



Song of the Wolf

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DEDICATION:

For Tad ~ always my protector.

For my Gram, Leota Sophia Woock (11/21/21 - 12/3/06) - for giving me all those summers of beautiful memories filled with wishes, hopes and possibilities...for all your love. I miss you!

And for my Spike-man. Because all dogs go to Heaven. I hope yours is filled with rabbits to chase and trails to run. I miss your sweet beagle face.

SONG OF THE WOLF

CHAPTER ONE

The heavy glow of the high full moon sent shards of painful light piercing through Jayden's skull as she attempted to pry her eyes open. Peat moss and the cloying scent of dampened earth swamped her senses as the pungent aroma of worms and molded leaves lay thick in the mid-autumn air. Her mind became a battlefield of distress, pinpricks of light erupting beneath her leaden eyelids as she tried to reclaim her sanity.

She lay on the cold, packed earth, her breath heavy in her lungs, darkness swimming through her vision. Her head felt like sludge. She tried unsuccessfully to get her bearings. It felt as though her skull had been cleaved into four sections.

What the hell happened to me? She groaned, feeling like death had been dancing a rhapsody beneath the moonlight with her aching body. The sharp protrusion of twigs gouging into her cheek where her face lay on the damp, gritty earth caused its own brand of discomfort, but she was too stunned to move. She could still taste the blood in her mouth; feel where her lip had split over her bottom teeth. Wincing in pain, she ran the thickness of her tongue along her swollen lip.

When her brain began to reform normal thought patterns, the last few hours replayed in her mind like

a bad B-movie.

What the hell were you thinking, Jayden? she berated herself, ignorance a heavy pill to swallow amidst the pain of her limbs and a bloody, aching mouth. She should have known better than to follow Nick up to Turner Creek.

She knew what he wanted. It's what they always wanted. Even when he said the whole gang was going to be there, she knew it was a lie. But she had wanted to believe him. Wanted to believe he wasn't like the others.

He had been so sweet when he asked her to meet him, his dark brown eyes so sincere. And the smoothness of his voice as it played on her emotions—she could still hear it echo in her head. Each word laced with just the right amount sincerity and charm.

You're a total fucking moron, Jayden LaFey! she cursed as she tried to relearn how to breathe.

She'd had a crush on Nick for years. Had sat behind him all through high school and again in several college classes—virtually non-existent. Until today. Today he'd finally asked her out. Finally, he'd picked her out of the rest of the girls in the group.

God, I was so stupid!

Jayden slowly moved her hands; each small movement sending jolts of knifing pain rocketing through her body as her fingers tried to tunnel through layers of cool, damp earth. The crisp moistness of the dirt caked beneath her fingernails as she tried to find purchase.

She tried to garner enough strength to push her

weary body up off of the ground. Her arms quaked as they tried to bear her weight; too weak and battered to do even that small task; her body too wounded to lift her. Her chest heaved from the exertion; teeth gritted as wave after wave of fire burned through her limbs, nausea not far on its heels.

She felt as though she'd been run over by a grizzly bear, mauled and left for dead in some ravine. If she were lucky, maybe some hunters would amble by and find her before the animals returned.

The thought gave her pause. Made her realize the smell that clung to the air; blood—her blood. And Nick's. She could smell it mixed with the soil, taste it on the back of her tongue, its cloying, coppery taint gagging her.

What the hell happened to me? She couldn't think. Strange images flashed through her mind like a crashing subway train thrown off track. The bleak shadow of the lake with its dark waters glistening in the moonlight caused the memories to briefly stir and her breath to hitch in panic.

Like the flickering light of a moth's wings just beyond the haze of a bug zapper, she could just grasp the image of Nick in her mind. With a force of will she couldn't remember ever possessing, she clung to his image like the clenching of a fist, and the memory washed over her.

It was still early when he'd met her on the beach. He said the others were coming, and they should have some beers while they waited. He'd had a huge bonfire blazing on the sandy bank along the shoreline, its orange and blue flames sparking against the dried

wood. Sparking her interest as well. He'd had a blanket laid out so they could kick back and watch the stars. She thought it was charming.

A radio was jamming some tunes, so they sat and talked. Drank some beer. Time passed, but no one came. After a while, Jayden started to get worried.

Then the edges of the world began to sway. She started to feel really strange. Disconnected, almost. Nick's image kept moving in and out of focus before her, wavering like a strange funhouse figure.

He'd slipped something in her drink.

He laughed at her when she mentioned it. Told her to take it easy. That he'd take care of her. And then he was kissing her, pawing at her like a big slobbery dog. His hands were everywhere, pushing her back against the blanket.

Jayden cringed as the images played over in her mind. She wanted to bash his face in for doing that to her. But she couldn't. Someone—or something—already had.

She lay on the ground in the darkness, trying to breathe, trying to stifle the scream that wanted to rip its way from the pit of her stomach. The memory played over in her mind like a twisted nightmare that she couldn't escape.

She could still hear herself screaming at him to stop. Begging him to get off her. But he just held her down. Kissing her. Forcing her.

Her limbs had grown heavy, like they were filled with sand. Too heavy to move. Nick laughed as he tore open her shirt. "I'm gonna give it to you good, Jayden," he said, licking a line down her neck. She

closed her eyes. She wanted to scream again, but was too numb to do even that. Instead she screamed on the inside, and prayed that it would just hurry up and end. In the moment it took for her to draw her next breath, he was gone.

Her mind reeled and soon her hysterical silent pleas were followed by the deep, laborious sound of growling. Then Nick began his own round of screaming, crying and pleading not far on its heels.

Jayden could only lay there in the darkness, her limbs limp, her body lethargic, listening. Horrified. Unable to see, unable to move as Nick began begging for his life.

Her body was slick with the sweat of fear as her heart tried to pound its way from her chest. Terror became a tight fist in her gut while she listened, unseeing, as something chomped and gnashed Nick to death, ripping and tearing at him as he pleaded for mercy. As he begged for his life. Begged for her to save him.

Moments passed in sheer terror, her heart roaring through her mind almost in tune with the savagery. Then suddenly the world went silent. The wind seemed to still and the rhythms of the night ceased as Nick's horrified pleas died in the forest, his screams for mercy carried off into the distance on the tendrils of the wind. And there was nothing she could do about it.

In silent horror, she wept, too afraid to open her eyes, too drugged to do anything but possibly be the next one to die.

So she wept. Not for what happened to Nick. No.

She would never cry for that. In a way, he deserved it. No. She cried for what he could have been.

As his screams stilled and the creature's savageness ended, there was no sound coming from the night. Nothing but the silence and her pitiful weeping.

Jayden lay there for some minutes, afraid to breathe, her heart hammering in her lungs as the drugs worked their way through her body. Moments passed like a silent history of endless eternity. Heat began to pour through her; electrifying and molten as every nerve ending in her body came alive even as the tears dried on her cheeks.

The night took on a life of its own. Silently, she listened as the trees began to sway in the breeze. She could feel the wind flow across her body like a lover's caress, hear every zest and sigh amplified a thousandfold. Heat and need tightened within her womb, and she wanted to kill Nick all over again for lacing her drink. Then she heard the creature move, felt it in her bones as the thing circled her. Felt every step it took inching its way closer; the ground shaking with every measured step.

She was horrified to open her eyes. Afraid to see what had come for her. Afraid to know what it was that now stalked her in the darkness. But like any passerby of a train wreck or accident, she had to know. Had to look death in the eye and call it by its name.

Her body began to overload from the drugs racing through her system. Each pulse of her heart spiraled out of control, causing an inferno of hot, electric

desire to burn through every limb. Her breasts grew full and aching, the core of her wet with need. Jayden groaned in horror as fear and desire spiked through her; a irrational beast of enflamed need erupting as the cool hand of fear swept down her spine.

With her breath clogging her throat and her heart hammering, she forced herself to open her eyes. Forced herself to see what it was beyond the darkness that had come for her. Horror froze in her throat. Disbelief hung suspended on the silent sigh of her lips.

His large, masculine frame silhouetted the backdrop of the lake; the moon was full and sleek in the jet-black sky above. His mane of ebony hair flowed past broad shoulders, blending with the night as large silver eyes, sharp and penetrating, watched her with interest.

Jayden blinked several times, trying to focus on what it was she thought she was seeing. Her confused mind attempted to wrap itself around the image that stood before her, yet the vision was too surreal.

