



## *Lycan It*

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## Chapter One

He fought the pack with the ferocity born of years of abuse and anger that tore at him. He'd never agreed on the brutal beliefs of his pack, but hadn't been strong enough to break free . . . until now. Or so he thought.

Last night, when Damon had dragged that poor woman in and used her in front of everyone while they laughed and egged him on, had been the last straw for Raze. The woman's terrified screams still echoed in his mind. He'd no longer been able to fool himself into believing that he could continue to witness the ever increasing violence.

The pack had been singling out women with the mating scent for months now, and while he'd known it was wrong, he'd forced himself to turn a blind eye. Every potential mate had two scents—a main scent, which all lycans could smell, and a mated scent, which could only be detected by a fated mate.

The lycans were dying out, and every potential mate was crucial and sacred in playing a role to revive their race. The alpha male, Damon, had decided that those with the scent were marked for one thing only. Sex. Raze, on the other hand, felt differently. Those who carried the main scent were supposed to be protected until their true mate was found, not brutalized.

When he'd first been born, the pack had had their faults, could act unusually generous or unusually brutal at any given time. For the most part, he'd been on the latter end of their actions, but the violence had been at a minimum for the most part. Over the years, things had gotten out of control and the pack had lost all trace of morality, and did what they pleased to whomever they pleased.

When he'd walked away from the den only a few moments earlier, he'd had no intention of ever returning. Those plans had abruptly changed when Damon had stepped into his path. Now, Raze was fighting for his freedom, a fight he was likely to lose as more pack members joined in. He was a skilled fighter and size was on his side, but he was no match for this many lycans at once. *You may win, but I'll make sure you know I was here, you bastards.*

His determination renewed by anger and desperation, adrenaline shot through him, and he shifted into full wolf form. He bit down hard on a leg

that had been mistakenly put close to his mouth, and a yelp told him he'd at least taken one of his attackers down. It was a losing battle, for every time he'd throw one body from him, another would take its place. Before long, his strength began to ebb, exhaustion slipped deep into his bones, and blackness started closing in on him. The last thing he remembered before tumbling into unconsciousness was teeth clamping around his neck.

When Raze came to, he was lying flat on his back, and had no idea how long he'd been out. Minutes? Hours? Longer? He tried to move, but his entire body screamed in protest. He was back in human form, and most of the wounds inflicted by the pack had healed, but the injuries must have been severe for him to feel pain at all. His body felt as if it was weighted down with lead, and every muscle ached.

He took a few deep breaths and rolled to a sitting position. It was several moments before he realized that the sound of chains rattling came with his movement. He looked down, reached up to his throat, and fury pulsed through him. A thick, iron cuff hugged his neck. A chain ran from it to the wall behind him where it was bolted into the rock. Son of a bitch! Even if he changed, he wouldn't be able to get free. He was such a large wolf when in his lycan form, the collar would likely choke him to death, a fact Damon exploited for this exact situation.

He was worse off now than before he'd tried to leave the pack. Now, he was the focus of attention, and he had no doubt that Damon would make an example of him. Raze could probably take the leader, but he'd then be required to take his place. He'd be able to do whatever he wished from then on, but the pack would follow him wherever he went until the day he died. He didn't want anything to do with the lycans he'd been raised with, much less be their leader. There was no possible way to reform the corruption Damon had caused amongst rogues. They were too far gone, and he had no desire to waste his time on an impossible mission.

Raze crouched into a fighter's stance when Damon walked into the cave where he was being held. "Let me out of these chains," Raze growled.

Damon smiled, but it wasn't the kind of smile brought forth by happiness. It was the kind spawned by the knowledge that satisfaction would

soon be gained by revenge. Damon steepled his fingers together and tapped the tips. "Hmm. Let me think for a moment. Um. No, I don't think you will be going anywhere anytime soon."

"Just let me leave, Damon. I no longer wish to be part of this pack. That is my choice, and our race has always allowed each individual member that option. It is lycan law." Raze glared at Damon with all the hate he'd developed for the man over the years.

"As you know, our pack does not abide by ancient, out-dated, preposterous rules. We do as we please, thus, you have no choice but to obey what we, or rather, I, decide. Fortunately for you, I am in a very forgiving mood after last night's festivities, so your punishment will be seen by most as a reward." Damon squatted and focused his eerie yellow eyes on Raze. "I, however, expect you to enjoy it even less than the normal punishment dealt in these situations."

Raze didn't have a clue as to what could be worse than being tortured, starved, and beaten for a month, which is what any other lycan had gotten that had tried to leave the pack. To make matters worse, the collar would not be removed for the entire punishment, therefore making it impossible to shift. A lycan could only heal injuries sustained in human form by changing into wolf form. Mathew had been the last to try to escape. He'd been worked over so badly he'd nearly died, and had become a recluse who barely spoke a word since.

"Let me go now, Damon, and I swear I will never set foot back here again. So help me God, if you don't, I will kill you." Raze clenched his jaw, and itched to wrench the bastard's head from his body.

Damon snarled. "Do not threaten me. You will do as I say. I am the alpha male."

"It's not a threat. It's a promise." Raze snarled back, and was pretty sure that, one day, he would carry his threat to kill Damon out because Damon had no intention of releasing him.

\* \* \* \*

Janine hummed softly as she slid a tray of cupcakes into the oven. Her love for cooking and baking had started years ago as a teenager. It had been her own personal therapy when the world around her had become too stressful. Now, that simple action that had brought her so much peace during those trying high school years had become her passion.

Five years ago, she'd started a small cupcake business out of her home quite by accident. After years of baking more cupcakes than she could ever eat on her own, or should eat on her own, she'd started taking all her overflow to the local businesses, friends, neighbors and co-workers at the office where she'd once worked at. The smiles she'd brought to so many faces gave her much contentment. One day, a simple statement from her sister set her on the idea of baking for a living.

Sherry had always been her number one cupcake fan even if Janine had been a little envious of how her younger sister could scarf down more sweets than a college football team and still stay slim. Janine apparently didn't get the coveted stay-skinny-while-I-stuff-my-face gene that had unmistakably come from their father's side. Nope. Janine got the look-at-a-grape-and-gain-five-pounds gene.

One day, while Sherry had sat munching on one of Janine's latest creations, she'd said, "Janine, you could make a fortune selling these. These are the most heavenly cupcakes I've ever eaten."

That one simple statement had given birth to an idea that had led her to her dream job. She'd made a small menu and began taking orders for cupcakes on the weekends. Within a year, Janine had retained so many loyal customers, she'd been able to quit her word processing job and work from home full time. She'd hired Sherry to help her out with orders and deliveries, and she'd never been so happy in her life. That was until two years ago when the accident had happened.

Janine, Sherry and their parents had been driving to a family dinner one evening when a tired trucker had fallen asleep behind the wheel and hit them head on. Her mother and father had been killed instantly. Sherry had been lucky and had only sustained a few cracked bones, cuts, and bruises. Janine hadn't been as lucky as Sherry. Her leg had been crushed, and the doctors

had thought she might even lose it for a long time. It had taken her months of physical therapy to get back on her feet, and now she had a pronounced limp that, every day, served as a much hated reminder of that night.

She'd never be able to forget something like that even if she didn't have a limp, but at least if she didn't, at the very least, the memories could fade to the back of her mind. The damned limp was a nuisance, and she was certain it caused Sherry to think about that night more often than she might, as well. She'd seen Sherry staring at her with that vacant, haunted look as she'd hobbled around the kitchen on more than one occasion.

"Hi, Janine!"

Janine jumped a little, so deep in her thoughts that Sherry startled her.

Janine greeted her sister with a smile. "Hi, squirt. We've got several deliveries today. You up for it?"

"Of course. When haven't I been?" Sherry hopped up on a stool sitting at the long granite counter where most of the baking preparation took place.

"Hey, I need to talk to you."

Sherry frowned. "Uh oh. That sounds serious."

Sherry was always bubbly and full of energy, but she was also six years younger than Janine's thirty-one. Janine had no delusions in thinking thirty-one was old by any means, but at times, thirty-one felt old in comparison to twenty-five.

"No. Nothing serious. I was just thinking of taking a vacation and closing up shop for a few weeks." Janine held her breath waiting for Sherry's reaction.

Sherry's pretty brown eyes widened, and a huge grin broke over her lovely face. "Oh! That is wonderful!" Sherry jumped off the stool and tackled Janine with a huge hug. "You've been talking about going on a trip for years. You deserve it."

Janine hugged her sister back. She hadn't actually thought Sherry would be upset about her decision to take a vacation, but Sherry had had problems being alone since the accident. As selfish as it might make her sound, she'd needed to take this trip on her own. She hadn't had time to herself for ages, and she wanted to reconnect with herself, so to speak. It was time to do so,

and time to come to terms with the accident and move on with her life once and for all.

“Thanks, Sher.”

“Where are you going?” Sherry asked as she danced on the balls of her feet. “I’m so excited.”

Janine had a feeling her sister wouldn’t be as excited if she hadn’t recently acquired a new boyfriend. Mark was a nice guy, but Janine wasn’t sure he was a keeper, not that there was anything wrong with him. He just seemed to lack the same level of enthusiasm Sherry had for, well, just about everything.

“I’m renting a cabin up north. It has nature trails, a lake I can swim in, and is close to a small town that has specialty shops.” She figured Sherry wouldn’t think much of such a simple trip. If Sherry ever took a trip, it would probably be to some far-off, exotic place.

Janine was much plainer than Sherry. She didn’t want to go to flashy parties or concerts and *hang* with hundreds of strange people she didn’t know. She liked people well enough, but she liked being alone. She liked sitting outside, snuggled under a blanket on a crisp evening while reading a book or gazing at the twinkling stars. She loved nature, always had. That was the only downfall to her business. She was indoors way too much.

Sherry wrinkled her nose. “Well, that definitely wouldn’t be for me, but sounds perfect for you, sis. When do you go?”

“Saturday. I’ll be gone for three weeks. I know it’s a long time to close up shop, but . . .”

“No. You deserve it, Janine. You’ve worked your tail off since the accident, and haven’t had one single minute to yourself. Everyone will understand.”

Janine frowned at Sherry. “You really think so?”

“Definitely.”

Will you be okay?” Janine watched Sherry for any sign of discomfort at her quickly approaching, somewhat lengthy absence.

“Of course, silly. Mark will keep me company.” Sherry smiled reassuringly.

"I'll have my cell if you need me." She was glad Sherry wasn't upset about her being away for so long.

"Don't worry about me, Janine. I'll be fine. You want me to do anything here?"

"No. I want you to enjoy the time off, and be ready to work your tail off when I get back." She'd never closed up for more than a couple of days for holidays here and there, and orders had been backed up on those occasions. She could only imagine the backlog of orders she'd walk into after three weeks. It would be so worth it though.

"Yeah, everyone is going to go crazy without your cupcakes for three weeks. We're going to be swamped when you get back."

