone applauded and joyful cheers filled the church.

The minister made the new introduction of Mr. and Mrs. Richard MacArthur. The new couple turned to face their audience. My eyes widened when my own likeness came into full view.

Richard and his new bride walked down the aisle toward me. No one else noticed me except her. Her gentle eyes lifted to mine while she moved forward with Richard. My stomach tightened as my pulse raced. I stepped aside as they passed by me. As she passed by me, she whispered the name Adrianna. I gasped and jumped back when her cold hand touched mine.

Opening my eyes, I looked around and realized that I was by the pool. My heart was pounding in my chest. I tried to relax by taking a few deep breaths. The ringing in my ears was almost unbearable. Slowly, I came back to myself. Easing down in the lounge, I relaxed. The surreal wedding disturbed me.

Reminding myself, I loved Daniel and he was the one I would marry. Richard's charm had more of an effect on me than I realized. It may be a good idea if I stayed away from Richard.

Pushing myself up from the lounge, I stood. There were a few things on my agenda for the day. I headed into the house and noticed the housekeepers had finished. The house looked great. Quickly, I organized the rest of my day while heading up the stairs for a shower. Register for my online classes and arrange to move my belongings here from my apartment in Virginia. A trip to the grocery store later on would be a good idea. I figured I needed to learn how to cook if Daniel and I were going to be married. Maybe pick up a couple of cookbooks wasn't a bad idea.

## EIGHTEEN

*The* week flew by so quickly, probably because I was so busy with moving my things from Virginia. It took a few attempts to find a moving company to move the rest of my belongings from the apartment. I donated all of my furniture to a local charity. Even the tatty Mustang, I sadly parted with and gave it to a local church.



While I was in Virginia, Daniel and Jason worked together arranging the research clinic. Thomas had all the legal paperwork completed so the transaction moved smoothly. Heather spent most of her time while I was away taking care of the boys. When I returned home, she had done most of the grocery shopping and stocked my kitchen. I shouldn't have been surprised to see several cookbooks stacked neatly on kitchen counter.

I was thankful for the time to rest before this evening. Casey and Heather worked together with Charlotte for the final preparations for the engagement party. They double-checked the guest list and the caterers. Everyone on the list would be attending the grand function tonight. Many people inquired as to the type of gifts to purchase. Daniel and I decided that instead of receiving gifts, the guests could make a charitable donation to an organization that specialized in children's cancer research. We invited the president of this organization to attend our engagement party. Daniel and I agreed to make a sizeable contribution ourselves.

Adding to the other extremes in my busy life, there was Casey. Charlotte and Thomas were still not pleased with her new love relationship. Thomas's concerns were as expected-losing the precious Lycan bloodline to a vampire no less. Casey confided in me that she wanted to stay with him forever. This forever meant she would become a vampire.

Personally, I felt her decision was somewhat erratic. Casey, being the headstrong daughter, and in many respects her father's spitting image, made up her mind as to what she wanted to do. There was no way to change it. She made me promise to keep the transformation a secret.

Casey and Nathaniel had a well thought out plan, taking a trip to Rome for a week. She explained to me in detail the transformation process. She would be in no condition to see anyone for the next three days. While in Rome, they would stay at Richard's vacation home seated in the luscious countryside of Italy, where he owned a wine vineyard. She explained upon her returned she would stay with Nathaniel. Her parents wouldn't have much of a choice after that.

My mind tried hard to comprehend the plans and decisions she made. She was willing to give up her life as a Lycan to become a vampire out of love. I wondered--the laws were strict so exactly what would her penalty be? Would fate hold a punishment for such a love? She would take a life as an immortal, to be with the one she loved.

To add to my frustrations, during our phone conversation Casey brought to my attention the thorn in my side. This one, however, crushed my box into pieces.

"There is also something I wanted discuss with you." She paused. "Richard."

Somewhere in the back of my imagination there was the remote feeling he was going to be the topic of this conversation.

"All right." I took a deep breath and prepared myself for the worst.

"Julie, Richard has asked me a lot of questions about you. One in particular was your length of relationship with Daniel. I have to warn you, Richard is extremely interested in you."