He appeared to be a man, and yet he was anything but human.

His image swirled through her mind as his form became that of a monster, his clawed hands and furred chest glowing in the brilliance of moonlight. Somehow she still could see the outline of a man's perfect physique shimmering like a shadow beneath the monster's form. Somehow he existed both as man and beast. And yet, he was neither.

He stood almost seven feet tall, his body contorted, caught between worlds. It was amazing and horrible

and she was too stunned to comprehend it. Too amazed to scream.

Thick black fur ran in patches down the washboard of chest and abs. His arms and hands were twice the size of a normal man's, with long clawed nails that glistened with blood in the moonlight. His long dark hair surrounded a face frozen as one with his beast.

Blood dripped from his jaw, running in crimson rivulets down his chest as he snarled at her from above, gums drawn back over the points of sharp canines. But the thing that frightened her most was the way that he watched her, hunger and need a dark mixture in his pale silver eyes.

With her breath frozen in her lungs, Jayden watched in shocked awe as the creature stalked towards her on silent feet. The ground vibrated with the force of his power—the world bending to his will.

Suddenly the creature crouched before her, folding its large frame above her. The heat of his body engulfed her as she lay on the ground beneath him, shaking with fear. Paralyzed by the drugs she'd been given, overwhelmed by wonder, she held her breath as he leaned into her.

Ever so slowly, the creature sniffed up her body, scenting her, his breath hot on her exposed flesh, misting in cool night air. He stopped along her neck and jaw line before turning his cold silver eyes upon her.

She could almost read the wonder and interest that his bright silver eyes portrayed as he gazed deeply into her eyes. All the while she was screaming inside, praying as loud as she could. Praying he wouldn't kill

her. Pleading with God to let her live.

Your God has no power here, she swore she heard him say.

Jayden's breath left her in a whoosh of disbelief. *How...? How could he speak to me?* she questioned frantically, her mind awash in a mixture of uncertainty and startled panic. She knew she hadn't seen his mouth move.

Our ways are the old ways. Your human life means nothing to a people who have walked this earth for a millennium. A people with abilities beyond your comprehension. Your God must bow before their laws. The voice rolling through her mind was deep and rich like the earth, as dark and mysterious as time itself. It was luxurious and hypnotic, and her body pulsed with uncertainty and desire. She couldn't believe what she was hearing or seeing. But she wanted him to keep talking. Wanted to feel each nuance rumble through her bones.

What are you? she thought hesitantly, looking into the depth of his tumultuous silver eyes. For some strange reason, she wasn't afraid of him. She needed to know more.

I am he who walks with the moon. He who follows the ebb and flow of the night, the creature said, bringing his muzzle close along her body and scenting a line from her hair back down to the pulse of her neck.

It looked at her with strange eyes filled with dark intent and interest. It was as though it seemed to recognize something in her scent. Something distant. Something ancient and remembered.

Jayden's heart began to thunder even harder as the

Ecstasy that Nick had slipped her rocketed through her, sending shock waves of desire to piston through her body like a vortex of light. The beast growled low in his throat, picking up the scent of desire as it sparked through her, clinging to the air.

That man poisoned you, he stated, his voice thick with distaste.

Jayden was so consumed by emotion she could only nod.

You are heavy with need, he growled, *your body thick with the scent. It will call to others.* He stared deep into her eyes.

He was trying to tell her something, but she couldn't pick up on it. Her mind was too wasted, her body burning up with desire.

They will come, he told her, his conviction thick and clear in his voice. *If I don't mark you, they will take you. And they may not have as much care with you. Do you understand what I am saying?* His face started to change, to flow back from wolf to a man. The sight was even more unbelievable than seeing it merged with the wolf.

"What is your name?" His voice when he spoke was so deep, Jayden swore she could almost touch each word. He was hovering above her, his arms corded with muscle, holding his amazing body just above her. He was completely naked and fully aroused. The sight was so spellbinding, Jayden couldn't remember the question as she stared in awe at the view; completely forgetting the monster she'd just witnessed.

His hand on her chin, firm and commanding,

brought her back to her senses. "What is your name?" he said again.

"Jayden," she whispered, too captivated by his touch to say more.

He was leaning into her, his lips but a breath away from hers when he stopped, his back going rigid as his head shot up and he scented the night. His eyes darted everywhere.

"What is it?" she whispered, his apprehension filling her with worry.

"You must leave here," he told her, his voice at once low and gruff and filled with hatred. His eyes were angry as he scanned the darkened forest.

"What? Why? I can't. I can't even feel my body," she said, panic rising in her voice.

"They are coming." He looked down at her, his eyes began bleeding out to silver orbs of shadowed light. Then he was pulling Jayden up off of the ground and shoving her towards the path that led up towards the lot where her car was.

"Go." The command in his voice sent her stumbling along the path before she even knew what she was doing. Pausing, she turned back to look at him. He was already changing, his form shimmering in the moonlight. His body convulsed, muscles rippling and fur flowing. A huge black wolf appeared in his place.

"Holy fucking shit!" Jayden exclaimed, stumbling in the darkness, her body not complying with her requests to move. The drugs were too far into her system, and she could barely remain upright.

"Run," he growled, and from all around her the

bushes along the tree line shook with life. She could smell the forest coming alive as movement erupted on all sides. Her feet began moving before her body realized what she was doing.

She was trying to sprint up the dirt trail, but she couldn't get her rubbery legs to work. The loose rocks beneath her feet tripped her up, causing her to stumble. Her knee ground into the first protruding stump it could find on the path. Her arms went out in front of her, but even they were too weak to break her fall.

Landing face first on the path, she scraped her palms, her chin slamming into the hard-packed earth. "Fuck!" she swore as the knee of her jeans ripped open along with her skin, the warmth of blood pouring down the front of her leg. A noise to her right had her turning her head just as something big and black tore through the trees.

CHAPTER TWO

Rionon caught the scent of Chazell as he burst through the edge of the thick foliage, the girl directly in his path. "Son of a bitch!" Rionon roared taking off at a lope up the narrow path. He'd be damned if he let Chazell have her.

Rionon was twice the size of the grey wolf and was three steps ahead of him as he dove into Jayden, just as she was getting to her feet. *Forgive me*, his mind whispered. Despite her screams of terror, he drew back his lips and bit deeply into her shoulder.

Blood filled his mouth like a warm fount of liquid heaven, her lifeblood, memories of her human life roaring through his mind in a mirage of blinding images. Rionon gasped, emotion and shock rocking through him. He stared in amazement at the screaming girl, her blood and memories filling him with life.

It was impossible. She was impossible. No human had ever been known to be able to share their memories with the Lycan. Only one's true mate could share their past in a blood taking. And yet...

At that moment, Chazell slammed into him, breaking the bond. Rionon's lips ripped from Jayden's flesh as they rolled over each other, her memories gone from him as though he'd never known them. A piece of Rionon felt her loss.

Relax, Rionon, you can have the remnants of my meal when I'm through with her. Chazell laughed, lashing out at Rionon with a swipe of his claw. They were clinging to each other, teeth biting and nails clawing through the darkness.

The human is mine, Chazell, Rionon warned, snapping at his throat and coming away with fur. Three of Chazell's lackeys burst through the darkness surrounding them as they fought.

Rionon knew he needed to finish this before they decided to join the fray. Or worse, carried the girl off.

It's just a human bitch. What the hell do you care what happens to her? Chazell growled, taking a snap at Rionon's front leg as they rolled through the thick brush towards his brethren. He was working his way towards the others, needing their help to finish Rionon off.

It was always his way. Never able to do the job himself. That is how he'd managed to kill Riordan, his twin, for his place in the pack as Second. And now, Chazell was looking for a way to kill him too.

He was afraid that Rionon would seek his brother's revenge. That he or someone else would kill him, and steal his place as the pack's Second. It was a fear Chazell could never live with. Not as long as he drew breath.

So he and his lackeys worked as a team, killing off those among the pack he thought would stand against him. Killing those he thought would fight him and win. And there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Once challenged, they could fight, or accept Chazell's dominance over them. For most, they would

rather die than be led by Chazell. For many, that is exactly what they did. And it wouldn't be long before Chazell sought loftier rewards, such heights as pack leader.

No, Rionon could never allow that to happen. Not tonight. Not any night. His pack would never survive with Chazell as their leader, and well they knew it. The pack was just waiting for Rionon to recover from his twin's death. Waiting for him to take his place among them as Riordan once had.