Janine nodded. "I know, but that's good. You know, job security and all. Speaking of which, we need to get going so we can get all of today's orders done."

"Yes, boss." Sherry gave Janine a mock salute and both the girls laughed before getting to work.



## Chapter Two

Raze had been chained to the wall for a week. He'd barely been given enough food and water to sustain him, he was naked and in bad need of a shower. The den consisted of a conglomeration of cabins scattered throughout the hundreds of acres of wooded land located in a remote part of northern Wisconsin. The cave where he was being held, secluded from the rest of the pack, was only one of many.

He hadn't been unhappy about the seclusion, but the longer he'd sat, chained and alone with his thoughts, the stronger his urge became to kill Damon. He had completely healed from the injuries inflicted upon him by the pack, but he was weak from dehydration and hunger. A lycan needed a lot of calories to sustain an unusually high metabolism that was a result, in part, by a body temperature that constantly ran on the hot side.

Raze tensed when he heard footsteps, and Damon appeared in the mouth of the cave. "Your punishment takes place tonight. I will send four of the pack soon to take you to bathe. I would suggest that you give them no trouble, or things can, and will, be made worse for all involved later."

Raze had nothing to say to the fucker and curled his lip in reply. His muscles had tensed instinctively, ready for fight, and only when he could no longer hear Damon's retreating footsteps did he allow them to relax. What the hell had he meant by *all involved*? He felt as if he'd swallowed a brick and it had lodged in the pit of his gut. The sickening lump told him that tonight was going to be much worse than he had expected.

\* \* \* \*

Janine had gotten up bright and early, thrown her bags in her Jeep, and hit the road. It would take her six hours to get to the cabin she'd be vacationing at, and she'd been eager to get on her way. But five hours of driving later had zapped a bit of that eagerness from her, and her leg had begun aching, which wasn't unusual when she'd been sitting for so long. She'd been on a two lane highway for an hour now, and was thankful when

she saw a rest stop sign that indicated she'd get a break from sitting behind the wheel in twelve miles.

About ten minutes later, she exited off the highway and pulled into a parking spot in front of the brick building that served as a bathroom. She was the only one at the stop, and when she opened the door, a prickle of unease hit her. She carefully looked around, but didn't see anyone or anything strange. She laughed. She'd been cooped up for so long, she'd gotten paranoid. She held her arms above her head and stretched.

Another prickle of unease hit her, and the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. She took another look around, but still saw nothing that was alarming. The rest stop was deserted, and a thick line of trees ran along an open grassy area at the back. *Okay, Janine. Go use the bathroom, get back to the car, and get out of here.*

The bathroom was surprisingly clean, which was probably due to the fact that it rarely got used in such a remote area. She glanced around quickly as she exited the restroom, and limped toward the Jeep. Just as her hand touched the handle, she was grabbed from behind. She screamed, and was surprised when the man who now held her tightly against him made no move to silence her and laughed. He obviously knew no one would help her because no one was around.

Her breaths came in quick, shallow pants, and fear clawed at her insides. Was this how she was going to die? Had she gone on a well-deserved vacation only to be murdered or raped? The thought sent her into another fit of struggle, but the man was strong, stronger than a man should be, and she was no match for him.

"What do you want?" she whispered. "Please, just let me go. I'll give you money. You can have my car, just take it, but please, let me go."

He laughed again. "So sorry." He took a long sniff of the side of her neck. "But, it's you I want, not your money or car."

When he started dragging her toward the woods behind the rest stop, she thought she might vomit. Her whole life started flashing before her eyes. Every harsh word she'd ever spoken to her sister, and every time she'd been too busy to hold Sherry's hand for whatever over-exaggerated mess she'd

thought herself to be in sliced regret deep through her chest. She was going to die, and she'd never see her sister again.

\* \* \* \*

The chain connected to the collar around his neck was jerked hard, and Raze stumbled along the path to the lake for the third time. By the time they made it to the water's edge, fury reddened his vision, but unlike most of the pack, he cared if his actions resulted in pain for someone else. Since Damon had threatened that his lack of cooperation would result in another being harmed, he held his anger in check.

Damon knew where his weakness lay. The leader was aware that Raze would be unaffected by any threats of violence to himself, but he would never allow an innocent to be hurt if he had any say so. He hadn't exactly been sure what Damon had been speaking of earlier, but after having time to think on it, he had a pretty good idea now. He closed his eyes and prayed that he was wrong.

A bar of soap came sailing toward him with force. He snatched it out of mid air with ease, and began washing. He couldn't deny that the water felt good on his dirty skin, but the anxiety of what would take place this evening gnawed at him. He had to find a way to escape. At some point in time, their watch over him would become lax, and he would get his chance. He just hoped it was sooner rather than later.

Once he finished washing and exited the water, a towel was thrown at him along with a pair of black jeans. He dried off, and pulled the denim over his legs, happy to finally have something on besides his own skin. The return journey to the cave was no different, and the jerking of the chain to make him stumble began again.

As dusk settled in, activity outside of the cave picked up. A monstrous fire was lit and crackled loudly, and a table was set up and covered with food, mostly meat. Whatever Damon had planned for him was going to be witnessed by the entire pack. Afterwards, there would be a feast and celebration of whatever horror Damon had subjected him to.

By the time night fell, all the lycans were present. Damon stood in front of the cave's mouth, which was wide enough for them to see Raze, and addressed the pack.

"You all know Raze tried to escape our pack. As your leader, I have said that no one is to leave the pack unless given permission."

Raze snarled. Damon would never give permission to anyone to leave the pack unless he wanted someone out. In that case, more than likely, the poor soul would leave dead.

"As you also know, normal punishment for such traitorous behavior is a month long fast and beating."

The pack members hooted and hollered in response to Damon's words.

"However, in this particular case, with this particular subject, I do not believe that is the best punishment." Various boos and heckles came from the pack.

"Silence!" Damon continued only after the pack quieted. He motioned with his hand to someone in the back of the group. "Bring her forward."

Raze leaned toward the cave mouth and watched as a blonde woman was dragged forward. She struggled, but she was human and would be no match for any lycan. He sniffed and the main scent signaling her as a lycan mate tickled his nose. He could smell another scent as well, a scent that nearly made him collapse, the mated scent. A scent that no other here but he could smell. She was his mate, and if Damon figured that fact out, this night would go much worse.

Growls and howls grew from the pack as the excitement of her smell hit them. Raze was disgusted by their actions. The main scent should not excite them. It should invoke a deep instinctual need to protect anyone who carried that scent, but years of violence and disrespect of ancient lycan law had bled that instinct out of most of the pack.

Raze watched the blonde while Damon continued a speech he only half listened to now. Her wide eyes and pale face made it clear that she was petrified. She was of average height and wore dark jeans that hugged her curves. He liked women with curves. She wasn't fat by any means, but she wasn't one of those women who pecked at salads. He'd bet she liked a good

steak as much as he did. Her blouse was purple and tapered under her breasts, letting the fabric below fall loosely around her waist.

Raze focused back in on what Damon was saying and his heart lodged in his throat where it nearly stopped beating.

"I have decided that Raze will initiate the woman who is carrying our scent into the pack. He has never participated in any other initiation, though there have been many over the years. I believe that once he has partaken in our rituals, and sees for himself that these humans marked with the main scent are ours to do with as we see fit, he will fully embrace the pack into his heart." Damon raised his arms to encourage the praise of the pack.

Cheers, more howls and growls erupted through the group. Raze's stomach clenched violently, and he thought he might throw up. Damon was going to force him to rape this woman? His mate?

"No!" Raze watched as Damon turned and faced him. An eerie quietness fell before he continued. "I will not do this."

"Oh, you will do this, brother, or you will watch her be used by every single member of the pack before being murdered. I promise you it will not be a quick death." Damon sneered at Raze. "You make the choice. Her blood or her body? Makes little difference to me."

When Raze didn't answer, Damon turned back to the pack. "I guess we will all have a bit of fun tonight after all. Now, who shall go first? How about—"

"No!" He couldn't allow anyone to touch her. He'd never forgive himself. But, he knew he'd never be able to rape her. He'd have to buy them both some time, and hopefully, he'd figure a way to get them out of this mess.

"Does this mean you've had a change of heart?" Damon waited for Raze's answer.

"I will do it, but only in here." He knew he'd have a bit of an advantage in the cave. Not everything would be as easily visible inside, and a plan was forming in his head.

“Makes no difference to me. There will still be plenty of a show to see from out here.” Damon motioned to the two lycans holding the woman. “Take her to him.”

She struggled, kicked, and pleaded the whole time she was being dragged to the cave. Raze ached to be able to tell her everything would be okay. He’d make sure she was not hurt. It was his duty to protect her with his life. Unfortunately, at this particular moment in time, that meant doing whatever he had to do to keep her safe, even if it meant scaring her.

### Chapter Three

“Please! Let me go. I haven’t done anything to anyone. Just let me go home.” Janine had never been so scared in her entire life.

She hadn’t thought being kidnapped could get any worse. She’d been wrong. She had at least thought she’d have a chance at getting away from her captor until she’d seen where he’d been dragging her to. There were at least twenty-five men standing around the biggest fire she’d ever seen. They were all big, scary and feral-looking. They painted a picture of what she might have imagined Vikings, or even cavemen, to look and live like. They were raw, primitive, and she hadn’t a hope in hell of escaping.

A strange scent curled through her nose, which she could only describe as wildness. From what she had gained from her captor’s speech, she was about to be used as a means of punishment, which was kind of ironic since she was the one who was obviously going to suffer the most. All the talk about packs and leaders had thrown her a bit, but she narrowed it down to assuming they must be some type of cult.

Tears welled in her eyes, and hopelessness beat through her with wings of terror. She was never going to get out of this alive. She was in the middle of nowhere with scraggly men who obviously had no respect for life, or at least not for hers.

At the mouth of the cave, she was shoved toward the man inside with such force, she landed on her knees on the hard packed dirt floor in front of him.

She gasped when she looked into gray eyes that eerily glowed back at her from the dimly lit cave. He was crouching, and remained as still as a rock. Not one muscle twitched. Not one blink of his lids betrayed his statue like pose. One of those funny images came to mind of a homeowner walking in on a burglar who freezes. The unsuspecting homeowner walks by the robber several times, getting a beer from the fridge, grabbing a newspaper from the table, and never so much as glances at the intruder before retiring to another room. This man in front of her was capable of pulling off such a feat in real life.

Suddenly, he lurched forward, and she fell back hard on her backside, thankful for the first time in her life that she had a bit of extra cushion there to soften the fall. She propped her weight on her elbows and watched him as he crawled over her on his hands and knees, only stopping when his face came within a few inches of her own.