"Casey I appreciate the heads up, but you have no need for concern. My love runs deep for Daniel." I tried to assure her. The answer was as honest as I could give.

"Listen to me carefully- there is more. Nathaniel says..." she paused a second. "Look, I've got to go. Just trust me on this and be careful around Richard. OH! And whatever you do, absolutely don't let him touch you with his lips or breathe on you! Jewels, the man has been without a woman for the last two hundred or so years. Trust me when I tell you to be careful. I will call you back when I can." She chuckled.

"Wait!" The phone clicked.

A certain amount of anxiety crept inside of me. Was I correct in thinking the spell he wove over me was going to be harder to shake? What now? Had Richard done something to me? I needed to know if my own life was in danger or Daniel's for that matter.

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The evening approached. Heather managed to help me with a style I liked. The final finish, I wore it pulled back on one side and letting a few strands fall on the opposite side. With the help of a hot curling iron, the strands turned in curls in no time.

Daniel looked breathtaking when he slid on his jacket completing his tuxedo. I stood when he walked into the bedroom. His eyes roamed over me from head to toe. For a moment, I wasn't sure if he was pleased.

"You look," he paused, "absolutely beautiful. Do you like the dress?"

I turned toward the mirror and glanced at my reflection. The beautiful long dark blue dress fit my figure perfectly. The top of the dress was thin strapped and covered me without worrying about another flashing incident. The long slit on the side ran up past my knee. The new dress looked great with my new stilettos.

"I love it. You have remarkable taste."

"I know." Daniel took me in his arms. "I chose you didn't I?" he purred. A smile crossed my lips as he pressed a soft kiss against them.

"I need to find jewelry to go with this dress," I said moving to my jewelry box.

Opening the box, I chose a beautiful diamond set my father gave me two years ago for my birthday. Daniel gently clasped the diamond necklace around my neck. He then reached for the matching diamond bracelet and hooked it around my wrist. I finished off the accessories with a set of diamond-studded earrings and a set of gold chains with a diamond at the end. The perfect finish.

I held Daniel's arm while he escorted me down the stairs. Heather and Jason looked up when we walked down to meet them.

"You look so beautiful, Julie. You're actually glowing." Her warm smile brought out my smile. "Actually, you both are glowing."

"Aye, I believe it's something called love," Jason said raising his eyebrows. "Well, now that you have me in this monkey suit," he paused, "the chariot awaits." He motioned toward the front door.

Once inside the limo, Daniel stretched his arm around my shoulders as I snuggled against him. My hand rested lightly on his leg while few kisses passed between us. Jason shook his head a couple of times and laughed. I knew acted like two love sick puppies. Our affection was evident for one another. Sickening, as Jason called it, but love nonetheless.

We arrived at the Regency Hotel where Charlotte arranged for the grand event. Daniel and Jason stepped out of the limo first, followed by Heather and me. Daniel stood tall and proud while his hand reached for mine. Watching him reminded me of how tenderly his father handled his mother that one evening. His hand wrapped around mine with a lovingly look in eyes. His smile broadened when my arm went into his.

"Tonight, I finally have the opportunity show you off as mine." He spoke proudly leaning down to my ear.

Laughing lightly I glanced up to him. "Remember what I said concerning the pissing contest?"

"Yes," he reminded me. "The night is still young." He chuckled.

We walk into the grand room, astonished its beauty. A colorful variety of lilies and orchids elegantly decorated the room. The aroma of flowers filled the air. White linen covered the tables. There was even a champagne fountain.

Three long buffet tables lined against the far wall and filled with food. Four chefs in white uniforms stood by the meat table ready to serve their specialties. I knew from the list, we were having roast beef, roast pork, grilled Mahi Mahi and grilled leg of lamb. The next table complemented the meats with a variety of vegetables both steamed and grilled. A third table stood aside with seven varieties of cheese, a variety of fresh fruits and the fondue pots.

My concentration suddenly broke when someone started the applause. Soon everyone's attention turned to us when we heard a round of applause and a string of congratulations. The slight rush of heat to my cheeks let me know my face was probably red as the beautiful orchids. Daniel smiled proudly while greeting several people through the crowded room.