It was no secret that their leader, Cahnah, was ailing. But he had chosen his circle well. It was always thought that when the time came that Riordan would step in and take Cahnah's place, and Rionon would be Riordan's Second. A succession of choice. One without bloodshed. One by pack declaration. One with honor for their ailing King.

But Chazell had loftier dreams. Dark dreams. And lately he had been taking the path to see those dreams come to fruition.

Riordan's unexpected death had been a blow to the pack and to Rionon. As his twin, he had felt his brother's death far deeper than most. And without a mate to anchor him, he suffered, retreating from his pack and his duties. Chazell had used that time to work hard at driving a wedge deep into the pack, separating the clan.

It was time that Rionon returned, and put an end to Chazell's reign of madness.

Chazell swiped out with front claws, catching Rionon across the shoulder as one of his lackeys got close enough to dive forward, snapping at his back

leg. Unable to see who it was, Rionon kicked out with his other leg, catching the interloper across the eye and sending him scurrying in the darkness.

Another came to take his place, trying to assist Chazell as he tried to go on the offensive. But Rionon was too fast and too big for both of them. He swept out with his claws, catching the latest offender across the middle. As he spun back, Chazell was leaping forward. Rionon kept swinging, connecting with Chazell's throat.

The grey wolf was sent back a good ten feet with the force of the blow. He landed against a fallen tree trunk with a whimper and a thud. The other wolves scurried to surround their leader, protecting him from further harm.

"Leave this place, Chazell," Rionon warned, "and I'll not bring it before Cahnah. But cross me again in any way and you'll not live to see another moon."

The grey wolf slowly staggered to four paws, blood thick in his matted fur. It dripped along his throat as anger pulsed through his blood. Chazell was pissed that Rionon had bested him, furious that it was he and his beleaguered pack slinking off into the darkened forest.

When they reached the edge of the tree line Chazell stopped and turned to glare at the large black wolf, hatred filling his dark eyes. "This is far from over between us, Rionon," he vowed.

Headlights in the parking lot had Rionon sprinting towards the thickest brush.

CHAPTER THREE

"Nick. Jayden. You guys down there?" The voices echoing through the darkness made Rionon want to lash out with more violence. He had to get them out of here before they found the girl or their friend's remains.

"Nick. Jayden," the male voice called from the lot above. "Lynn, I don't see anyone down along the beach. Maybe they took off and went back to his place," Jeff said as he called from the parking lot, squinting into the darkness. Lynn was Jayden's best friend, and she had all but forced him to drive her out to Turner's Creek to check on her when she didn't answer her cell phone at the agreed-upon time.

"I don't think Jayden would do that. Maybe you should go down there and look for them," Lynn said, leaning over the open door of the car.

Rionon knew he needed to hurry. Jayden was on the path, just a few feet from the top. Scurrying through the edge of the tree line and thick brush, he crept up the side of the hill, keeping to the shadows.

"Fine," Jeff said, starting towards the path, a sigh of resignation escaping his lips. As soon as his feet met the dirt path, Rionon bolted from the bushes, stopping just a few feet in front of the car, the girl—Lynn—directly in his sights.

"Jeff!" Lynn screamed, jumping in the car and

slamming the car door. She laid on the horn, yelling his name in unison with the pulse of the horn. Startled, Jeff turned in time to see the large black wolf just inches from the edge of his car.

"Holy shit!" he said, stumbling backwards. "Open my door, Lynn. Open my fucking door!" He was backpedaling so quickly he all but fell into the car, tripping over his feet as he went. He had the car in reverse and was peeling out of the lot before he even had his door shut.

"Did you fucking see that thing? Did you? It was fucking huge!" he was yelling. The door slammed closed from the force of the wheel cranking as he shifted into drive.

"Jesus Christ, Jeff. We can't just leave. What if Jayden's down there?"

"That thing could have attacked us!" he screamed. "Sorry, babe. I know she's your friend and all. But with that thing out there in the darkness...she's on her own."

* * * * *

Jayden swore she heard the crickets chirping as she forced her body to roll over. She was finally lying on her back, and the world looked and felt just as shitty as it did before. Only now her shoulder hurt far worse from moving it.

She couldn't make her body move any more than she already had, and trying to get up was obviously out of her realm of possibilities. So she lay on the ground, her body shaking in pain and what she was

sure the beginnings of shock, and stared at the ink-black sky above. As she watched the stars twitch and glimmer above her, a dark shadow rolled across her vision, blocking out the brilliance of the night.

"You again, huh?" she said, not at all surprised to see the dark-haired stranger. This time he had returned to the form of a man; striking and still mysterious in the darkness.

And still completely naked.

Where the hell are his clothes? she wondered, too perplexed by the whole situation to grasp onto anything else.

"It would appear so," Rionon replied, intrigued by her lack of fear of him. "It is time we leave this place, Jayden. I must see to your wounds. And you and I have much to discuss."

"Well, unless you plan on lugging me around the forest in all your naked glory, I'm afraid I'm just going to have to lie here and die," she told him, a hint of annoyance breaking through her strained voice. "You see, there was this thing that I thought was a man but wasn't, who decided it might be fun to take a fucking chunk out of my shoulder." She gritted her teeth as pain lanced through her with the rush of adrenaline. "And while he was at it, he took half my damn blood as well. So I'm a bit short on the will to do anything at the moment," she stated, sarcasm dripping from each word.

Rionon winced at the anger in her voice. "I am sure I deserve your anger to a degree. But had I not marked you, you would already be dead. Or worse." He bent down and lifted her effortlessly into his arms.

Jayden cringed as pinpricks of pain sparked throughout her body. He lifted her easily, her body fitting snugly against him. She had no idea where he was taking her, but at the moment—though she was loath to admit it—it was better than being left for dead in the forest.

He carried her effortlessly as he ambled up the path towards her car. “Where are you taking me?” she asked.

He opened her passenger door and set her as gently as possible inside. “To my cabin,” Rionon said, shutting her into the dark quietness of her beat-up old Nova. It was a place she never thought to see the inside of again. When he got behind the wheel, he turned to her, his long dark hair sweeping over his shoulders, and Jayden was once again captivated by the dark ruggedness of him. He watched her from the darkness of the car, and her heart pulsed a little faster as their eyes found each other in the hushed silence.

“Do you have the keys?” His voice rumbled through her, and things low and tight sparked to life.

“They’re in my pocket,” she replied, her voice low, her heart thundering. She could still feel the affects of the drug that Nick had slipped her. She wasn’t entirely sure if it was that or the loss of blood, but everything about this man made the world seem woozy.

“Can you give them to me?”

Jayden could only shake her head no. They were in her front left jean pocket. It was her left shoulder that he had bitten into and torn open. There was no way in hell she was going to be able to dig in that pocket and

fish out those keys. If he wanted them, he was going to have to get them himself.

Briefly, he watched her, then licked the fullness of his lips. She closed her eyes, her stomach a mad flurry...from worry or anticipation, she wasn't sure. Suddenly he was next to her and she hadn't heard him move, but when the heat of his body was pressed alongside of her she opened her eyes. His face just inches away, his breath whispering against her cheek.

With his silver eyes boring into her, she felt the warmth of his fingers on the waistband of her jeans. Then his long, dexterous fingers were inching their way into the edges of her pocket, riding along her hipbone as he maneuvered them deeper.

"You're going to have to lean back a little," he whispered, his breath growing hot along her collar.

Jayden stretched out her legs in front of her and his hand slipped deeper into her pocket, his fingers skimming along the line of her panties. He watched her with intense focus as her breath grew heavy in her lungs.

Rionon palmed the sleek edge of her hip bone, his fingers so close to the juncture of her thigh and her sex that she felt like she would implode with desire as need filled the tight enclosure of the car, sparking a yearning deep inside of her. She wondered if he could feel the thundering beat of her heart while his fingers danced over the line of her pulse. Wondered if his own pulse quickened.

"Don't even breathe," he warned, his voice so deep and gravelly that Jayden was about to overload on lust. "If you wish to make it out of this car, do not so

much as twitch." His fingers found the edge of the keychain and he ever so slowly pulled them from her pocket.

He was across the car, and it was whipping out of the lot before Jayden finally took a breath. Even then they were small and shallow, just enough to remind her lungs what air felt like.

Jesus, Jayden, what have you gotten yourself into now? she wondered as her car swerved down the road. Who the hell knew that getting one's keys could cause such a damn inferno?