That was when she noticed the metal collar around his throat with the chain leading from it to the wall behind him. If she'd come across him in another time or place, she'd no doubt she'd find him attractive. His golden-blond hair was cropped closely to his head with a bit of length and spike to the top. His cheeks were lean and tapered down to a square jaw with several days' of beard. Facial hair had always been a turn off for her, but on him, it worked. The hairs matched the golden color on his head, and complemented his full lips. His nose was straight and narrow.

If she had to guess, she'd say he was over six feet, but it was hard to tell with him practically lying on top of her. The only thing he appeared to have on was a pair of jeans, and his wide, bare chest accented shoulders that were close to twice the width of her own. Power practically emanated from him, and she gulped.

"Are you going to hurt me?" Janine wasn't even sure she wanted to know the answer to that question, but felt compelled to ask anyways.

He put his mouth close to her ear and whispered so low she almost couldn't hear his words. "I know you have no reason to trust me, but I'm in the same situation as you. We are both prisoners. If I do not do what they say, they will kill you."

"You are going to rape me?" Tears swelled in her eyes and spilled over her cheeks.

He closed his eyes for a moment and swallowed hard before answering. "We only have to put on a good show for them." His eyes burned into her. "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

She nodded. Was he really a good guy or was it all just an act? At this point in time, did it really matter?



“I can’t fake some things, and I’m apologizing up front, but I’m going to have to kiss you, and touch you a bit.” His intense stare never wavered from her face.

She panicked and tried to scramble out from under him, but his hand clamped around her arm and adequately halted her try for escape.

“Listen to me!” he whispered through clenched teeth.

She stared down at the dirty floor, and he cupped her face and forced her to look him in the eyes. “I swear to you, I am not going to rape you, but we have to make this look and sound realistic or they will kill you. I am going to act the part, but I will not take this to its expected outcome.”

She didn’t know why, but at that moment, she believed him. Maybe she chose to because she couldn’t handle any other possibility. Maybe it was a terrified grasp at hope that she would be okay. Whatever it was, she would play along if it meant there was a chance of her coming out of this alive.

“Okay.” She quietly agreed, hoping she hadn’t just sold her soul to the Devil.

\* \* \* \*

“Get on with it!” one member of the pack yelled out, and other jeers shortly followed.

Raze looked down at the woman. “What’s your name?”

“Ja-Janine,” she whispered.

His heart hammered. She was absolutely gorgeous. His body had already hardened, ready to claim his fated mate. He wouldn’t allow that, though. Not tonight, and not like this. When he took her, it wouldn’t be in front of an audience, and he’d love her like she deserved . . . long, slow and thoroughly. The pale blue of her eyes sparkled with fear, and if he thought he’d wanted to kill Damon before, those wants paled to the need to do so now.

“Mine’s Raze. Are you ready?”

She nodded.

"I'm sorry if I get a little rough with you, but I promise I will do as little as I have to do to please the assholes out there." He nodded toward the opening of the cave.

"Okay. Let's just get this over with." She squeezed her eyes shut.

Those were so not the words he'd ever wanted to hear from his mate. He took a deep breath and yanked her shirt over her head, and took her mouth before she had time to scream. Her lips tasted of honey and sugar, and he groaned, trying hard not to thrust his tongue inside for a better taste. He promised he'd only do what he had to, and shoving his tongue in her mouth was not something necessary for this show.

She sobbed into his mouth, and his gut clenched. There was no other choice, no other hope of saving her but to do this and he continued on, fighting the urge to take her. The rage for Damon boiling inside him was nearly his undoing, but he hung on to his control by a shred.

He blocked out the whistles, jeers and disgusting comments coming from the pack, and focused on Janine. She struggled against him, but he got the distinct feeling that she wasn't genuinely frightened of him, and that she was playing a part just as he was. She kept her arms on the ground at her sides, and he longed for her to hold him. There would be time for that in the future . . . or at least, he hoped.

He broke the kiss, cupped her full breasts through the pale lavender fabric of her bra and kneaded them. He stared into her eyes, willing her to understand that he was only doing what he had to, willing her not to hate him. Her lids were squeezed tight, but her mouth formed a small "o," which made him wonder if she was enjoying his touch, but she couldn't possibly be under the circumstances. Could she?

Before he could stop himself, he flicked her nipple, and she gasped and let out a low moan. His cock hardened painfully and throbbed to the rhythm of his heart. When he trailed his hand down her soft stomach and opened the fastening on her jeans, her eyes shot open and panic darkened them once again. He shook his head at her, silently commanding her to trust him, but she bucked wildly, trying to get away from him as he yanked the denim from her legs and tossed them across the cave.

He reached for the snap on his jeans and wiggled out of them. The only thing that separated them from being skin to skin was her matching panties and bra. She renewed her efforts to get away from him when he pinned her arms above her head and reached between her legs with his other hand. He didn't touch her where he ached to. Instead, he stroked high on her inner thigh, the creamy skin soft against his rough fingers. Her eyes widened when she realized he wasn't touching her where she obviously thought he'd been headed.

He nestled his hips between her thighs, and brought her arms to her sides where he encircled one bicep with each hand and held her against the floor of the cave. Tears streamed down her cheeks, but he was positive she knew he had meant what he said about not raping her after he had refrained from touching her intimately.

"Janine." She stared up at him. His chest ached with the fear he saw etched deep in them.

His thumbs hooked in the waist of her panties, yanked them over her legs, and her startled gasp sent a sharp pang of guilt through him. He made a show of kicking her knees wide with his own, and arched his hips up. "Scream."

When he slammed his hips against her, she let out a yell that pierced through the sky straight to the heavens. He lay his forehead against her chest and pumped up and down against her while she continued screaming and crying out. No one but the two of them knew that he was not penetrating her, and he got some small amount of satisfaction at the continued jeers and taunts because he knew he was fooling all of the idiots in the pack. They obviously believed what he was doing was real. His skin burned against hers, and he fought hard not to give in to the primal urge tearing at him to slip inside her thrust after thrust.

The thought of sliding into her hot, wet channel sent him spiraling into a lust-filled haze. His breathing grew ragged and, within moments, he climaxed. When he did, he made sure to direct it where it was evident he'd done the deed if anyone decided to check. When he released her and stood,

she scrambled across the floor, gathering her clothes. He stood in the mouth of the cave in front of the pack and glared at Damon.

“I’ve done what you’ve asked. I see the error of my ways, and I ask that you release me now so that I may enjoy the woman some more tonight.” Raze made sure to keep the hatred for the leader from showing on his face.

“You can enjoy her just fine with the chain on. You will be watched closely for the next few days, and if I feel you have truly learned your lesson and your place in the pack, maybe I will have the chain removed. For now, you will stay in the cave with the woman, and once you tire of her, the rest of the pack will do as they please with her. If I find out you are lying to me and try to escape, she will die a horrible death.” Damon raised a brow as if waiting for Raze to defy him.

Over his dead fucking body. No one but him would ever touch Janine. “Whatever pleases you.” Raze gritted his teeth as he bowed to Damon.

After Damon left, Raze moved to the back of the cave, slipped on his jeans, and sat beside Janine. She’d gotten her clothes on, but they were disheveled. He reached over and pulled her to him by the arm until she sat between his legs, her back to his chest.

## Chapter Four

Janine's insides quivered. As she sat pressed against Raze's chest, the way his touch seemed to calm and excite her was confusing. She should feel nothing but disgust for all of these men, and she did . . . just not for Raze. He'd kept his promise. He hadn't raped her, and she was grateful to him for that at the very least, but as the warmth of his body seeped into her chilled one, she wondered how, under the current circumstances, she enjoyed the feel of him against her.

She hadn't exactly been disgusted by what he'd done to her earlier either. Once she'd realized he really was going to keep his word and not violate her, his touch had ignited a slow desire in her that had made her ache. She'd actually wished they had been someplace alone, and that his touch had been ignited by passion not by the sinister expectations of others.

And the strangest thing of all? She'd actually orgasmed at the same time he had. She didn't think he had been aware of it over her fake shrieking, and was still astonished it had happened. She'd only had sex with one other man, and that experience had been awkward and uninspiring.

Raze wrapped his arms around her and nuzzled the side of her neck. "I'm sorry. I didn't hurt you, did I?" he whispered against her skin.

She closed her eyes, letting the feel of his mouth against her throat wash through her and gather deep inside her. "No."

He continued nuzzling her, and speaking low and quiet. "When we communicate, we must continue to do so like this, and you should continue to show disgust toward me and what I'm doing. They will expect that."

She immediately tensed, and tried to jerk away from him. He laughed out loud, most likely for the other men's benefits, and pulled her back against him.

"Very good." He praised her before going back to nuzzling her neck.

She didn't understand how it would be possible for anyone to hear them talking in the cave, but she wouldn't chance it. She made sure to keep all of her communication to a quiet whisper. "Why can't we just wait until they fall asleep and sneak out?"

He subtly shook his head. "They will catch us. Tell me, did Damon find you at the rest stop?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"That is the only place within miles of here that he could have gotten to and back from so quickly. Do you have a car there?"

"Yes."

"Did you leave the keys in it?"

"Yes."

"Good." He began massaging the sides of her arms and moved his nibbling lips to her ear.

She stifled a groan and squeezed her eyes shut. This was not the time or place to let her hormones get the best of her, but damn, the man's mouth was magically firm and soft, and enticed her in all the right places. "Do you have a plan to get us out of here?"

He nodded.

"Tell me then."

"Kiss me first." When she tensed again, he cupped her face. "They are still keeping an eye on us."

She turned her head to the side and let him claim her mouth. Stars danced before her closed lids, and his lips coaxed her passion high. She mumbled against his mouth. "You are so warm."

He murmured back, "I tend to run a little hot."

When she tried to respond, he slid his tongue between her lips. He had not taken that advantage earlier, but she had wished he had. Now, though, at this moment, she was glad he hadn't. This was something that should be shared for the first time in private, not in front of an audience. She moaned as his tongue tentatively dove and retreated, but the moment she touched her tongue to his, he responded to her invitation by deepening the kiss.

His tongue stabbed deep into her mouth, and the desperation she felt to submit to him was mind boggling. Her nipples peaked into tight buds, and wetness seeped between her thighs. A low growl came from his throat, and he cupped one of her breasts and toyed with the excited tip.

She reached up and slid her fingers through his short hair, tangling them in the longer strands at the top. She felt tiny next to him, and she wasn't petite by any means. Just as his hand began a downward journey toward the place she really wanted him to touch her, he growled again and broke the kiss.

Both of their breaths came in ragged pants, and he stared at her with his, once again, eerily glowing gray eyes.

"Why do they do that?" she panted.

"Why do what do what?"

"You're eyes. They look like they are glowing."

He closed them for a moment and, when he opened his lids, the glow was gone. "It's just another one of those things I tend to do."

No one she knew tended to do that, and she was sure he was holding something back from her.

"Tell me how we are going to get out of here?"