Thomas and Charlotte mingled quietly among the guests. Daniel released my arm and moved his hand to the small of my back. It was his subtle way of reassuring me. Then there was the voice I recognized all too well.

"Julie! Oh, Julie!" She streamed through the crowd to us. It was Aunt Doris with Uncle Dave in tow.

Turning toward the woman who pushed and shoved her way through the crowd, I smiled to myself. I knew this was going to be a grand event for her.

"Oh dear, I'm so excited for you!" She grabbed my hands only to look at my ring. "And whatever took you so long?" She grazed at Daniel. "Oh my! The ring is, well... huge." Her eyes widened while her hand quickly adjusted her glasses.

"Thank you, Aunt Doris." I spoke smoothly.

"Charlotte tells me you are planning for an October wedding?" She patted my hands.

"Yes. We feel it will be a good time." Daniel spoke up.

"Well dear, I feel you have made a good choice with this one. Don't let him get away." She leaned closer to me. "Get a few books if you have to. I hear they have movies now. You need to learn how to keep him satisfied." She whispered.

Daniel immediately leaned over to her. "I think we will be just fine. I tend to bring out the animal in her," he whispered back to her.

I caught my lip with my teeth holding back a laugh. Aunt Doris jerked her head back and looked aghast at Daniel. Her attention then snapped to me. Her mouth opened, and then closed. In all my years, it was a moment my father would have loved to see. Aunt Doris was at a loss for words. She patted my hands again, and gave Daniel another glance.

"Come on, Dave, let's see what they have at the buffet." She grabbed the poor man by the arm.

Uncle Dave turned back to us and winked his eye. A huge smile broadened his face as he walked away. I'm sure he loved every moment of it.

"You have made my night," The laughter escaped me. Daniel laughed with me. "I don't know, but I really like her."

Looking through the crowded room, I tried to locate Casey. Jason and Heather were had already made their way through the buffet lines. They seated themselves at our reserved table.

My heart dropped. The anxiety built inside of me. I controlled my thoughts for the obvious reason, Daniel. He didn't need to worry over this matter between Casey and me.

"Stop worrying. She will be here," he tenderly whispered in my ear.

Daniel and I walked toward the line gathering around the buffet tables. From the corner of my eye, I saw a glimpse of something pale and looked up. Casey had arrived and she brought Nathaniel. Fear suddenly shot through me. My body stiffened. Daniel's body stiffened next to mine. He sensed what I felt- fear.

"How many Lycans are in this room?" I thought, looking at him.

"Too many," he replied in thought while his eyes fixed on our newest guests.

Richard stood behind Casey and Nathaniel. Tall and the epitome of beautiful, if a man could be described as such. As the three moved further into the room, four more appeared behind them. Lance and Raphael had two extremely beautiful and well-dressed women with them. I knew in an instant these women had to be vampires. Their pale skin and abnormal beauty were definitely signs one couldn't avoid.

My heart froze in my throat. Daniel's hand slipped under my arm as we moved quickly out of the line.

"Let's go," he whispered moving us cautiously toward them.

Casey looked beautiful as always. Her tan complexion made Nathaniel and his family stand out even more.

"I'm so glad you made it," I said throwing my arms around her neck.

Daniel extended his hand to Nathaniel. Smiling to myself, I knew he was keeping up his end of the promise.

Here we were a room full of Lycans and not four but six vampires in our midst. Nervously, I glanced over Daniel's shoulder to make sure no one noticed the obvious differences in our new quests. The next concern was their scent. I only hoped that in a room scented with flowers and the mixed spicy scents of all the Lycans, no one would actually pay too much attention.

Maybe Daniel and I had been overly cautious with our new friends. However, it would only take one person to stir up a hornet's nest. Where was Aunt Doris?

"I would like to introduce you to the rest of my family," Nathaniel began, motioning to Lance as he stepped forward with a breathtaking blond beauty. Her tall, slender, statuesque body was perfectly shaped as if by a gifted sculptor. Honestly, I do not think Michelangelo could have painted her even more elegant and perfect than she already was. Her blond silky hair flowed across her shoulders when she moved. There was no surprise that her unnatural beauty distracted Daniel.