He was driving like a crazy person, clipping down highway five at about eighty when she finally realized she had no idea who he was or where he was taking her. And other than *his cabin*, it didn't sound like a good idea.

Jayden glanced over at him in the darkness. His hands, gripping the wheel, were white-knuckled, and his arms corded with muscle. He had the window down and his long black hair was blown back from his face, giving her an excellent view of his chiseled features.

His bearing was so intense and powerful, yet there seemed something about him that was sad. Broken, almost. Like he had lost something or was missing a piece of himself. She couldn't quite grasp it, but it was there, etched in the creases of his eyes.

"So are you going to tell me your name, or are you just going to kidnap me and haul me off into the night?" she asked, far too intrigued by this strange man for her own piece of mind. It seemed to be a bad trait with her.

She had a habit throughout her life of trying to find the best in people, believing there was good in them, despite what current circumstances told her. It had gotten her into trouble time and time again, from bad boyfriends to the alcoholic father who left and kept coming back always seeking her help, her trust, and her love. She'd always give it, and she'd always get burned.

But that was just who she was. She saw the good in people no matter how bad they seemed to be, or how bad they treated her. She still held onto hope.

His gaze rested on her for the first time since they had whipped out of the parking lot and a jolt of excitement thrilled through her. He was such a contradiction of a man, large and imposing; such an opposite to her small, petite frame. Dark features, and hair and those intense liquid eyes—so mysterious, like a moonlit night, where she was more an autumn-splashed forest in the peak of full bloom—hair of redwood and sun-spun gold, eyes like dark almonds.

Time hung suspended, their eyes locked and she wondered if he were ever going to tell her. A quirk of a smile finally reached her lips, the moment stretching too thin.

"My name is Rionon," he finally said, and she swore she could feel the easing of some small tension.

Releasing the breath she'd held too long, she lightly replied, "And are you going to tell me *what* you are?"

Headlights danced across the oasis of his dark eyes, the sparkle stirring a wellspring of emotion in the pit of Jayden's belly, her fingers clutching

SONG OF THE WOLF

instinctively the edge of the seat for fear that the rush would topple her over. His whispered, "Perhaps," rushed through her bones one syllable at a time, almost more than her frazzled nerves could bear.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rionon's cabin was off the highway on some little-seen dirt road. If you didn't know it was even there, you'd mistake it for a deer path. Jayden was certain her shocks and tie rods weren't up to the task as her old Chevy Nova bounced its way down the twisted, and heavily rut-covered path.

When they finally reached the cabin, she was shocked to find it more than just a shanty held together by sticks and covered with a tin roof. In fact, it appeared to be an authentic hand cut cabin; each log appearing to be gouged out and stacked together like actual Lincoln Logs.

"Wow!" she said, getting out of the car only to stand on shaky legs. She tried to push the car door shut behind her, an awkward, heavy task in her current condition. Rionon was beside her before she even heard him move, holding her up with the lightest touch.

"Do you like it?"

"Yes. It's amazing. I don't think I've ever seen anything like it before. It's so...so...real."

He laughed and his whole face lit up, making Jayden feel at ease, the knot loosening in her belly, the tension lightening just that little bit from between her shoulder blades. "Come," he told her. "I must see to your wounds." She started to follow him, her steps at

first sure and steady as he led the way into his home, seemingly unafraid despite all that had happened to her. But with each small step, the world grew fuzzy. Spots, white then grey, flashed before her. When her head began to spin and her legs crumpled beneath her, the last thing she knew was the warm firmness of Rionon's touch as he caught her.

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Rionon swept her into his arms before she had a chance to crumple to the ground. Jayden had no idea what she was getting herself into. Her guilelessness was so refreshing to him, her beauty and innocence breathtaking. And that worried him.

He had been used to women in the pack who wanted to be with him for a status symbol. For a reason of territory, or a place of rank. It would be nice to be with someone who didn't see him as a means to improve themselves. But there was something else about Jayden, something in her blood that his blood recognized. And he needed to know why.

He carried her into his cabin, through the small front room, past the kitchen and into the only bedroom. His cabin was small but neat. All of the furniture he'd hand made. The linens were passed down from his mother's family.

Quilts and hand-sewn curtains decorated the bed and windows. In his small kitchen, a hand-stitched tablecloth covered the table. His home was rustic and comfortable. Despite the lack of amenities, warmth filled the small spaces.

While Jayden lay passed out cold on his bed, oblivious to everything around her, he watched her. Quietly taking in her features, trying to discern what it was about her that stirred in the pit of his stomach.

He stood there for some moments gazing over her trim shapely figure. The way the light danced softly on her pale features. The shape of her eyes. The way her long dark hair was spread out on his pillow.

Then something inside him jerked with awareness. It came to him like a hard slap to the snout. Mystical and secretive; rumors only spoken of in hushed whispers, old stories told of by their Elders. A story as old as time itself. A story about a people—the one true people—who could mate with the Lycan. A people with the power to tame the very beast within them—the power to increase their strength tenfold—the power to make them whole. With a mate such as this, a Lycan was said to be able to call another's beast at will and hold that beast's power within his hands.

To find a mate such as this was extremely rare. To find *this* mate meant that he would become pack leader.

"It can't be," he whispered as he cocked his head, considering the girl at rest on his bed. Maybe it was a trick of his mind, he thought, but he swore as he stood there and watched, the wound on her shoulder glimmered with light. Healing just a little, while he watched in awestruck silence.

Rionon growled, anger, fear and overwhelming awe at the impossibility rushing through him, awakening his beast to the magic. Amazement poured through his body, the possibilities too

incredible to believe and yet, her wound shimmered with a sparkling glow. The punctures closed, new soft skin beginning to form, covering her shoulder in mere seconds while he stood astounded by this discovery.

When her healing was complete, Jayden's eyes flew open, her breath escaping in a rush. Her back bowed and all of her pain seemed to escape in a single fluid motion, passing as quickly as it came before she settled once again against the mattress. It was then her eyes found Rionon's in the dark.

"You have much to explain," he told her, anger, uncertainty and possession jumbled together with a million questions he wanted to ask before his emotions got the better of him. For now though, he would wait, hard as it might be, for her to freely give him the truth.

"Do not even think of leaving this place. You owe me an explanation, Jayden," he said, his arms crossed over his straining chest. "And I will have it."

* * * * *

Jayden could feel his anger across the room. She glanced from his face to the door behind him. He stood solidly in front of it, blocking her path. Blocking any means of escape. She knew she was in trouble. He wanted the truth from her. A truth that she'd never spoken of to anyone. A truth that she, in fact, knew very little of. How was she to tell him when she didn't even have all of the answers?

She was different from other people. She knew that. Had known it all of her life. But she didn't know

exactly who or what she was, or even where she'd come from. She had a drunk for a father. A mother she didn't know. How could she make him accept that? Accept her?

"I can't," she whispered, her eyes closing as the lie escaped in a hushed plea for understanding.

Rionon was across the room and was on top of the bed straddling her before she could take her next breath. "You will tell me," he growled. He suddenly grabbed both of her arms and pulled them above her head, the fire in his eyes lighting a flame in her belly, the command in his voice burning a hole in her heart. His body sank against her, his groin riding her waist, her body stretched out beneath his like an offering. She watched the light in his eyes sear to liquid silver, hunger and need reflecting back at her.

Her gaze never left his, her heart pounding wildly in her chest. She was helpless beneath him, her shirt just barely covering her. His bare chest resting just a few inches above her, the earthy, woodsy scent of him engulfing her senses. Rionon had slipped on a pair of jeans but they were unbuttoned; the heat and weight of him above her sent her nerves out of control. She could feel his anger and the roll of his desire as it coiled in the air around them.

"I have tasted your blood, and it has called to me like only a mate can do," he growled, dark need and hunger filling each word, reverberating through her. He was holding back, trying to keep his emotions in check and barely hanging on to them. She could see it in the strain around his eyes, the tick of his jaw.

"It is said among my kind that there is but one

mate for us, and we know them by blood."

Silence stretched between them, the weight of his words sinking into Jayden's soul like a lost memory.

"It is your blood I have tasted, Jayden," he continued. "Your blood I know like a childhood memory—a vision my heart can't forget."

Memories, fragile and deep like long lost stars flashed in her mind. She felt the first stirrings of tears mixed with her unspoken fears as she watched this man who had captured, not only her person, but was slowly capturing her soul.