He sighed. "Lay down." She did as he said, and he blanketed her with his body. "Sorry. We can't give the impression that you and I are getting along. They will know something is up. Now struggle a bit."

When she wiggled under him, he pinned her arms above her head as he had earlier. She bucked her hips, and he trapped her thighs between his powerful legs. She was effectively subdued under him, but he was gentle, only applying enough pressure for show to the prying eyes outside of the cave.

"Now tell me," she said through gritted teeth.

"For the next couple days, I'm going to request that I be allowed to escort you to the lake for a bath. You will make a show of defiance, and I will make a show of disciplining you as will be expected of me."

"Wait. Disciplining me? What the hell do you mean by that?"

"Shh. Don't worry. I promise I will not harm you. I might get a bit rough to make it look real, but you have to trust me. Whatever I say and do, do not be afraid of me, but at least act like you are. Within a couple of days, Damon will think me trustworthy, and the pack will get lax in watching my every

movement. Hopefully, I will be unchained soon.” Raze brushed her hair out of her face and tucked it behind her ear.

“I have to stay here for a couple more days? I want to leave.” She sniffed.

“I know. So do I. That’s why I was punished in the first place, as you probably figured out by Damon’s speech. I was trying to escape.”

“Wait. Why did you call them a pack? Aren’t packs like dogs or something?”

“Just how we refer to ourselves. Anyway, back to the plan. Once they get more trustworthy of me, I will wait until right before dinner time one evening to request to take you to the lake for your bath. Believe me when I say, when dinner is served, most of the men around here get extremely distracted. We will be able to make a run for it then. Hopefully, by the time anyone notices we are gone, we’ll have made it to your car and be on our way.”

She shook her head. “It won’t work. I can’t run.”

“What?” He scowled at her.

“I have a bad leg. I can’t run.”

“Shit. At all?”

“A bit, but no, not really.”

He furrowed his brows. “Okay. Plan B. I’ll carry you out.”

She couldn’t help it, but she laughed. “I’m sorry. You are big and strong, but I’m not a petite woman by any means. You can’t run through the woods carrying me and expect to escape. I’m too heavy.”

He smiled at her. “Don’t underestimate what I can and cannot do. This is just something else you will have to trust me on.”

“Well, let’s say that by some small miracle you do get us out of here. Where are we going afterwards because I will not go home and risk leading any of these animals back to my sister. She’s all I have. I won’t let anything happen to her.”

“I know of somewhere we can go in Michigan. There is a pack—um, there are some friends of mine there that can put us up and keep us safe. I won’t lie to you, though. It will be rough outrunning these men, and Damon



will be hell bent on getting his claws in me. He won't stop until one of us is dead."

Janine shivered. "Why? If you want to leave, what is the big deal?"

"I'll explain it some other time. Right now, I need you to concentrate on acting like you can't stand the sight or touch of me in front of the others, and react appropriately to what I do to you."

"I'll do my best."

He nuzzled her neck. "You're doing great so far."

"Why are you being so nice to me? Wouldn't it have been much easier for you to have really done what they told you to do? You'd be free within a matter of days and wouldn't have to worry about me being an obstacle to your escape. I mean, why are you concerned with helping me at all?"

"Because we are both prisoners, and I think I can also safely say that we both hate those sons of bitches out there. If I get you out of here, too, it'll make it all the more sweeter for me knowing that I pissed Damon off that much more."

She wasn't one hundred percent certain she could trust Raze, but he'd kept to his word thus far. She prayed that he wouldn't double cross her and leave her when it came time to run because she'd never get away on her own. She was dependant on him, and she'd never felt more helpless in her life.

## Chapter Five

*Two days later . . .*

Raze watched Janine as she waded into the lake in her underwear. Her limp was pronounced in her right leg, and she'd been correct in confiding in him that she'd never be able to run. He was pretty sure if she was scared enough, she'd get along at a decent pace, but she wouldn't be able to flat out run with that leg.

He was aware of the two other pack members close by watching her as well. His blood boiled, and he wanted to rip their balls off for daring to look at her. The first night he'd been escorted to the lake with her, she'd argued with him when he'd told her to strip and bathe. She had been, and still was embarrassed, but he'd let her maintain some modesty by keeping her undergarments on, which did nothing but arouse the hell out of him. He hadn't had the heart to tell her once the fabric was wet, the dark hairs of her mound, and her tantalizing nipples were all but bare to his gaze.

Her skin was creamy and soft, and he longed to make love to her, but he'd never take her like an animal in front of the pack. They'd put on a good show, but he refused to defile her for real like that. He'd rather die than inflict such humiliation upon his mate. The guilt that burrowed deep in his gut was bad enough over the way he had treated her, no matter how necessary it had been for their survival.

The only good thing about Damon was that he was so full of himself, the huge ego of his could never fathom that Raze was playing him. It had only been two nights, and the lack of interest the pack was showing in keeping an eye on him told him that Damon had thought his punishment had broken him, had forced him into submission and compliance. Raze gritted his teeth and bit back a smile. He couldn't wait to knock Damon's holier-than-thou attitude down a couple notches right along with knocking his teeth from his filthy mouth.

Tomorrow night would be the night he and Janine would make their escape. He'd stall on taking her for her bath at the normal afternoon time by saying she was sick. Right before dinner, he'd tell them she was feeling better

and request to take her to the lake. He hoped the fact that Damon and the pack thought Janine was sick would relax the surveillance on them that much more.

He watched Janine duck under the water to rinse the soap from her blonde hair, and wished he could allow her a hot shower instead of a dip in a lukewarm lake. It was fine for him, but her normal temperature was a few degrees lower than his, and he knew she got chilled from the baths. He'd made sure to warm her up as fast as possible afterwards. He didn't want it to be the truth when he said she was feeling ill tomorrow night.

He kicked off his jeans and waded into the water behind Janine, and she turned and slapped at his hands when he tried to help her finish rinsing her hair. His breath sucked in when he caught another glimpse of her pretty pink nipples pushing against the wet, transparent lavender of her bra. She'd become quite the actor at showing her distaste for him. He'd been worried at first that it hadn't been an act, but she'd had no objection to his kisses or snuggling up to him late at night.

He gently restrained her hands and smiled down at her, knowing the two pack members watching could not see his expression with his back to them. "Good girl."

"I'm not a dog."

His brows dipped down. "I did not know that I implied that you were." If she had an aversion to dogs, he was in deep shit.

"Most people refer to their dogs with a hearty "good girl" or "good boy" when they do something worth praise. I'm not a damn pet."

"I didn't mean it like that," he whispered next to her ear, and didn't miss the way she quivered when his warm breath hit her cool skin.

She blew out an agitated breath. "I know. I'm just a little on edge."

He nodded, and as she finished up with her bath, he cleaned himself quickly and tugged her from the lake. He picked up the one towel they had been given and handed it to her. He wrestled his jeans over his wet skin, and waited for her to dry and dress before leading her back toward the cave. When they settled toward the back wall, he was pleased to see that they'd

been given a bit more food than the previous night, most likely a reward for heeding Damon's commands.

They ate in silence while night fell, and he watched as the stars popped out and twinkled around a nearly full moon. "We are leaving tomorrow night."

She stopped chewing and set her bowl down. "Thank God. Do you think we will make it?"

Her eyes sparkled with doubt, and he wanted to assure her they'd be okay, but he couldn't guarantee anything. "I'll protect you." That wasn't a lie. He'd die protecting her.

"I'm scared." Janine's bottom lip quivered.

The need to comfort her beat through him. He reached for her and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her snug against him. "We'll get through this. Somehow, we'll get through this."

She looked up at him with tears shining in her blue eyes, and did something completely unexpected. She stretched up and placed her lips against his. She was soft and smelled sweet and feminine. His instincts screamed to claim her, but she deserved better. Yet when the tip of her tongue touched his, he lost all reasonable thought as he was overtaken with blinding need. The pressure of his hardened cock built with every touch of her velvety tongue, and he rolled her under him where he could wedge his thighs between hers.

She moaned softly and he slid his hand under her shirt and pushed her bra out of the way so he could cup her breast. He let out a tortured growl at feeling her bared nipple for the first time. Her arms came around him and her fingers entwined behind his neck. He rocked his hips forward and she cried out. Her scent and softness drowned out everything else in the world. The only thing that existed at the moment for him was her. The cave, Damon, the pack, everything else melted away.

She arched up and met his thrusts. He wanted her so bad. He had to have her. He undid her jeans and slid his palm under her panties down over the short curls covering her mound until his fingers slipped across her slick heat. He deepened the kiss and guided two fingers into her sheath. Her

hands frantically ran over the skin of his back and pushed under the waist of his jeans to cup his ass. Her fingernails bit into his flesh and spiked his already urgent need for her.

He pushed her jeans to her knees before unfastening his pants and groaned as some of the pressure was released from his cock as it sprang free. She pulled him back to her mouth for another hungry kiss, and he thrust his hips into her again. The only barrier between him and what he sought was the flimsy fabric of her panties. Her breaths came in pants and she broke the kiss.

“Take me, Raze. Please.”

He hooked his fingers into the crotch of her underwear and yanked them to the side, exposing her hot heat. He braced himself on his palms and positioned his cock at her opening, but just as he started to surge forward, laughter rang out from outside the cave. The sound was as effective as a bucket of ice water being thrown on him. He rolled off Janine and lay beside her on his back, sucking in gulps of air.

“Fuck! I’m so sorry. I can’t believe I almost—”

Janine rolled on her side and faced him. “It wasn’t your fault. I wanted you to.”

He closed his eyes when she ran her fingers along the stubble on his jaw. “Yes, it was. This is not the place I want to make love to you the first time.”

“You want to make love to me?”

He held his breath for a moment before letting it rush out in a whoosh. “I thought that was pretty obvious.”

She flopped on her back. “Yeah. I guess it was.”

He sat up and leaned over her until his face was a mere inch from hers. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I just feel a little confused I guess,” she whispered.

“Confused about what?”

“I don’t understand why I want you, Raze. I shouldn’t want you given the circumstances, but I do. I mean, I don’t know you all that well, actually, not really at all, and although I feel I can trust you, I’m hesitant to do so.”

He stroked his thumb back and forth over her bottom lip. "It will all be okay. What you feel is perfectly normal. I won't lie. I want you like crazy, and all I can do is keep promising you that you can trust me. I've given you no reason not to, have I?" *Except for just now, you dumb ass.*

"No." She shook her head slowly from side to side. "You haven't. Thank you."

She thanked him? Her instincts to not trust him were right. After all, he was holding back information that would freak the hell out of her, like that he was a lycan. He couldn't tell her yet. He needed her to keep a clear head until they were safely away from Damon. Thankfully, none of the pack had shifted in front of her. Hopefully, none would before they got the hell out of there, as most shifted at the edge of the woods to go hunting or running. There was usually no reason to shift in the open.

He pulled her against him and she sighed. "Raze?"