"This is Leona- she is Casey's wife." Nathaniel continued as the pale-skinned blonde move aside. "And this is..." he motioned toward the brunette who stepped forward with Raphael, "Adrianna."

Words couldn't describe all the emotions that ran through me in an instant. Adrianna's beautiful pale face rose to meet my gaze. Her warm brown eyes looked deep into mine. It was an odd feeling of déjà vu. Suddenly her eyes widened. We both froze a moment in time.

The beautiful creation who stood before me was the same Adrianna in my dream. There was only one exception; she wasn't a vampire in the dream.

"Juliet?" I heard her whisper in a slight French accent.

"Adrianna, Leona this is Julie Knight." Nathaniel quickly jumped in. The warm brown eyes glanced from Nathaniel to Richard. Moving slightly forward her gaze met mine again.

"Bonsoir, Mademoiselle Julie." She said with the most elegant voice. I was in awe. "It is a pleasure to meet you. Casey has told me many things about you. I feel as though I already know you." A gentle smile crossed her face.

Returning her smile, I lowered my eyes in an affirmation of respect. "Please, I'm honored to have all of you here tonight. Your family has our deepest appreciation."

"Yes," Daniel joined in. "Please come and join us." He motioned through the crowd.

Cautiously I glanced around the room. Very few people noticed them. Mostly the men gazed upon the two extremely beautiful vampire women. I had the feeling these men had no idea the women were vampires.

We joined Jason and Heather at our table with our new guests. Nathaniel repeated the introductions. Adrianna's name still had an effect on me that I couldn't describe. I wanted so badly to take Casey to the side and discuss this with her.

"How about I get us something to eat," Daniel whispered in my ear.

"Sounds good," I replied.

"Casey, would like to go with me?" Daniel held his arm out for his sister. She nodded and touched Nathaniel's arm slightly as she left.

"This is a lovely party," Leona began.

"Thank you. Actually Daniel's mother and sister put it together for us." I smiled. "Is there anything I can get for any of you?"

They all shook their heads. All right of course, vampires do not eat food. My thoughts ran back to Richard.

"So how long have you and Daniel known one another?" Richard asked.

Adrianna's head snapped toward him in a stare.

"Basically my whole life. Our parents were close friends," I responded smoothly.

"Arranged marriage then?" he tossed in.

"No." I tried to control the tone of my voice.

"Si'l vous plait, Richard. De nos jours." Adrianna's voice was short and firm. "This is truly a lovely occasion. I love weddings," she said, her attention directed to me.

The uneasy feeling was coming back in the pit of my stomach again. What did she mean "not our time"? My hand went to my head to steady the dizziness I felt.

"We're quite excited," I politely replied.

"Casey tells me she will be your matron of honor?" she continued.

"Yes. Casey and I have been best friends since childhood. She's the closest thing I have to a sister." I smiled, fighting the woozy feelings.

"I was a Matron of Honor once. Years ago." Her voice trailed off when Richard shot her a glance.

My stomach tied into a knot. Here my dreams had become a partial reality. I looked into the face of the same woman in my dream. Daniel arrived, and not a second too soon, with a variety of food on the gold trimmed china plates.

"I had the waitress bring drinks over for everyone." He glanced at Nathaniel. "It could at least look 'normal'." He tried to convey his concern.

Nathaniel's face brightened with Daniel's idea. "Yes, I suppose you're right. Shall we?" He stood and the rest of his family followed his actions. Soon they all moved to the buffet line. Even Richard followed behind his brother.

"So did I miss anything?" Daniel peered around the table.

"No," I replied.

"Richard grilled Julie on her upcoming marriage to you." Jason added.

Casey and I both sent Jason a look that would kill. "It was nothing more than curiosity." I tried to speak calmly.

"I have to agree love. Richard is interested in you." Heather chirped out.

"Well, I guess that does it then." Daniel abruptly stood.

"What are you going to do? *Daniel! Sit down!*" I hissed at him.

"No, I'm going to go ahead and piss on you! Maybe then he will get the hint!" Daniel said chuckling. For a moment, I thought he was serious. Jason and Heather found Daniel's joke amusing. I truly didn't.