"Who are you?" he questioned.

The answers lodged in her throat.

"Only one other people can call to us by blood. One other that can know my spirit as though it were their own." The fierceness of his words sent a shockwave through her. Hope, fear and so much uncertainty. What was she to do?

"Tell me who and what you are," he demanded.

His face was so close to hers she could feel his breath on her neck, see the swirl of his silver eyes as his emotions rolled through him.

"La Fey," she finally whimpered, her heart in her throat.

"What?"

"Fey. I am Fey," she cried."

Rionon's lips were on hers before she could utter another sound. Kissing her as though he could climb inside of her. His lips were warm and demanding, his tongue seeking entrance. She did the only thing she could do. The only thing she wanted to do since she'd seen him. She allowed him in.

* * * * *

Rionon released her wrists, delving his fingers into the dark warmth of her hair, plundering the hot sweet warmth of her mouth. Kissing the only lips he ever wanted to kiss again. Slowly he nipped and licked his way along the bow of her bottom lip, across the small peak of her chin and up the line of her jaw until he found the pulse point just below her ear. There he nipped and nuzzled, seeking acceptance of his mate. Relishing in the scent and taste of her.

It was almost too much for him to believe that he had found her. He wanted to wrap himself in the joy of the moment, but he knew he could not. He knew with a bone-weary tragedy that he would first have to be certain that her magic had truly healed her before he could have her. And the only way for him to be sure was to complete the sacred bonding ritual.

A ritual he was certain would bring her pain.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jayden became lost in the taste and feel of Rionon's lips on hers as he explored her mouth. With each graze of his tongue on hers, each nip of his teeth, her body thrilled as passion erupted through her body. Just the feel of his hands in her hair, holding her in the strength of his arms, she knew she would never fear her safety again.

Somehow telling him who and what she was had been so freeing. It was like he knew, like he'd known all along, and her soul had come home. It was amazing and frightening and wondrously incredible and she never wanted the feeling to end.

He was kissing her passionately. As though she were the most delectable creature on earth and he couldn't get enough of the taste of her. Just the feel of his lips on her made her entire body constrict with need. And the way he nuzzled the point beneath her ear. God! Who knew something could feel so incredible?

Then without warning, he stopped. Suddenly Rionon was sitting up on the bed, his knees straddling her waist. His dark hair hung over his shoulders, covering the sides of his face, and all she could see was the silver glow of his eyes as he stared down at her. There was a dark hunger to his expression, a glimmer of sadness that seemed to pass

so quickly, Jayden questioned if she even saw it. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"We must make certain you are fully healed before we go any further," he told her, his voice careful. Rionon had a lost, faraway look in his eyes that Jayden could not understand. One moment he was filled with longing and hunger; she could feel it with every breath she took, every caress of his lips on hers. Then suddenly he was retreating, pulling away from her.

Even now, she watched his eyes fill with regret. She couldn't understand how healing her could bring him sorrow.

"Rionon, tell me what is wrong." She rose up beneath him so that they were now eye-to-eye. Gently she laid her hand against his heart and said, "Whatever troubles you have, we can face together. You have but to tell me and I will try not to be afraid."

"I don't want to hurt you," he said, and she watched the worry and fear form in his eyes.

Jayden hesitated biting her bottom lip as she considered what all of this meant. She had almost been raped, nearly been killed by a pack of...what? Wolves. No, she knew they weren't normal wolves. Had Rionon said they were? "Will I become like you?"

* * * * *

Rionon brushed the length of her hair over her shoulder and held her face in his cupped hands. "You

will be Lycan and so much more," he said, his voice filling with conviction and emotion.

"Will it hurt?" she whispered.

He watched the light dance in the warmth of her dark brown eyes, picking up the small flecks of gold that glistened around her pupils. Eyes that seemed so trusting even now. Eyes that reflected the warmth of her soul.

Rionon felt he could stare forever into their warm, dark depths. Warm himself forever by the fire that burned brightly within her. That was her gift. The gift of the Fey. Love and Light. They filled the world with their tranquility, brought peace and beauty to the land and the beasts that walked it.

He knew that for him to finally know his own peace, he would first have to bring her pain. He would have to show her the madness and darkness of his beast. And that knowledge made him falter. There was nothing in this world he would rather not do than cause her to suffer.

"Know that I would never intentionally hurt you, Jayden," he whispered his eyes serious, his voice deep with unspent emotion. "But to heal you, I must bind you to me as my mate. I must take your blood and your memories into myself. As you must do so to me. Then, and only then, will we be as one."

Rionon looked deep into her eyes, wishing he could answer any other way. Wanting to promise her that it would be painless, but he knew he could never lie to her. "Yes, it will hurt."

"The Fey are respected among my people, Jayden. You will never be harmed again. As my mate, I will

always protect you. As will my pack."

"Will you love me?"

"Only you and no other," he growled, wanting to kiss her so badly he could already taste her lips upon his own. But he didn't want to persuade her. This had to be her decision, one she made without coercion or temptation.

"I was yours from my first breath, Rionon," she told him, conviction clear in every word.

Pulling her tightly against him, love overflowing from his heart, Rionon had never in his life ever thought to feel such emotion again. Not since his brother Riordan's death had torn open his soul and left him empty and wandering the great wilderness did he ever dream of feeling such completion again. But she had given this to him. She had brought him this peace.

He was kissing her as though he could drown the two of them with the love that poured from his lips into her own. Heat and fire kindling the flames, desire sparking like an out-of-control forest fire, threatening to burn them in the heated blaze of their mutual need.

Rionon clung to Jayden, kissing and nipping his way along her bottom lip, his breath heavy as his passion increased. Ravenous, he lost his hands in the thick length of her hair, clinging to her, his pulse hammering in his chest. His beast was so close to the surface he could feel it stretching against his skin, seeking purchase for release from the cage of his body.

Jayden's moans of need as she succumbed to Rionon's hungry demand urged him on, his lips on

hers sending fire coursing through him, sparking through every limb, her pulse racing in rhythm with his own.

"Do not fear me," he whispered just before his canines bit through her throat.

Her entire body convulsed in pain, her eyes stark with horror, back rigid and arms flailing as she tried desperately to push him away from her. But the creature whose elongated muzzle was clamped tightly onto her throat was not the same as the man she'd just sworn her heart to. Though he had the same liquid silver eyes and long dark hair, his face was once again part beast and he held her life trapped within his razor-sharp teeth.

She tried to scream, but Rionon only clamped on tighter, blood pouring down the side of his jaw. She shoved and struck him repeatedly with her fists. Her arms flailing uselessly, trying to get him to release her but he only wrapped his arms around her body, locking her arms to her sides.

Do not fight me, Jayden. It will only hurt worse. The words were somewhere between a whisper and a growled plea. Her body shook with pain, then began to go limp, her struggles subsiding with the increased loss of blood.

Rionon, she whispered, her mind calling out to him.

I am here.

Am I dying?

You must leave this human plane to walk my world with me. Do not fear, Jayden. I am here. I will not leave you, he told her as her body went limp in his arms. It was then that his jaws released her.

She was covered in blood, but she was still just barely breathing. Not quite ready to cross over to his plane. Rionon knew instinctively he still had the time he needed to complete the binding ritual.

He laid her back against the pillows, her breath shallow and the wound in her throat bubbling and gaping from his teeth. His beast roared through him, pacing in the confined walls of his human body. It wanted him to hurry as it hungered for its mate.

Closing his eyes briefly, Rionon laid his palm across Jayden's heart and taking her left hand, placed it against the wildly erratic beat of his own. In a voice trapped between the two worlds of mystery and life, he said, "I call upon the old ones, the keepers of earth and light, shadow and magic. I call upon my brothers, my sisters, my fathers before me. I call my love to my heart, my soul, and my flesh. I bind you, Jayden LaFey—Love of my Love, Light of my Light, Soul of my Soul, to walk with me in the Great Forest as our kin have done all the lifetimes before us, that we may never part."

As Rionon finished the words, he extended one clawed finger across his left wrist, slicing a deep wound into his flesh. He then took his bleeding wrist and allowed the blood to first flow over the gaping wound in Jayden's throat. Then, before his own natural ability to heal could begin, he cut himself deeper so that the wound bled more, and laid it over her parted lips.