"Yeah?"

"I keep hearing wild animals at night, like howling and whining and growling. You don't think anything is out there that will hurt us when we try to escape, do you? I mean, besides your, um, family?" She chewed at her lip.

"They aren't my family. They haven't been for a long time, and I'm sorry to be associated with them, and I despise what they do." His gut rolled with hatred and sorrow over what his pack had become.

"I didn't mean to imply that you were like them. You aren't."

"Don't worry about anything right now other than getting some sleep. You need to make sure you are rested and clear minded for tomorrow night."

If she had any inkling that the minute they were missed tomorrow night, wolves would be on their asses, she'd freak out. He couldn't afford for her to be distracted. He helped her right her clothing and pulled his jeans back up, but left them undone. He tucked her closer to him, and slid his leg over her hips to give her as much of his warmth as he could. The nights were cold this time of year, especially in the cave, and she ran the risk of getting sick or dying of hypothermia if she got chilled.

She sighed and snuggled against him, and he waited for her deep, even breaths of sleep before he allowed himself to rest beside her. He wouldn't be able to doze because his need to protect her wouldn't allow it, and until he had her out of Damon's and the rest of the pack's grasps, she'd never be safe.

## Chapter Six

Janine lay curled in the corner of the cave with her back to the entrance just as Raze had instructed her to do. She pretended to shiver every so often, and listened as he talked to a man that had brought them food.

“What’s wrong with the bitch?”

She recognized the voice as that of the dark-haired kid who appeared to be no older than nineteen or twenty named Ricky who normally escorted them to the lake.

“She’s sick.” Raze’s voice was laced with disgust just as he’d warned her it would be.

“She gonna die?”

“Don’t know. Don’t care.” Raze snorted. “She’s only good for one thing to me.”

Ricky laughed. “Yeah. I wish I could have had a go at that one. She’s curvy and womanly, unlike a lot of the sticks brought up here for us.”

Janine winced. Nothing like being called fat.

“Damon told me to take your chain off.”

“About fucking time. My neck’s starting to chafe.”

There was some rustling, followed by the rattle of the chain hitting the floor of the cave.

“He had to be sure you wouldn’t run again. You know, Raze. I’ve always liked you. You’ve always been different, but if you run again, he’s going to kill you. You know that, right? There ain’t no second chances here. Hell, there’s rarely a first chance. Don’t be stupid again.”

“Why in the hell would I want to leave? I just had a stupid moment of weakness just like we all do on occasion. I know my place is here now. Always was, always will be.”

Janine shivered for real after Raze’s statement. She’d rather be dead than spend the rest of her life here.

“Here’s your food. Let me know if you need anything else. Oh, here’s a clean change of clothes too.”



She listened to Ricky's retreating footsteps before risking a glance over her shoulder. Raze was crouching, holding a big bowl in his hand, his head bowed, and his back expanding with each deep breath.

"What's wrong?" Janine whispered.

Raze's head snapped up and he turned to look at her. His eyes held that eerie glow to them once again. "Nothing."

Her breath caught in her throat. "Seems like it's not nothing to me."

She watched him as he stood and came to sit beside her, so close he nearly touched her back. She didn't miss the way he always placed himself between her and everyone else at all times. Even when he'd been talking to Ricky, she didn't have to look to know that Ricky would have to peer around him to see her. He protected her the best way he could without drawing attention to the fact that he was doing so.

"Here." He handed her an apple. "Eat something." He sighed. "Nothing is wrong. I'm just real tired of playing the meek, obedient dog to Damon."

"After tonight, it will all be over." She tried to reassure him, even though she had doubts of them ever escaping.

"No. After tonight, we will be running for our lives until Damon is dead."

She turned to him. "You were serious when you said you will never be free of him unless he's dead? He will never stop coming after you. But, what you didn't mention is, he'll be after both of us. Won't he?"

"Yes."

"Oh my God! I can never go back home." She sat up. "Wait. If he finds out who I am, he will use my sister to get to me, won't he? I have to find a way to protect her."

"Settle down, Janine. First of all, where is your ID?"

She frowned. "In my car."

"Did Damon get in your car?"

"Not that I know of. No. I don't think there was time. I believe he watched me and waited to grab me as I came out of the restroom. I don't think there was a reason for him to get into my car."

"Did you tell him your name?"

She shook her head. “No.”

“He has no way of knowing who you are then. You’re sister will be safe, and once we are free, you can call her and check on her for your peace of mind.”

“She’s all I’ve got left, Raze. She has to be safe.”

“Hey, it’ll be all right. How about we talk about something else?” He glanced down at her leg. “Why do you limp?”

“Car accident a couple years back. My parents were killed, my sister barely got a scratch, and I got a shattered leg.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up bad memories for you.”

“No. It’s okay. It was really hard, still is really hard at times, but I’m coping.” She took another bite of the crispy apple.

“What do you do for a living?”

“I have a cupcake business that I run out of my house.” She smiled before taking another bite.

“Cupcake?” He grinned.

She smiled. “Yeah. I’m a good cook and an even better baker, and I love doing it.”

“Well, just so happens that I have a sweet tooth. When I get you out of here, I expect to sample some of your cupcakes.” He wiggled his eyebrows and she giggled.

“If you get me out of here, you can have whatever you want.”

He swooped down and took her mouth in a slow, scorching kiss. “I’ll hold you to that, Janine—what’s your last name?”

“Denton.”

“Janine Denton.” He grinned a wide, toothy grin. “I like it.”

“What’s your last name?”

“Jackson.”

“Raze?” She whispered.

“Yeah?”

“I still don’t think you’re going to be able to carry me out. I mean, I know you could probably pick me up and all because you’re a pretty big guy, but if they chase us... There’s no way. I’m too—”

“Do not say what I think you are going to say.” He traced her cheek with his fingers. “For one, you are beautiful and curvy and sexy. Two, I guarantee you that I will have no problem carrying you, even if that means running while doing so.”

She snorted, and watched as he set the bowl down and crouched over her. She gasped when he scooped her up as if she weighed nothing.

“Do you believe me now?” he whispered.

“I said that I didn’t doubt you could pick me up, although I do have to admit, you did it easier than I thought you’d be able to. I’m just worried about the running with me part.”

“Don’t. And don’t doubt that I meant exactly what I said about you being sexy and beautiful either.”

“I’ve never been called beautiful. Cute, adorable, sweet, yes. Beautiful? No.” Her breath caught when he placed his lips over hers in a feather light, scorching kiss.

“Now you have.” His lips still touched hers as he spoke the words.

He deepened the kiss, and her arms tightened around his neck. She’d never met a man that made her burn like Raze. She could simply look at him and get hot and bothered, and the way he touched. Oh, he knew just where and how to touch her to make every cell in her body awaken to him, call for him, beg for him.

Raze broke the kiss and rested his forehead against hers. “Nightfall will be coming soon. I’ll ask to take you to the lake at dusk. I doubt anyone will be watching us too closely since Damon had my chain removed. I want you to act like you are feeling better, but not entirely well.” She nodded, and he set her down. They ate their food in silence and waited.

## Chapter Seven

Raze watched as the table was set up in front of the fire for dinner. Once all the plates of food were set out, and the pack started gathering, Raze called out to Ricky.

The pup came over to him. "What's up, Raze?"

Raze nodded toward Janine who sat in the cave holding her stomach. "She's feeling a bit better and wants a bath now. You mind if I take her down to the lake?"

Ricky glanced over at the meal and licked his lips. "Can't it wait until after?"

"I'd rather get her down there while she can walk on her own. Why don't you go ahead and eat, and we'll be back before you know it." Raze nodded toward the table. "Sure looks like some good food tonight."

"I don't know." Ricky glanced across the fire at Damon who had his back to them.

"He had me unchained. Obviously he trusts that I won't run again. I'll be back before anyone even realizes we're gone."

Ricky nodded. "Okay, but hurry up. You don't want to miss out on the food."

"I will. I'm starving." Raze waited for Ricky to head to the table before going back to Janine. "Time to go."

She looked up at him with wide eyes. "Okay."

He helped her get to her feet. "It'll be all right." Or he sure as hell hoped so.

He exited to the right side of the cave, and kept her close beside him, trying to draw as little attention as possible. Fortunately, the one thing that rivaled the pack's appetite for sex was their appetite for food, and barely a glance was tossed their way as they made their way toward the lake.

"Take off your clothes like normal. If someone is watching, we want to appear to be doing the same routine."

She nodded, stripped off her shirt and jeans, and waded into the lake. She shivered, and Raze stepped up behind her. "The freaking water is even colder now."

"Yeah. It cools off more at night. It'll be completely dark in a few minutes. Just follow my lead, okay?" He gave her shoulders a gentle squeeze.

She nodded and he was proud of how brave she was being. Ten minutes later, he led her by the hand out of the lake and instructed her to put her clothes on. He was thankful Ricky had brought him a change of clothes. Running through the forest without a shirt wasn't a good idea. If he was in wolf form, it wouldn't be a big deal, but bare skin, sticks and thorns didn't mix well. If he changed, he wouldn't be able to carry Janine, and there was that small fact that Janine didn't have a clue what he was.

He took her hand in his again and strolled a little further away from the pack along the lake's edge. When Raze was confident no one was paying attention to them, he slipped into the dark woods and started in the direction of the rest stop. They moved along at a good clip, and he was proud of her for keeping up with him.

"You doing okay?" He glanced over his shoulder and noticed she was a little frazzled and sweaty.

"Yeah." She huffed out. "I'm just not used to trotting through the woods in the dark."

"You're doing good. Another fifteen minutes and we should be there." He would like to be moving faster, but he didn't want to alarm her.

"Don't worry about me. I'll make it. I just wish I could run. We'd probably be there already."

He squeezed her hand in reassurance. "Don't put yourself down for something you can't help."

He hadn't allowed himself to think about any kind of future with her up to this point, but now that it looked as if they might actually escape, he thought of how, when he changed her, her leg would be healed after she shifted for the first time. A shot of fear slithered through him. What if she wouldn't let him change her? What if she didn't fall in love with him? What if she didn't want a relationship with him at all?

She'd wanted him as badly as he had her. Her passion for him, he had been in no doubt of. But things had been complicated, and he had to at least entertain the idea that a part of her attraction to him might have been because she'd needed comfort. Suddenly, a howl broke through his thoughts and pierced the still, night air. Their escape had been noticed.

Janine froze. "What was that?"

"That is our cue to run."

She squeaked when he scooped her up and took off at a dead run with her in his arms. She clung to him, and he was aware that his jarring movements must be making her uncomfortable, but there was no helping that now. The howls grew louder and he could hear rustling and sticks broken under trampling paws in pursuit behind them.

Just when he thought they'd never make it, he shot through the clearing and spotted a black Jeep. It had to be Janine's because it was the only vehicle in the lot.

"Black Jeep right?"