"Look Jewels, I know you are mine and no one else's. Richard may try if he likes- but baby, you are all Daniel's." He said smiling. "However, if he does try then well..." He paused. "I'll just have to kill him."

My eyebrows shot up while I looked to Casey for help.

"Well," she began, "there is a little more to Richard's interest in Julie than all of you know. Daniel please don't take this personally. It has nothing to do with you. Richard is a nice, well, person. He has one of the biggest hearts I've seen next to Nathaniel's.

"Richard was deeply in love with his wife. She was the center of his world. Her name was Juliet. Juliet and Adrianna were sisters. The story is still unclear as to how he lost her. Can you imagine how lonely he must have been? He spent the rest of his life protecting and taking care of his younger brother after their parents died. When he saw you, well, according to Nathaniel you are an exact double for Juliet. I think you can understand why he is interested in you, Jewels." Casey trailed off when Nathaniel and his family approached the table with plates of food.

My heart melted from hearing his sad story. Never did I know that a heart was capable of holding so much love for one individual as I had for Daniel. Slowly I glanced at Daniel. My heart grieved for Richard and his loss. His story touched me in more ways than anyone could imagine. The memories of my father and mother came back.

“Are you all right, mon cheri?” Adrianna smoothly spoke.

I nodded. “Please, excuse me a moment.” I pushed my chair back when Daniel stood to hold my chair for me. I needed to step outside. A breath of fresh air would clear my head. My heart broke into a thousand pieces. Quickly heading for the closest exit, I stepped outside and wrapped my arms around myself.

Tears flooded my eyes. The sorrow and loss Richard suffered must have been an eternity of hell on earth. I couldn't live like that. If something were to happen to Daniel, I couldn't live. I know this. The door opened behind me.

“Julie?” Daniel took me in his arms. “Sweetheart.” He held my head to his chest.

“Daniel!” I pulled back and looked at him. “Promise me you will never leave me!” I gritted my teeth while the dam inside of me burst open.

“Listen to me. I'm not going to leave you.” He looked me squarely in the eyes. “Why are you so frightened?”

“Daniel, I can't live without you! I can't! I will die!” I gasped through my tears. “I promise you I will die!”

Daniel glanced toward Casey. Her hand touched my back.

“Julie, we are your family now. I'm here for you and will always be there for you. Sweetheart, you're safe, all right.”

I shook my head, wiping my eyes with my fingertips. “Promise me!” I hissed again through gritted teeth.

“I promise.” His words were strong. He pulled me to him, holding me securely in his arms.

Casey's arms went around us. “Jewels, you know I'll always be there for you too. We will always be there for you.” She cried out with me.

My tears became stronger hearing Casey's words. She and I both knew she would be there always. It was a true statement for her. She would be an immortal in a matter of a few days. Daniel was my world. He was the very air I breathed. The day I would lose Daniel would be the day I died.

After I stopped trembling, Daniel stepped back and wiped the tears from my eyes. Kissing me gently, his finger moved a few pieces of my hair back in place.

“Let's get you back inside now. You need to get something to eat before you pass out.” He smiled at me. “*It is going to be all right. You will see. Just have faith.*” The assuring whispers of my angel.

After a moment or two, we returned inside. Pulling myself together, I approached the table with a smile on my face. As I returned, I looked at Richard a little differently. Still haunted by his uncanny ability that frightened me, I truly felt sorry for him. For the first time, I saw the agony in his eyes when he looked at me. It must have been pure torture for Richard to see me that first night. To see someone who was identical to a person you once loved and then lost. I wanted to say something to him at some point, but realized it may not be in my best interest.

Watching Daniel, his reaction was different concerning Richard as well. He was no longer so defensive and jealous. In a way, I believe Daniel understood more of Richard's loss than I could. A man could give his heart and hurt deeper than a woman. They were fragile creatures. Nathaniel was correct when he said vampires do have a heart, although it may not beat the same as ours, but the emotion for love was still there.

The rest of the evening went smoothly. The donations were well over what we had expected to receive for our charity. Daniel and I managed to give a short speech to thank all of our guests for their donations. We talked of our plans for our own research center in Chattanooga, and our hopes of finding more cures for adults and children as well.