CHAPTER SIX

The rush and surge of power as it flowed through Jayden's mind and body was electric. She felt like the earth must feel when the rain finally comes after a long drought and the shriveled roots have reached the land of the dying. When that small magnificent drop of dew glimmers on the tip of its tiny shoot for one precious moment before life goes rushing through its limbs. It was there like a glimmer of hope, stretching and sparking in her body like magic, a dawning upon the world as the first breath of birth brings forth hope.

Her chest heaved, air rushing through her lungs in a gulping gasp, thick enough to choke on. And yet so pure and clean that she couldn't get enough of it into her lungs.

It was then that she realized that she was healed, and that she was forever changed. As she opened her new eyes upon the new world in which she dwelled, she found Rionon poised above her, dark and mysterious and oh, so beautiful.

"Rionon," she moaned, reaching for him.

His lips found hers in a searing kiss. Sealing the bonds between them and sealing their fates.

Excitement thrilled through her as Rionon began to touch her with dark need. Ripping at the remnants of her shirt, his nails extending and tearing it to shreds

in lust-filled abandon.

She was just as quickly pulling on his jeans, shoving them below his hips, pushing them lower until his engorged sex sprang free. The heat of her hand quickly taking it into her palm, stroking him.

"I must have you," she stated, her dark almond eyes flashing to gold as her beast lurked in the madness of her desire.

His only response was to growl as he discarded her remaining clothes, paying little attention to the way he removed them or where he threw them. His hunger and need seemed to match her own. He moved and shifted her beneath him, spreading her legs to fit between them. Reaching between the juncture of her thighs, he stroked his way down to the apex of her sex, finding her swollen and wet with need of him.

Rionon leaned into her, taking her mouth, plunging his tongue into its warm heat, tasting and sucking and nipping until she thought she would die from his kisses. When his fingers spread her nether lips and he plunged a finger deep into the heat of her body, working her into a frenzy as his tongue did, she could only groan with delight, the fire of desire rushing through her body.

She could feel the shaft of his desire solid with need of her. Her own body, aching, wept at his touch. Taking his engorged flesh in his hand, he pressed himself against her warm entrance and as Jayden's breath caught, he filled her in one long thrust.

The world erupted into bursts of magical lights behind Jayden's eyes as her body rocked with the first

rush of her orgasm. Then Rionon began to move, and the contractions began anew.

She could only feel as a million new emotions erupted through her senses. Sight and sounds and feelings the likes of which she had never known flowed from Rionon into her as though they were one complete being. Closing her eyes, she felt the ebb and flow of the earth, smelled the scent of the pines, and felt the call of the moon. And deep in her heart, she could feel Rionon like the long lost love that she knew he was.

Hard and quick he pumped into her, their mutual need taking them to heights they'd never experienced. Jayden felt his beast roaring through him with elation as her body constricted and quivered around him, and he only gripped her hips tighter, pumping himself deeper into the heat of her body as they searched for heaven.

"Oh, God, Rionon," she moaned, her nails raking down his forearms, tiny rivulets of blood forming in the creases of their mark. He growled with what appeared to be elation, his beast howling inside her head.

Jayden's wolf answered and she felt it slam against her, her back bowing as her orgasm rocked through her body, carrying Rionon with her. He screamed her name as he shifted, his shaft still buried deep inside her. And her beast answered his call.

They ran that night in the forest, two dark shadows beneath the moon; one as dark as the night itself, the other, the warm, burnished amber of earth and fire. Two free spirits hunting the night, making love

beneath the waning moon.

When dawn approached, they returned to Rionon's cabin, exhausted and yet elated to have found each other. Making their way into the cabin, Rionon headed for the shower saying, "We can probably get a couple hours of sleep, but then we will have to go and see Cahnah. I won't be able to put off seeing him; the pack will know there has been a binding."

"Ah, but you see, Rionon," Chazell said, his voice carrying through the cabin like a dark vapor as he stood at the open front door, a knife to Jayden's throat, "the pack already knows."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rionon whirled around at the sound of Chazell's voice, anger, and hatred rushing though him and he could only see red. Red, so thick and deep, to match the blood he was going to spill from Chazell if he harmed one hair upon Jayden's head.

"Release her, Chazell," he growled, his voice thick with loathing. "Your quarrel is not with her, it is with me and me alone."

"But you see, Rionon," he said, twining a lock of Jayden's hair between his fingers, "that is where you are wrong."

Rionon's stomach clenched in anger and guilt as he watched Jayden's large brown eyes grow cloudy with fear. He should not have brought her into this. But he knew deep down inside him, where his memories, love and faith in his pack were stored, he had no choice. She was his mate. Without her, he was nothing. He needed her, not just to beat Chazell and defeat his reign of madness, but he needed her like the air he breathed.

"I intend to destroy all that you have and all that you are," Chazell was saying, scorn and disdain heavy in his voice. "Nothing of you will remain to get in my way of taking succession of this pack. You and your pathetic brother, along with our worthless leader, have run this pack into the ground. We are

weak and useless. Weak, when we could rule many. Useless, when we could use our will and strength to control all. We could be so much more. And I intend to do just that.”

Rionon took a step towards the burly man as anger rushed through him. He was certain Chazell’s madness would destroy their pack if he didn’t stop him.

It was rare that Rionon saw Chazell in his human form, for he so often chose to walk amongst his people either as the grey wolf whom he’d fought against so often, or as the Halfling that he was—the Were creature that man still feared in the darkest hours of the night.

Rionon used the moments of Chazell’s tirade of glory to study him anew, taking in his large husky frame and the way that he held himself. The way the morning light reflected the greying strands of hair around his face where it hung loosely in waves to his shoulders, even the wrinkled brow and the indenture of crow’s feet and the frown lines along his scruffy jaw.

Chazell was aging. It appeared it was now time for Rionon to make his move as leader, before time and too many battles took their toll on the aging warrior. His age would be both a benefit to Rionon, and a detriment.

The one would make him slower, as previous fights against him had shown. The other would give Chazell the skills and strategies of far too many battles to the death, making him a better tactician and a far more dangerous warrior than many believed

him to be.

"That's right, Rionon," he growled. "You will suffer this day. For there will be no Cahnah to plead your case to. No pack to stand behind you." A dark look of victory filled Chazell's pale brown eyes as he leered at Rionon, baring his teeth in a smile of evil delight, chilling Rionon to the bone.

"What have you done?" Rionon asked, afraid he already knew the answer.

"Your precious Cahnah is dead," he laughed. "This pack is mine."

"You bastard!" Rionon roared as he rushed towards Chazell his anger and fury clouding his judgment. Chazell pulled Jayden against him, stepping back away from Rionon's reach as he pressed his blade against Jayden's neck.

"Rionon, no!" Jayden screamed, the blade piercing her flesh, the ripe scent of blood filling the cabin. Chazell sliced her just enough to get everyone's attention. Enough to cause her pain, the sharp edge piercing her skin and the cloying scent of her blood filling his senses, bringing Rionon to a staggering halt.

Two of Chazell's goons came through the door and rushed him as guilt and grief overwhelmed his senses. They slammed him face first to the floor at her feet, jerking his arms behind his back as they bound him.

"Bring the dog," Chazell ordered as he dragged Jayden from the cabin. "Tonight, we will finish this."

* * * * *

Through out the long day they kept them separated; Rionon was chained to a stake in the middle of the pack's gathering circle for all to see. Chazell had made certain his men beat him repeatedly so that he was a bloodied, wounded husk, too weak to fight when the pack gathered beneath the moon and he laid Rionon's crimes before them.

The girl he took with him to his lodging. He was intent on using the time to call her beast over and over until she too was too weak to fight him, too weak to use her strength of will to aid her mate in the battle to come. He was certain that nothing would stand in his way.

Chazell struck her again as she continued to defy him. "I swear to you, Jayden, before this day is over you will change," he growled, "and I will have you beneath me like the bitch that you are. Now fucking change!" Chazell screamed as he threw her to the floor of his cabin, straddling her waist.

She could feel the pull of her wolf deep in the darkest recesses of her soul, thrashing against her like a trapped beast in the darkened forest. She could almost hear her howling her discourse to the very moon hidden in the waning light of day.

"I am alpha of this pack. My will is law!" he roared. Chazell began choking her, slamming her head against the floor, spittle running down the sides of his mouth as he lost control of his temper in his fit to control her. Their wills crashed against each other as she continued to defy him.