"Ye-e-ess," She said through being bounced.

They made it to the car, and he sat her down by the passenger side and opened the door. She let out a shrill scream that made him spin around. Three wolves broke through the trees and ran at them full out.

"Get in! Now!" He pushed at her.

He slammed the door after she scrambled in the car, and raced around to the driver's side. He jumped in, turned the ignition, and engaged the locks. He'd just put the car in drive after backing out when one of the lycans hit the side and rocked the Jeep. Janine cried out again, and Raze gnashed his teeth together. He stomped on the gas, and headed for the highway. Another wolf stood in the road, staring at them, and he didn't let up on the pedal for a second. The familiar gray coat shined in the headlights. Damon.

"You want to die you son-of-a-bitch, then so be it." Raze raced toward the wolf, and right before impact Damon shifted and rolled out of the way.

"What the hell just happened?" Janine craned her neck to look out the window at Damon's retreating figure.

This was so not the way Raze wanted her to find out about him. They made it to the highway, and had put several miles between them and the rest stop before Janine spoke again.

"I said what the hell happened back there? Am I crazy or did that wolf turn into a man?" She shook her head. "I'm not crazy. I know what I saw. It was Damon wasn't it?"

He nodded. "Yes. He's a lycan, and so am I."

"A lycan? Do you mean a freaking werewolf?"

He nodded again.

She laughed. "Are you kidding me?"

"I was going to tell you later, after we were safe. If I had told you before we escaped, it would have scared the hell out of you, and you were already dealing with enough. If I had told you, you would have been so crazy with fear and confusion, you wouldn't have listened to anything I said. It would have been so much worse for you. I was trying to protect you."

"You think? And you don't think I'm confused and scared now? I saw him change in front of me, and I still don't believe it."

"It's true, Janine."

"If it is, why would they grab someone like me, and why weren't there any other women there besides me? I mean, don't get me wrong, but werewolves, or lycans, or whatever you all are—I didn't see a bad-looking man amongst you. I can't imagine that it would be hard to find some better looking women who wouldn't need kidnapping. Oh, wait. That's why you referred to them as a pack." She stared at him.

"Stop belittling yourself. I told you that you are beautiful and sexy. You're right. They don't have problems luring women to them. It's keeping them that's the problem. The pack is rogue and believe that women are only good for one thing."

"And you don't, hence your punishment for escaping was using me in front of them all."

He nodded. "They only pick specific women. Only women who have the main scent are allowed to be brought to the pack."

“The main scent? What is that?” Her eyes were wide as she waited for his answer.

“Potential mates have two scents. A main scent, which all lycans can smell, and the mated scent, which only the destined mate can smell.”

She was quiet for several minutes before she whispered. “Are you trying to tell me that I am a mate to one of those animals? You have got to be kidding me. No way will that ever happen.”

A little ache pinged through his chest at her comment. “We’re not all like them. There are many lycans, many packs, and not all of them are rogue. Potential mates are supposed to be protected, taken care of. They are essential to our survival, and to the destined mate’s happiness. Don’t forget, I’m one of those animals too.”

“This is too much for me to contemplate at the moment. How long until we get to wherever it is we’re going?” She rubbed at her temple.

“About nine hours. We should be there by morning.”

“Wait. Are these *friends* of yours werewolves too?”

He gritted his teeth. “Yes.”

She stared at him. “You are taking me into another pack of those crazy ass things? No. Let me out. I’ll take my chances on my own.”

“They are nothing like the pack you’ve been exposed to. They will protect you.” He sighed in frustration. He didn’t blame her for being scared.

“Nothing like that except they turn into big, hairy wolves?” Her voice sounded high and panicked.

“Please, trust me. You’ve done so this far. Can’t you do it a while longer?” He couldn’t leave her on her own. Damon would find her in a matter of hours if he did so.

“I don’t want to go through that again. What if they take me and do the same thing to me there. I’m willing to bet the next one they give me to won’t be as chivalrous as you were.”

He braked hard, pulled to the gravelly shoulder and stopped. He slammed the car in park and turned to Janine. “I’m not going to let anyone hurt you. You have nowhere else to go. You said yourself that you didn’t want to lead them to your sister. What I didn’t tell you earlier is that, even



though Damon has no idea who you are, he knows your scent, and he will find you. If you go home, he will follow you there. The only choice we have is to hide out, and wait for him to come for us on our terms so we can take him out.”

“But—”

“I’m not feeding you any more bull. We are in some major shit, and we need some back up. The only way I can protect you is with help. I’m absolutely positive Damon is back there right at this moment gathering the pack to come after us. The place I’m taking you is a sanctuary. I swear to you neither of us will be harmed there.” Her pale face and wide eyes made his gut clench. She was so afraid, yet she’d been so brave.

Tears swam in her eyes and he ached to hold her, but there was simply no time. He put the car in drive and pulled back onto the highway. Janine remained quiet.

“The couple who run the sanctuary, Brent and Rindy Falls, are good people. Rindy is Brent’s mate, and she had been chased her entire life by rogue lycans. Her family was even murdered by them when she was young. Brent is an ancient, and from what I hear, the sanctuary borders the land of another lycan couple, Anthony and Karen Wolfson. Anthony is also an ancient, which means not much can get through them.”

“Are Karen and Rindy human like me then?” she whispered.

“They were. Now they are lycans.”

“How did they become lycans?” Janine’s voice became a little high pitched again.

“Rindy was turned by Brent, with her permission. Karen, unfortunately, was bitten on purpose by a rogue, a rogue that Anthony killed. It is a great offense to turn another’s mate, and it causes great pain during the first change when someone is turned by anyone other than their mate.”

“Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God! Are you telling me there is some maniac out there I am supposed to be mated to that is going to try to turn me into a werewolf?” Janine visibly shivered.

“Settle down Nothing will happen to you that you don’t agree to.” He wondered if he would ever be able to convince her that not all of his kind were bad.

“But you just said Karen was turned without her permission. What if I’m bitten?” She began hyperventilating.

“Janine.” When she didn’t look at him, he said her name louder. “Janine!” Her head snapped around and her eyes rested on him. “Calm down. I will not let that happen to you. I swear. No one will do anything to you that you don’t agree to.”

After a few moments, she leaned back in the seat and closed her eyes. “I can’t take anymore. I need to rest.”

## Chapter Eight

As dawn broke, Raze pulled down the long, secluded drive of the sanctuary. Janine had slept the entire drive, and he was glad because she hadn't had much sleep since Damon had kidnapped her. A man with dark hair stepped into the lane.

Raze stopped the car and killed the engine. He glanced over at Janine and was glad when she didn't stir. He got out of the vehicle and approached the man. He hadn't told Janine that he hadn't actually met Brent, Rindy, Anthony or Karen, but knew of them by rumor.

"You Brent?" He asked the man.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Raze. The woman is Janine. I've been trying to escape from my rogue pack for quite some time now. Unfortunately, she paid the price for my attempted escape along with me. We need a safe place to stay." He hoped the man wouldn't turn them away as this was his best shot at protecting her.

"Your pack going to be coming after you?"

"Oh yeah." Raze stayed between the man and the car, shielding Janine from his view the best he could.

The man sniffed the air. "She yours?"

Raze nodded.

"She know she's yours?"

"No." Raze shook his head.

"She know about us?"

"Some."

"Nice to meet you, Raze. I'm Brent Falls." He extended his hand to Raze and the two men shook briefly.

"Can you help us?"

"That's what we're here for. Follow the road up about another two miles. Veer off to the right and you'll find an empty cabin. You and Janine can stay in it as long as you like. After you get settled in, come back the way you came and go straight across at the T. You'll come to a log cabin. That is my and

Rindy's place. We'll need to discuss your pack and get prepared for their arrival. I assume that will probably be pretty shortly." Brent raised a brow at him in question.

"I'm guessing in a week at the most." Raze figured it would take them that long to track them.

"See ya later." Brent nodded and disappeared back into the thick woods.

Raze got back into the car and drove to the cabin as instructed.

\* \* \* \*

Janine awoke as the car came to a jarring halt. She jumped, and a warm hand landed gently on her arm. Raze stared at her intently, a small frown tugging at the corner of his full lips. She looked up and saw a small cabin tucked into a thick nest of towering trees.

"Are we at the sanctuary?" she asked after yawning.

"Yes."

They both got out of the Jeep, and she followed him into the cabin. It was plain, but pristine. There wasn't a speck of dust to be seen, and the view from the big windows on the back wall of the small living room was quite breathtaking. When they'd entered, Raze had wandered down the hallway from which he was now returning.

"There's only one bedroom."

"Oh." She chewed at her lip. "I'll sleep on the couch."

"No. I will." His face seemed to fall when he said the words.

Had he been expecting to sleep with her? She was still attracted to him. She looked at him closely for the first time since she'd been kidnapped. He was well over six feet, his shoulders were wide, and his waist tapered neatly into narrow hips. His thighs were thick and his legs were long, and he reminded her of an athlete, lean and sinewy. He was a sexy man with an edge to him, a wildness, which was quite fitting considering what he was.

"I'm smaller. I won't be as cramped on the couch. You won't fit. You're too big." She eyed him from head to toe once again, gulping when she focused for a moment on the growing bulge behind his zipper.

“Stop looking at me like that.” His voice came low, quiet, predatory.

“Like what?” she whispered.

He proceeded to show her exactly ‘like what’ by treating her body to a slow perusal with his gray eyes. Her skin heated everywhere they roamed, and she sucked in a breath when he focused his stare back on her face with his now glowing eyes.

“Like that.” The words rasped low from his throat.

“Your eyes are glowing again. That’s a werewolf thing isn’t it?”

“Yeah. They tend to do that when I’m feeling extra emotional, like angry or aroused.”

He walked toward her slowly, and she fought between her instincts to run and her desire to stay. He stopped right before the toes of his boots bumped into the toes of her sneakers and stared down at her. His arms hung at his sides, but his fingers slowly clenched and unclenched against his palms.

Finally, he reached up and dragged the pad of his thumb over her bottom lip. “You are so gorgeous.”

She scoffed. “I’m not—”

Before she could get the rest of the sentence out, he bent and took her lips. He cupped her nape in one hand, wound his other arm around her lower back, and pulled her firmly against him. His heat bled into her, and when she moaned, he slipped his tongue deep inside the cavern of her mouth and tasted her. Her knees nearly buckled, and she welcomed his kiss.

His hand moved in slow circles, massaging her lower back, and he dragged his fingers up her side, along her rib cage, around and down to her stomach and back up until they rested under her breast. She’d never met a man who could turn her on with such infinite ease. She didn’t understand what he saw in her. He was sexy, and sinfully beautiful. She had no doubt that women would fall at his feet. She was plain and on the chunky side.

She’d never considered herself ugly, but she wasn’t a sexy siren by any means. How was it that Raze was interested in her? Then it hit her, and she jerked her mouth from his.