As in our family tradition, we left the party earlier than our guests. Casey left with Nathaniel and his family. Giving me a huge hug and kiss, she reminded me she would see me soon. Jason and Heather rode back with Daniel and me to the house. I barely spoke a word all the way back home. It was hard to fight the thoughts that crept back into my mind. I managed nicely to think of wedding plans. This kept Daniel safe from the real nightmares which threatened me. He didn't need to worry himself over my extensive imagination if it were an imagination at all.

Arriving back to the house, we all went our separate ways. I changed into a beautiful silk nightgown that I purchased on my shopping spree with Casey. Needing the time to think on my own, I walked downstairs and stepped out onto the patio. Leaning on the railing, I looked out to the wooded area. The full moon lit up the sky with a beautiful glow. My thoughts drifted to the last few weeks of my life.

The dark veil, which covered my life for so long was no longer present. No longer would the darkness cover me, preventing me from seeing who I was- a Lycan. Within the last few weeks, changed into a woman who willingly stepped into a new world my father secretly hid from me. There were commitments and obligations I had by right. My courage to walk in my own heritage had grown inside of me. The bloodline I carried dated back a thousand years for a purpose to become a guardian.

The truth of my mother and father would always be in my heart. Their love held as true for me as does Daniel's love. Here I found myself in love with the most wonderful man; Fate had thrust us together. Because of our love for one another, we survived. Willing to die, self-sacrifice to prove how much we loved each other. In what way could Fate have denied this kind of love?

Fate again granted us with new friends. Casey had found love in Nathaniel. It was a very strange union. How would all this play out? Who knows? We only have this one life to live and it is better to love for a moment than live a lifetime without knowing love.

Truly, we live for the moment each day. Striving for the best that Fate offers us. We learn to believe in that which is the unknown and have faith that only the best will come. No matter what tragedies we face in our lives, we believe and hold on to the belief that there is a greater purpose. A destiny that waits with its arms opened wide to embrace us, we walk forward into the call. Never should we look back, never worry, but go forward stronger and running breathlessly into the world of the unknown. As Fate casts her web around us, she guides us and wields her sword directing us where she would have us to be. Yes, we believe, but it is better to believe and walk than to believe and stand by. Never should we watch life pass by us.

My thoughts broke when a noise came from the woods. Peering deep into the dark, I saw it emerge slowly. I wasn't afraid and remained calm when the large grey timber wolf walked out into the yard. Slowly it moved closer while carefully eyeing me. Standing approximately twenty feet from where I stood, it stopped.

It looked directly up to me. A slight change occurred within me. My teeth emerged slightly. My eyes saw the animal more clearly when I focused on its grey eyes. A chill ran down my spine when I remembered my father's grey eyes. Slowly the wolf raised its head and snorted. I didn't move but stood still. It wasn't from fear but from respect. I knew he was an older and much wiser wolf. I nodded my head to him. Lowering his head, he turned slowly and trotted back to the edge of the woods. Stopping one last time, he turned and looked at me. With the moment it took to catch my breath, his head rose while he opened his mouth to loosen a mournful howl. He was alone. My heart broke when he slowly turned towards the woods. A tear fell from my eye while I watched him walk off into the dark of night.

That night, as I snuggled against Daniel, I had the most beautiful dream. My soul was at peace as I slept. In my dream, I stood in Charlotte's rose garden and one rose stood out among the rest. It was a beautiful pure white rose. Its name was Peace. Never before had I seen such a delicate rose. Its scent was by far more fragrant than its neighboring roses. It was the scent that drew me in like the scent of my lover.

The fog settled around me, moving slowly through the rose garden. I reached my hand through the fog to collect my prize. My peace.

*If you enjoyed  
Dark of kNight  
Take a sneak peek  
At  
The upcoming sequel  
Fall of kNight*

This preview is being provided to in an unedited form.

Fall of kNight

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.  
~Charles Darwin~

## PREFACE

The sound of ghostly drums began beating all around me, drawing my soul into another realm or dimension. I was not sure which one. The only thing I was sure was the fact I was in pain. Does death come so easily to those who choose it?