Jayden knew that if she succumbed to his demands and let her wolf free, she and Rionon were lost. She

was too newly turned. She did not yet have the strength of will to fight Chazell in the form of her beast, not fight him and win. But she now knew with certainty that she could fight him as she was.

For the first time in her life, she realized the power of her birthright. Rionon had given her that. Only he had known that she was different, and he celebrated that difference. Only he knew that she was Fey. And Chazell could never control that side of her.

He was slamming her against the floor, cutting off her oxygen, and she didn't fight him. Somehow she knew she had to secede this small battle to him. Like the earth knows the moon is rising, she knew she had to allow this one small sacrifice. This was a battle she would forfeit at her will—not by his. And in doing so, she could only hope it would buy Rionon the time he needed.

"Oh! You fucking stupid bitch!" Chazell bellowed as Jayden's eyes fluttered shut, unconsciousness skimming the edges of the insanity that had become her world. Chazell's slap as it connected with the side of her face was the last thing she felt as her head rocked against the floor and she fell into the comforting arms of blackness.

My love. Rionon's voice in her head was a softly glowing beacon that she clung to as the world around her fell away.

Rionon?

Jayden, I am here. His voice was a strained whisper filled with pain. *What has Chazell done to you?* he asked, unable to hide his worry or his strained weakness from his voice.

I am fine, Rionon. Merely resting, she said, and he could almost see the smile and joy to accompany the strength that filled her words. I know now what it is that I am, Rionon. I know my place among my people. You have given that to me, she told him. With all of your memories and your Lycan blood, you have shown me the path that I never knew was there.

Jayden's voice was filled with wonder as she explained to Rionon all that she had felt and remembered in her turning. How the forest came alive in sound, sight and touch beneath her feet as they had hunted through the night. She spoke of the many things she would have told him had Chazell not disrupted their lives. And she told him how something, like a distant spark brought on by a warm wind, now burned within her.

She explained, her voice rich with joy, love, compassion and deep-seated understanding of how the spark was the earth, and the wind was the power it harnessed. That was the gift, she told him. The true gift of the Fey.

Then there is hope, he said and she could hear the question, the love and faith in her overflowing from his words as his mind touched hers.

Rest, Rionon, she told him. Rest, and let the power of my people come to your aid.

In the darkness of Jayden's mind, she could see Rionon chained to the pole in the center of a half-walled rock circle. This was the pack's gathering place, the place of their power. He was chained like a dog, beaten, bloody, his body a mass of bruises and bloodied cuts. What should have been healed or

healing still dripped with blood because they came so often to inflect their pain upon him. They used pipes dipped in silver so that the wounds would not immediately heal, making sure the damage was at its most fatal.

She saw all of this as her mind touched his memories and she knew without doubt or uncertainty that Chazell had to die. There was no other way. He would only destroy more lives, harm more people if he were allowed to continue.

Jayden took a deep breath and reached through the darkness that she floated in for the beauty and healing of the earth. She could picture the warmth and comfort of the forest; lush and green and alive with life. It felt like a homecoming to her soul. Joy so wondrous surrounded her that a warm glowing heat filled her body, erasing all of the pain she had suffered at the hands of Chazell.

She could feel the liquid silver warmth of the moon calling out to fern and fauna; see the foliage opening their palms for the gentle touch of the moon's soft glow. Her wolf brushed against her like a well-loved pet, nudging her as glee and adoration filled her. Her beast, at home and happy in the warmth and light of earth, moon, and forest.

These were the powers the Fey wielded. The Lycan were creatures of earth and moon. Ruled by one, set free to wander the other as its hunter, its great protector.

When her soul was filled to overflowing and her wounds healed, she took all of that joy, comfort and healing love of the earth and channeled it to Rionon.

Rionon's breath left him and his body felt warm and numb, strong and whole. She withdrew the power from him, but not her touch, not her mind. *I must leave the surface wounds, my love. They cannot know that you are healed.*

I didn't know either, Rionon. You gave me this. You gave us this.

And I you.

Rionon! Jayden yelled. But their connection was broken.

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SONG OF THE WOLF



healing had been enough.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The sun was just setting over the dark peaks of the evergreens as the pack, the Dark Creek Clan, began to gather in the circle. Named for the way the moon's reflection hazed on the banks of Turner Creek, the pack had thrived on this land long before humans had settled.

There were at least fifty members, all in various stages of life; some came in suits and ties—businessmen dandies, while other wore street clothes, workout clothes, or cutoffs and raggedy T-shirts; some seemingly prepared for *the change*.

Looking out into the crowd, Jayden could feel the roll of power as it filled the clearing, men and women alike, bursting with the power of their beasts. She could tell some were stronger than others, but many—by the dour looks that passed their faces—were not happy to be there.

"What is the meaning of this meeting, Chazell?" A dark haired man in a business suit asked. He was older, going round about the middle, his olive skinned face showing the fleshy signs of age and wrinkles. His sideburns had a dusting of grey that made him look distinguished.

"You are not yet leader here, Chazell, to bid us to your beck and call." The man was pointing his finger at Chazell, the deep baritone of his voice low, like a

growl from an angry father.

There were mumbles throughout the crowd as people voiced their complaints. A few among them piping in with their support of the rogue leader.

“What are you up to, Chazell? Where’s Cahnah? And what have you done to Rionon? Why is he beaten and chained like the lowest dog among us?” a red-haired woman asked. She was in her late thirties, dressed in a long green cotton dress and brown sandals. Jayden could tell from the way that Chazell watched her—the way that all of them watched her—she held some power among the pack.

“You are witch here, Sedra. Don’t you know?” Chazell laughed, stepping forward into the crowd. He stalked towards the woman as two of his lackeys held Jayden’s arms to keep her from moving.

The woman, Sedra, watched Chazell with cold blank eyes as he casually made his way towards her, his features dark while he smirked at her. “What have you done?” she whispered, looking around the circle and for the first time opening herself up to the elements.

As the pack healer, she was attuned to the heart of the pack. She could sense when there was weakness, injury, and turmoil. It was the earth that allowed her the ability, and when there was a rift, it was the earth that allowed her to help heal it.

Horror washed over her, filling her dark cobalt eyes with the shadows of the death and evil that tainted the very place they held sacred. She could see it like a grey fog through her vision, feel it like sludge covering the soul.

Everyone in the pack could now see and feel it as well, so connected were they to their holy place. She searched their eyes in turn. Each one knew what Chazell had done, knowing now what he was capable of.

"I am alpha here now, witch," he bellowed, his voice ringing out through the darkness like the grumble of thunder as he stepped up to her and plunged his claws deep into her belly, without warning or inclination.

Shock rushed through Sedra as she fell forward into him, choking on whatever it was she had planned to say. Chazell dug deeper while she clung to him, speechless, death swarming around the edges of reason.

"Goodbye, Sedra," Chazell was saying. "I'm afraid your death is a necessity, you see. Can't have you seeing any more of my deeds and have you sharing them with the others now can I?" he whispered against her ear.

Just beyond Chazell's shoulder, Sedra could see the one thing that Chazell couldn't. The girl, her aura burning like the brightest moon on the darkest night.

With her dying breath, Sedra's wolf howled, singing through the pack like a call of the wind. Heads were thrown back in succession, voices growling out their mournful wails, the night filled with their outcry as wolf after wolf sang in sorrow the passing of their pack mate.

Jayden too had little choice but to join in the voices that were raised. Only those that were strong enough and old enough fought their beast's need and

suppressed their animal's call.

"Enough!" Chazell roared, his voice cutting through the majestic harmony of the wolf song.

"You would deny us even this, Chazell?" the elder wolf-man questioned, anger and disbelief heavy in his voice, his eyes quizzical as he looked around the circle for someone young enough, strong enough to put a stop to this.

"I am leader here, Degren. If you don't like it and think you're still wolf enough—then challenge me." There was amusement in Chazell's voice, and with it, knowledge. He knew he was in the position of power. He had done his groundwork well, already having challenged and killed those he thought would fight him for succession when the time came.

Those who *were* foolish enough had met their end, either by his own hand, or with the help of those loyal to him. There had only been a handful that needed to die, but it was enough to make his point and wield his terror with.

"Is there no one?" He laughed. "You are weak. All of you." Disgust filled the rough growl of his voice. "Cahnah ruled you with passivity. He catered to your human whims and demands like an overrun father. He ruled you as a teacher of petulant, spoiled children giving in to whatever petty demands you wanted."