“What’s wrong?” He frowned.

“You think I’m your mate, don’t you?” She backed away from him slowly.

“Janine, please.”

“No. That’s why you are attracted to me, because of my scent. A man like you could never be interested in me.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” He started for her.

She threw her hand up, halting his progress. “There is no way that someone who looks like you could find me attractive.”

“Why in God’s name would you say something like that? You are gorgeous.” His brows slanted down.

“I am not and you know it. I’m ordinary, a little overweight and you . . . you are perfect. You’re not blind. You know what I’m saying is the truth. People like you and me do not go together, and I’m not buying it just because I might have the right scent. You would have never been attracted to me otherwise. Admit it.” She crossed her arms over her middle and glared at him.

His jaw ticked. “I have told you over and over how beautiful you are. You are not fat. Your body is exquisite, just like a woman’s should be. And, yes, you are my mate. I don’t think it. I know it, but it has nothing to do with me finding you attractive.”

“Bullshit! You would have never given me a second glance if it weren’t for my scent. It’s what draws you to me, isn’t it?”

“It does draw me to you, but it can’t make think that you are beautiful unless I think so for real.” He blew out a long breath of agitation.

“No. I’m not for you, Raze. There’s been some kind of mistake. I’m a plain girl with a plain cupcake business and a limp. I’m so not for you.”

“You are a beautiful woman who is obviously intelligent enough to make a living at what she loves and who has a battle wound in memory of a tragic event that took some of the people she loves from her. You were smart enough to play along after being kidnapped, which allowed us to escape, and your kisses make me so hot, I want to rip off our clothes and ravish you.” His eyes glowed bright.

And just like that, her body heated again and ached for his touch. "Surely you can see that we are not a good match. Even if you don't mind my extra weight, you cannot be strapped with someone who can't even run with you."

"That's just it. You can run with me. If I changed you, your leg would be healed after the first time you shifted. It would be like you had never broken it."

"I don't want to be a werewolf. I don't want to be like those monsters that kidnapped me," she cried out.

"If that's truly what you think of me, I guess I cannot change your mind." He turned and started for the door.

"No, Raze. I didn't mean you."

"Yes, you did. I am a lycan, but you don't seem to be able to differentiate between me and Damon. We are just like people. There are those of us who are good and those who are bad. I would never hurt you or anyone else unless I had no other choice. Yes, we can do things you cannot, like hear, see and smell better. We are much stronger and do have a predatory nature, but we are not, in general, 'bad.' We live much longer too. That is why we change our mates, not because we are selfish or want to hurt them, but simply because we do not want to lose them sooner than we must."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to imply that—"

"Forget it, Janine. I promise I'll clear this mess up as soon as I can, and get you back home to your perfect life. I'll see if anyone here has a cell phone so you can call home." He turned and started for the door again.

"No. I have a cell phone in my purse, but I'm not calling my sister. As far as she knows, I will be gone for three weeks on vacation. Until things settle down, I'm not calling her. She'll be able to tell something is wrong. I'm a terrible liar."

He shrugged. "If that's what you want."

She watched as he left the cabin. What had she done? He'd been nothing but gentle, kind, and caring with her, and she'd just called him a monster. She'd been raised to not discriminate against others no matter their skin color or circumstances, yet that's exactly what she'd just done to him, and she felt terrible.

She thought about how he touched her and watched her. His eyes glowed each time they kissed, and his stare scorched through her as if he could see into her soul, as if he longed for her. Would he look at her like that if he didn't honestly find her attractive, if he didn't want her? But how could she know for sure that it wasn't because of her scent? The answer was, she couldn't ever be sure. It was one of those things she'd have to put blind faith in or not ever believe.

She tightened her arms around her waist and walked toward the bedroom, knowing that Raze would never let her sleep on the couch.

\* \* \* \*

Raze shifted and hit the ground running. His heart ached and anger beat through him with a rhythm that matched the pounding of his paws on the dirt floor of the forest. He loved Janine, loved everything about her, but she obviously would never feel the same way about him. He'd been careful and respectful with her even though the need to take her had clawed at him. Was there any way he could convince her that he wanted her regardless of her scent?

He couldn't understand the warped image she had of herself. Her lack of confidence dumbfounded him. She was perfect, beautiful, sexy, and she made him want her like no woman ever had his entire life.

He howled and sped up, trying to outrun his pain and anger. Surely he was not destined to a mate who would never see him as anything more than a monster? He had to find a way to make her see him as a man. He had to prove to her that he wanted her and found her attractive. He would woo her, and make her his if it was the last thing he ever did.



## Chapter Nine

Janine was cooking dinner in the small, but well-stocked kitchen when she glanced at the front door for what felt like the hundredth time. Raze had been gone for hours. She hadn't meant to hurt him, and had done a lot of thinking since he'd left. He was right. He was nothing like the men who'd kidnapped her. If they'd found out he hadn't been doing what they'd instructed him to do to her, she was pretty sure he'd have been killed. She shivered. No telling what would have been done to her in that case.

He'd risked his life to save her, and she'd thanked him by calling him a monster. He was more of a man than most. In fact, she wasn't sure another man existed who would have done what Raze had done for her. While she couldn't deny her attraction to him or the fact that she wanted to make love with him, she was still unsure of herself and the situation she'd been dragged into.

Could she really accept that he was a werewolf? What would she do if he changed in front of her? She'd about had a panic attack when Damon had changed in front of her, and she'd barely caught a glimpse of it. The contemplation of him changing her terrified her on a level she couldn't fathom at this point in time, although the thought of her leg being completely healed did hold some appeal to her. She'd suffered so much from her injury, and still did.

She mixed the spaghetti sauce and tasted it. "Mmmm."

"Smells good."

She dropped the ladle in the pot of sauce and spun around to find Raze leaning against the jamb of the open front door. "I didn't hear you. How long have you been there?"

"Long enough to see that you were in deep thought. I didn't want to interrupt." He smiled and closed the door before walking over to stand next to her.

He looked down at the pot of sauce and licked his lips after sniffing at the contents.

She laughed when his stomach rumbled. "Want to try a bite?"

He nodded, and she dipped a spoon into the sauce and blew on it to cool it before handing it to him. Instead of taking the spoon, he wrapped his fingers around her hand and drew it to his mouth where he licked at the dark red liquid.

He groaned and closed his eyes. "That is so good."

"I've made lots so I hope you are hungry."

"I am."

She put two plates and bowls on the table, and took the breadsticks from the oven. "It's all ready. We'll do it buffet style, if you don't mind. Grab a plate and get what you want."

"You first." He gave her a mock bow.

He waited as she scooped some noodles onto her plate, covered them in the sauce, and took one breadstick. He piled enough on his plate to feed three people, added four breadsticks, and followed her to the table.

She grinned at him. "I guess you are hungry."

They ate in silence, and toward the end of the meal, she felt compelled to apologize to him for what she'd said earlier. "Raze, I—"

"Let's just forget about earlier, okay?" He put his fork down and watched her.

"Okay, but I just want to say I'm sorry." He had a tiny drop of sauce on the corner of his mouth, and she imagined licking it off. She pushed the image from her mind and squirmed in her seat.

"Apology accepted. Now let's move on." He drank the glass of ice water she'd made for him and sopped up the rest of the sauce on his plate with his last breadstick before helping her clean up. "Would you like to take a walk? It's starting to get dark, but we have a little light time left. It might be the last night that will be safe for you to be out for awhile."

She knew that it was only a matter of time until Damon found them, but she was certain that tonight would not be the night Damon caught up with them as Raze would never put her in harm's way. "That would be nice. Thank you."

He held out his hand, and she hesitantly took it and let him lead her out the front door and toward a narrow path that led into the woods. She was

glad that she'd taken the time earlier to take a shower, brush her teeth and hair, and put on a fresh change of clothes. When they'd arrived earlier, with everything else going on, she'd completely forgotten she had her bags in the back of the Jeep she'd packed for her ill-fated vacation. She'd gone to the car while Raze had been gone and carried the bags in.

She'd peeled the shirt, jeans, underwear and bra she'd been wearing for days off and had chucked them in the garbage. She never wanted to see the horrible outfit that reminded her of Damon again, but that outfit reminded her of Raze too. In the end, she'd decided she didn't want any memory of Raze tainted by Damon and left the garments in the trash. As they walked deeper into the woods, the chill in the air made her shiver.

"Damn it. I'm sorry. I forget that you don't run as hot as I do. We'll go back." He tugged at her hand.

"No. I'm okay." She smiled when he looked down at her with a frown. "Really."

"You tell me if you get too cold. I don't want you to get sick." He sighed, put his arm around her shoulders and tucked her next to his side.

She sighed when heat radiated off him and soaked into her. He was like a furnace. She looked around at the enormous trees, and marveled at the beautiful fall colors of the leaves. Green, gold, red, and brown ones hung from the limbs and crunched under her feet.

"It's beautiful. I've always loved the fall." She liked rich colors and the cool fall air.

He stopped and leaned his back against a thick tree trunk. He pulled her to him, and wrapped his arms around her. "You're beautiful."

She started to protest and he laid one long finger over her lips. "No. Don't argue with me. I'm many things, but I'm not a liar. If I say something, I mean it."

She could feel the heat in her cheeks and knew they were burning red. She looked down at the ground, and he pushed her chin up so she was looking him in the eyes. There was a slight glow to them, and after what he'd told her earlier, she knew what that glow meant. She sucked in a sharp breath. He wanted her.

He tilted his head slowly toward her, giving her all of the time in the world to stop him, but she didn't want to. She wanted him to kiss her. All rational thoughts were chased away from her mind by the inferno he caused inside her when he reached for her. His lips touched hers, and he growled a low rumbling sound that turned her knees to mashed potatoes. She parted her lips and met his tongue with her own as it slid into her mouth. He tasted spicy, exotic, and wild.

He tasted of sex and all the forbidden things you shouldn't want but did anyway. She wound her arms around his neck and pressed close to his hard body, and wasn't embarrassed even a tiny bit when his erection nudged at her belly. He reached down and cupped the cheeks of her butt, and she actually felt tiny in his big hands.

He kneaded her rear, and she wiggled closer to him. She had a strange urge to climb him, but refrained from doing so. But, oh he was one mountain she wanted to conquer. He nibbled along her jaw and to her neck where he sniffed at her and growled again.

"You smell so good, and you taste even better." He brought his mouth to her ear. "I long to taste you here."

He cupped her between the legs, and she thought she'd faint from the heat that rushed through her and settled just under his hand. She cried out when he stroked her through her jeans. He unsnapped the top button and ran his hand under the waistband of the denim and her panties until his finger rested on her clit.

He applied pressure to her and her knees almost buckled when he moved his finger in light circles before dipping lower, lower into her wet heat. She clung to him while he slid into her, and rode his fingers until she was out of her mind with wanting him, and her orgasm nipped at her heels.