I wondered. It was a question that seemed to stand out in my mind. My body and mind were in complete torture as the war rage inside of me. Killing me slowly. Indefinitely. Killing me beyond all knowledge of the present or past. Even the future was not certain at this point.

My agony was my own demise. My decision. My choice. I barely noticed the days as they swept past me as my body continued its war. Visions swept across my mind of war, a battle actually, between a Lycan and a dark being. Was it real? Or was I actually dead and caught in the infinity of hell?

The already tortured heart inside my body, burned beyond recognition. A woman scorned. Finally, it stopped beating. Yes, this was the end. I thought. The last ounce of precious blood squeezed from my heart. The pain was intolerable as my mouth opened to gasp for the last moments of air. I wanted to scream. To cry for help in some way. But I remained silent in my agony.

Moments of recent events flashed before my eyes. A glimpse of all the madness. The deception. My mind was now flooded with the lies that had brought all this to a head. Yes, there was one unsettling factor that I held onto like a safety net. It was not over. The softly spoken words by an angel were the only glimpse of hope. The hope that drove me through this agony. "I love you, Julie." His words whispered against my neck as they etched themselves in my heart forever. His love for me was far greater than I could have ever imagined. It was patient, kind and everlasting. The kind of love you would gladly die for.

All the darkness that had clouded my mind ended abruptly. Clarity hit me like a strong northern wind, chilling me to the bone. Yes, in one unfathomable moment I realized my life was not as it had seemed.

## CHAPTER ONE

*The* darkness crept closer around me, surrounding me with the eeriness of the night. My footsteps were only echoes against the silence of the darkness. Slowly, I padded along the path in my dream.

Deep within the wooded area, I smelled them. The werewolves. The stench of the rotten flesh that clung to them. I gave into my senses, moving slower. Cautiously through the depth and darkness of the night. I tilted my head upward, lifting my nose higher to the air. The scent of lilies and carnations filled my nostrils. It was a scent I was all too familiar with. Vampire. One must be close by.

Behind me I heard the sound of approaching footsteps and I stopped. My ears perked forward. I listened intently as their pace quickened. The leaves and twigs crunched under its feet as it approached. My breath held tight as I braced myself for the oncoming attack. The thick brush parted as the creature moved into full sight. Its fierce teeth bared as its red glowing eyes flared with a killing rage. It would be over soon now. The killing. The death.

A low growl rumbled from deep within my chest. My lips curled back revealing my threateningly sharp teeth. My feet planted firmly onto the ground as I braced myself.

My tongue involuntarily slipped through my teeth. This time I sent one last warning. A snarl of deadly valor. One clean bite and it would be over. A shiver ran down my spine. The hairs on my back prickled on their ends. My head lowered closer to the ground. I began to circle the creature as our dance began. The dance of death. My heart quickened its pace. A huff of air escaped my mouth as the muscles tensed in my hind legs. My eyes were firmly locked on my prey. The dance was coming to an abrupt halt. My front paws braced against the cold ground, I bolted forward toward my prey.

The powerful muscles in my shoulders tensed. The leg muscles underneath my skin flexed as I gained speed, pushing my body forward. My feet pounded against the earth beneath me, lifting my body higher in the air. Quickly I moved toward the wiry-haired beast. The chill of the air blistered against my face. The breath held in my chest as the wind blew into my nostrils. The foul stench of the werewolf was now in my senses. Yes, my senses were alive as the killing rage overtook me. Death was certain. It would not be my blood that spilled this night.

My eyes locked onto the creature. I was focused for the hind leg. I was faster. I could make it. No time for mistakes.

A white flash moving in front of my eyes blinded me for a second. Distraction. Not good. The impact between my prey and I were no more. A pale arm quickly wrapped around the creature's neck. On top of its head rested a pale hand. A quick jerk. Loud cracking noises filled the air. It was over. The smell of death was now immanent. The body of the creature slowly dropped to its knees. The foul scent of werewolf blood filled the air. I snorted twice to clear the offensive odor from my nostrils.