Chazell was wandering the circle, approaching each member in turn. "You have forgotten the old ways," he told them. "When we ran as beasts, and took what we wanted. When we ruled this land and all that was in it. I intend to bring back the days of

glory to the Lycan. The days when humans bowed before us. The days when all the land in this valley belonged to the Dark Creek Clan.

"And you, my brothers and sisters who stand before me. You will reap the benefits of my rule." His voice echoed into the night as he threw back his head, arms extended to the moon, and howled his delighted madness for all to hear.

"Chazell, I challenge you."

The voice, splitting the hum of lunacy in the darkness, broke through Chazell's tirade like a bolt of lightning strikes a tree; harsh, edgy, and charged full of power. The crowd had all moved towards Chazell when he began his diatribe, the call of the pack filling each of them in turn with his power and the power of their holy place. But as Rionon's voice lashed out, it was like the warm hand of the moon washed through them, clearing their minds as nothing else could.

The crowd parted and Chazell shoved his way through their center, forcing entry into the middle of the circle where Rionon was still chained. He expected to find him lying on the ground, wounded, beaten and weak. The man that stood before him was anything but.

"This is not possible," Chazell whispered, looking at Rionon with shocked disbelief rushing through his body. His face screwed up into an open-mouthed frown. "Who did this? How have you healed? I will kill the person who has done this!"

Chazell was turning in a circle, eyeing the crowd, searching for the culprit who could have offered aid to his prisoner. His eyes alighted on Sedra, where

he'd left her for dead. "Did she do this?" he roared, pointing towards the crumpled body of the witch.

"It matters not, Chazell," Rionon told him. "Your reign of the Dark Creek Clan is at its end. I cannot let you live for the lives you have taken—Cahnah's, Sedra's, so many others, in your fight for ascension to leader of this pack—including the death of my brother, Riordan. All of which you must pay for."

Chazell turned to Rionon, threw his head back and laughed, his bark of laughter turning into the growl of his wolf. "And what do you think you will do to stop me, chained as you are?" He pulled a gun from the back of his waistband and pointing it at Rionon.

The silver pistol shimmered in the light of the moon, all eyes riveted to it as Chazell jacked a shell into its chamber, one collective breath ricocheting through the pack. Rionon flexed to break the chain, and Chazell pulled the trigger. The circle erupted, men and women running in all directions, panic ensuing in the melee. Some were yelling to take cover, others howling as Chazell kept firing.

The first bullet took Rionon in the left shoulder.

Jayden screamed, "Rionon!" His pain was a blow she could almost feel.

He dropped to the ground, rolled and pulled the chain with him as people continued to scramble, fear coursing through the pack like a conduit for a storm. He pulled the chain taut until it flexed in his grasp, the link stretching to the breaking point, finally setting him free. All the while, Chazell was randomly firing into the crowd like a madman.

People were screaming all around him, the scent of

fresh blood permeating the air as a few of the bullets met flesh, causing the younger wolves to turn; spurring a frenzy of change within the circle.

"I'm going to fucking kill you, Rionon!" Chazell ranted, standing within the circle, aiming his gun directly towards Jayden.

"Rionon!" Jayden's voice was filled with panic and horror. Two of Chazell's goons clutched her between them, each one struggling to hold on to her as she lashed out, trying to get loose before she became Chazell's next victim.

Rionon stood up in the circle and ran straight for Chazell.

He sighted down the barrel and took aim. "Do you hear me, Rionon? I will kill all that you love and you will have nothing."

As Rionon leapt his wolf, black as the darkest night, tore free of his flesh, the change so quick and fluid that he didn't even feel it, anger driving him on. Jaws open, he lunged for Chazell's throat. The gunshot rang out, the two of them hitting the ground with a resounding thud.

Chazell was in mid-change as Rionon lunged for his throat again, determined to strike the killing blow. A breath separated them, fury pushing Rionon on. Then suddenly Chazell's claws tore down his sides, shoving him away. Chazell was still in mid-change, his muzzle elongating when Rionon completed his change to his werewolf form, the transformation so fast it was almost impossible. It happened so rapidly and fluidly that he barely felt it and yet deep in his mind, he could feel Jayden like a spark of light. The

warmth of the earth touching him, allowing the change to be so immediate, so seamless.

The thought of Jayden fueled his anger, causing him to rush Chazell. In his haste of fury he was rewarded with a claw across his belly, the wound gouging long and deep across his flesh. He countered with a left and connected with Chazell's jaw, rocking the beast back on his heels. He hit him again and Chazell's head snapped back, causing him to lose his footing.

Rionon was on him before he reached the ground. They scuffled and rolled through the circle, claws and teeth snapping, blood flying. At one point Chazell managed to get on top and was slamming Rionon's head into the ground, blocking his claws with his arm.

"You can not defeat me," he told Rionon. "I hold the power of this pack, I am leader here." He clutched Rionon's throat.

Rionon could feel the restriction of air weakening him and with the deep wound to his belly, he was losing strength. He knew he had been overzealous in his attack. Too quick to put an end to Chazell. Too angry and uncontrolled.

And it may have very well have cost him his life.

"I am leader!" Chazell was screaming. "Do you hear me?" He slammed Rionon's head against the ground. "There is nothing you can do to stop me! For your treachery, you and your mate will die this night! Kill the girl!" he spat, squeezing off the remaining supply of air to Rionon's lungs.

"No!" Degren yelled, rushing forward towards the

two men who held Jayden. "This stops here, Chazell. I'll not allow this murder," he said, his dark eyes focused on the two young warriors.

"Then you shall die as well," he growled. "Kill him."

The two young Weres released Jayden so suddenly that she fell to the ground, rushing the older werewolf, claws extended, teeth bared. In a frenzy of growls and fur the older Were turned, bursting out of his suit, his own claws extended from his hands, his muzzle and sharp canines ripping from his jaw as he met them head on.

As soon as Jayden hit the ground, she felt the power of the earth rush through her in a flood of electrical fire as it coursed through her body like points of light, and in that one moment she knew she had all the power she needed to aid Rionon. She knew that this was the pack holy place; a holy place as old as time itself, filled with the power of the Earth, the Moon and all of the Magic that each of them harnessed. And the power of the Fey was within her grasp. All she had to do was open herself to it.

Rionon...

I feel it, he whispered through her mind, his breath raspy and weak. And I am ready.

It was all she needed to hear. Jayden lay on the ground at the edge of the circle, belly flat to the earth, arms spread wide, palms flat and opened herself to her power. She called the power of the Fey within her; Earth, Moon, and Magic, and it filled her up, rushed through her body like love and light filling the world and she drove that power into Rionon.

His body convulsed under the weight of Chazell's grip, causing the Were to look at him with startled eyes as the power surged beneath his fingers. In the few seconds it took for Rionon to feed off Jayden's power and to heal, he was tearing Chazell's hands from his throat.

Horror rushed through Chazell's face as Rionon effortlessly threw him off of him and across the circle. Coming to his feet, Chazell stared in astonished rage at the creature who now stood in the middle of the circle, fully healed, filled with power. "No! This cannot be. I am leader here!" He rushed Rionon.

Only this time, Rionon was ready for him. He struck out with his claws, the move so quick that most did not even see it, eviscerating Chazell in mid-stride.

Chazell stood, horror stark across his features, the vile flame of his hopes and dreams skimming across the dark surface of his eyes until the ember faded. On a last gasp, loss and pain wheezing their way in a throat clenched in the dying shock of fear, he choked out a final "No..." before falling to the ground. Dead.

The wounded were gathered that night in the circle of the Dark Creek Clan, their new leader, Rionon, praised for his courage. And a new story was written in the history of their people. A story of faith and hope, unity and love. A story about how the Fey and the Lycan together battled over evil and cleansed their pack of its darkness.

"Don't forget the part about the old Werewolf who saved the life of the beautiful Fey princess," Degren murmured as his wounds were being tended.

"We'll never forget," Rionon said, gathering

Jayden into his arms and kissing her softly.
“We’ll never forget.”

K. A. M'LADY

K.A. M'Lady lives in the burbs of Chicago with her husband and three children. Author and Poet, she has dreamt of writing since she was young enough to hold a pen and dream of mystical kingdoms. Her poetry has appeared in Plum Ruby Review, Thundersandwich, Wild City Times, The Dead Mule, and others. Her first Poetry Chapbook, 'Crickets Don't Sing the Blues' is available with Lily Press - www.lilylitreview.com.

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