Richard Macarthur stood before me. The pale skinned inhumanly beautiful vampire. The most dangerously seductive vampire or human I had ever known. As always, his attack on the werewolves was flawless. I thought for a moment as I stared at him. His killing methods have been perfected by over a century.

The thick mist on the ground moved under my feet as I exhaled slowly. My body jerked forward. I was now human again. The coolness of his pale hand reached under my arm, pulling me to my feet. Richard could kill me with one quick snap. Even though I was extraordinarily strong, he was faster. He pulled me slowly to him. The blue diamond-like eyes peered deep into mine. Fear screamed loudly throughout my body. I was now afraid. The words I wanted to say to make him stop were not coming to me. I wanted him to release me and set me free. Release and save me from the end I feared so.

With a gentle cooing whisper, he shushed me as his hand slid behind my neck. The coolness of his fingers lingered against my skin. Lightly they caressed the warmth my skin provided for him. Richard held me inches from his face. The coolness of his breath fanned against my skin, haunting and tempting me. My eyelids dropped at the soft sweet floral scent of his breath. My head tilted back under his control. My heart began to pound loudly, pulsating hot fire through my veins. My breath was now coming out in quick gasps as I struggled to breath. The sanity I once held so tightly to had left me. I was not under the spell of this beautiful vampire.

With each beat of my heart, my blood called out to him. Tempting him. She gave herself willingly to him as the vein in my neck arch to kiss the lips of this vampire. He inhaled deeply, intoxicating himself on the savory scent of my blood. I felt the coolness of his lips as they pressed into a kiss, touching the vein which contained the woman. The woman who desired him.

The blood that coursed through my veins was a woman in need of her lover. She called to him. Pleaded to him. Arched herself to him. Begged him to take her so passionately. She caused the muscles in my body to tremble as she pushed my will aside. I felt the coolness of his tongue as it slowly traced the vein up to my ear. My senses began to run wild. The world began to spin around me as their love affair began. My body waged war against my own will, surrendering itself to every touch and smell of this inhumanly beautiful vampire.

The once cold lips were now warm as they grazed over my mouth. Something was wrong. Terribly wrong. His mouth left mine only to find my neck. His lips touched my neck again as he inhaled a deep and solemnly breath. Ever so slow and gentle, his lips moved down my throat to the base of my neck. Fire burned within me as I felt the softness of his tongue next to my bare skin.

I was prepared to force the protest from my mouth as I inhaled deeply. Then I felt it. A sensation like no other. The sharp cold teeth grazed gently over my bare skin. A tremor ran throughout me, exciting every nerve in my fevered body. My mouth opened as I exhaled slowly. My body trembled against his lean statuesque form.

“No.” I whispered in a ragged breath.

“Yes.” He hissed softly. His words burned against my skin.

My heart raced. My mind whirled. Hot flames began to rush through my fevered veins. Intense burning and desire welled within me. In that one moment. I knew I wanted him. I wanted all of him in that one unfathomable moment. It was his spell. The bells of fear tolled again. Ignoring them, I left all caution behind. My will was not strong enough to save me now. I had fallen deeply and unendingly under his control. Richard had left me with a need that only he could fulfill. A need that screamed throughout my body as his cold hands felt like fire tracing over my skin.

The coolness of his fingers feathered against my cheek. Richard’s crystal blue eyes peered deeply into mine, piercing into my very soul. Searching. Seeking out an answer I was not willing to give him. The hunger was clear in those diamond-like eyes. A hunger which wanted more than what my blood could offer. It was the type of hunger that needed to be quenched and satisfied. The hardness of his need pressed against my body, making me completely aware of his desires.

With one gentle motion, his lips were on mine again. Searching. Taunting. Desiring more. He called to him the woman of desire inside of me, beckoning her to him. Slowly, his lips left mine. I exhaled a ragged breath. The softness of his lips were now on my neck. Tasting. Richard was unleashing the she-wolf inside of me. I shuddered as his lips parted against my throat.

Richard inhaled a quick breath. A soft growl rumbled from his throat. In one instant, one breath of a second, I felt it...

#### About The Author

T.L. Mitchell currently lives in Virginia where she enjoys the beautiful views of the mountains while working on her next book. She’s active in helping promote other authors through various venues.

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