Just as she thought she'd tumble over the edge, he dropped to his knees and yanked her jeans down her legs, along with her panties. She gasped and looked down into gray eyes that glowed back at her. Her breath caught in her throat as his tongue flicked out and laved her clit. She squeezed her eyes shut when he put his mouth against her and stabbed his tongue deep. He sucked the small nub once, twice, and she tumbled over into heaven.

She quivered and shook as he ate at her, and her orgasm plowed through her, wave after wave. She clutched at his shoulders, and he held her upright since her rubbery legs were nearly useless. She cried out over and over with each lick, each nibble, until glorious weakness washed through her.

He pulled her panties up and paused to press a kiss against the fabric just under her belly button. "Hot pink looks real good on you, Janine."

Her knees weakened more at his compliment, and he helped her get her jeans righted and scooped her up into his arms. He claimed her mouth in another sizzling, lazy, deep kiss, and started back toward the cabin.

"You taste like heaven. I could spend my entire life on my knees in front of you."

Her toes nearly curled at the thought of him doing just that, and she laid her head against his shoulder, listening to the steady beat of his heart. He sat her down once they made it inside the cabin and toed the door shut.

He cupped her face between his hands. "I want to make love to you. Will you let me?"

She did want him to, and for this one moment in time, she wanted something for herself. She didn't want to worry about what she should be doing to make sure she and her sister got by, or what she shouldn't be doing because she had responsibilities. She didn't want to think about what he was. Right now, he was a man, a man that she wanted more than anything.

"Yes," she whispered hoarsely.

He led her to the bedroom that was at the end of the hall. Thankfully, it had a queen sized bed, which was about all it had room for. He pulled his shirt off, let it fall to the floor and her breath hitched in her throat.

"You are breathtaking." She reached out and traced along each shoulder down to his pecs and further down across his rock hard abs.

He was amazing, absolutely stunning to look at. His skin was flawless and had a deep, golden tone. His chest was sprinkled in short blonde hairs that matched the hair on his head, and a thicker patch gathered below his navel and ran in a straight line that disappeared under his jeans. She licked her lips and looked up into his glowing eyes.

He tugged her shirt over her head and groaned. He traced the lacy cup of her bra with his index finger. "Hot pink too," he murmured. He reached behind her and unclasped her bra, and she quickly covered herself with her arms. "Don't." He smiled and encircled her wrists with his fingers and tugged until she exposed herself to him. He groaned. "Damn."

He cupped each breast in his hands and kneaded them gently, flicking the pebbled nipples with his fingers. She sighed and leaned into his touch as he bent his head and sucked one tip into his mouth. She clasped the back of his head, urging him closer, urging him to continue caressing her with his mouth and tongue.

He kissed a path up and over her collarbone before standing. Reaching for the front of her jeans, he unsnapped the top and slid the zipper down. He took her mouth in another kiss as he pushed the denim down her legs. When he stepped back she stood before him in her panties. She fought the urge to cover herself again, but the way he looked at her stopped her from doing so.

He looked at her with those gorgeous, glowing eyes as if he really did think she was beautiful. He made her feel sexy, and she rarely felt sexy. She boldly reached for him, and traced the line of hair under his navel to the top of his jeans. His body was hard under her touch. Where she was soft and curvy, he was muscled and firm. She ran her finger under the waistband and he groaned.

He hooked his thumbs in the denim, worked them down his legs and kicked them off along with his boots. Her breathing nearly ceased as his erection sprang free from a nest of short, golden curls. He was big, really big. She'd only been with one other guy, and he hadn't come close to the size Raze was. She licked her lips as she continued her perusal of his astonishing body. His thighs were powerful and dusted with the same golden hair.

They reached for each other at the same time and he tumbled her onto the bed where he blanketed her. He was heavy, but kept enough of his weight off her so as not to crush her. She felt safe, protected . . . wanton, naughty. He brought out a wicked side of her she hadn't known existed. He fisted a handful of her hair, gently tugged her head to the side, and exposed

her neck. He nibbled at the delicate skin, and she wrapped her legs around his waist.

He ran his other hand down her side, over the curve of her hip, along her thigh and around to her knee. His fingers left a trail of fire on her skin, and she ached for him.

“Raze.” She panted his name.

“I wanted to take this slow, but I need you so bad.” His voice was gravelly, almost laced with pain.

Before she could answer, he flipped her onto her stomach, yanked her panties down her legs, and spread her arms wide on either side of her head where he pinned each wrist to the mattress. He kneed her thighs wide, and positioned the tip of his cock at her opening. She was wet, and she tried to push back onto him, knowing he’d slide in with ease. He growled, and pulled her up on her knees until her back was pressed against his chest. His arms wrapped tightly around her stomach, and he thrust up and buried himself in her with one smooth stroke.

She cried out as he stretched her. Tears sprang to her eyes as her body tried to adjust around him, and he stilled.

“Are you okay?” His words came in a tortured gasp.

“Yes. You’re just so big.”

“And you’re just so tight. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

After a few minutes, her body adjusted to his size and another ache throbbed in her, an ache that had nothing to do with physical pain, and everything to do with wanting him to stay inside her forever. “It’s all right.” She pushed her hips back, and as impossible as it seemed, he grew harder, longer inside her.

He rested his head against her shoulder and slowly pulled out of her until the tip of his cock rested inside her, and thrust hard again. They cried out together and he pulled out and slammed home again, and repeated the motion. He plunged into her over and over, going deeper each time as she angled her hips down in invitation of his welcomed invasion.

She panted with every slam of his hips, and he bit down on her neck. Suddenly, fear rushed her from every direction, drowning out the wildfire he'd started in her. "No!"

He froze, but refused to release her when she struggled against him. "What's wrong, Janine?" The warm breath of his strained words tickled the moist skin of her neck.

"You bit me!" She thrashed hard now, fighting with all of her strength to break free of his hold, but he held her to him with infinite ease, infinite ease that angered her. "Let me go!"

"Stop it."

"No." She struggled until she went limp against him in an exhausted heap.



## Chapter Ten

“Janine?” She sobbed as Raze held her against him, and after her struggle ceased, he slipped out of her body.

“You made me like you,” she whispered between her sniffles.

“Son of a bitch,” he murmured under his breath before turning her to face him. “Look at me.” When she kept her eyes downward, he gave her a gentle shake. “Damn it. Look at me.” He nearly wept when he saw the pain in her eyes.

“Why? Why did you do it?” she choked out around sobs.

“I did not do anything. I didn’t even break your skin.” He took her hand and guided it to her neck so she could feel for herself. “I would never do that to you unless you agreed to it. Do you trust me so little after everything we’ve been through?”

He felt as if he’d been torn in two. His mate, the love of his life, the other half of his soul thought he would change her when she’d made it clear to him that she was scared of becoming what he was? The hurt Damon had caused him over the years was nothing, a tiny speck of dust compared to the pain he felt at this very moment. For a minute, he feared his now broken heart might stutter to a stop.

Her sobbing quieted as she glided her fingers over the area he’d bitten. “But, I thought—”

“Yeah. I know exactly what you thought.” He turned around and sat on the edge of the mattress and let his feet hit the wood floor. He propped his elbows on his knees and rested his face in his hands.

She was quiet for several minutes before she moved, and he felt the mattress dip beside him. “I’m sorry. I guess I freaked out a little.”

He raised his head from his hands and looked at her. “This just isn’t going to work between us, is it? I want it to more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life, but you aren’t ever going to trust me one hundred percent, are you?”

“It’s not that. I’ve been through so much the past few days. And, when I thought—”

“When you thought I bit you?” He shook his head and stood. He bent, pulled his jeans on, and watched her from under his lashes. He reached out, cupped the side of her cheek and sighed. “You are a beautiful, sexy, honest, feisty, lovely woman. You have so much to offer the world, and you don’t even know it. I wish with all of my heart that you could trust me, but if you can’t, a relationship between us is impossible.”

“Raze, I didn’t mean to flip out like I did. I just . . .” She chewed her bottom lip and watched him with blue eyes that swam in pools of tears.

“I know, but until I know that you trust me, that you know I would never do anything you didn’t want me to or anything that would hurt you, we can’t continue on with what’s between us. And there is something between us. You can feel it just as I can. I will protect you with my life, and clean up this mess with Damon. After that, you can decide if your life will include me or not.”

Walking away from her was the hardest thing he had ever done. His soul screamed at him to run back to her and tell her he didn’t care if she ever trusted him, didn’t care about anything as long as she stayed with him. She was his true mate, and he’d forever have a void inside his chest if she chose to live without him in her life, but he couldn’t be with her if she didn’t trust him. It wouldn’t be fair to him or her, and maybe he didn’t deserve any better than that, but she sure as hell did.

\* \* \* \*

“Tell us a little about Damon, Raze.” Anthony eyed Raze with a cold calm that sent a trickle of foreboding down his spine.

He sat across from Anthony and Brent. The two werewolves were ancients, and while he wasn’t a spring chicken, these two had quite a few years on him. They had been around when the lycan laws had been sacred, when the race had been united as one, and the main goal was to keep all potential mates safe. Raze had the same beliefs, and had struggled with witnessing the things his pack had done after most of them had gone rogue.

Luckily, he'd held on to his beliefs when most of the chivalry and morality had been brainwashed from those younger and older than he. He'd learned to keep his mouth shut and not draw attention to himself, but when Damon had killed the pack's old leader and had become the alpha male, things had taken a drastic nose dive to hell. Raze had been plagued by horrible nightmares of the things Damon had done, and had awoken on more than one occasion with screams clawing at the back of his throat.

He'd witnessed so much violence, so much useless cruelty, that he honestly didn't understand how he'd stayed sane.

"Damon lives for violence. He believes whatever he wants is his for the taking, including all lycan potential mates. He's brought several women who carried the main scent to our pack over the years. They've been horribly used and mistreated. Once Damon and the pack tired of them, they were killed. Janine is the first to survive." Raze scrubbed his fingers across his face, wishing he could wipe the things he'd seen from his mind.

He'd tried several times to help the women, to convince Damon that what he was doing was wrong. Those actions always had repercussions, and the repercussions grew harsher every time Raze voiced his concerns. He finally stopped saying anything, as he knew the next time would end in his death. That was when he started trying to escape, but Damon had kept a short leash on him as if he knew what Raze was planning.

"This is why we started the sanctuary. We know there are younger lycans like you stuck in rogue packs. It is near impossible to escape your pack unless you are ancient or have protection on the outside. That is where we come in. My mate was hunted by rogues for years." A muscle ticked in Brent's cheek.

"I believe that if we hadn't escaped when we did, Damon would have taken Janine from me and passed her around to the pack. She would have probably been murdered like the rest." Raze's stomach clenched at the thought.

"You did good getting her out and protecting her. You did the right thing." Anthony stood and leaned his hip against the wall.

"I had to," Raze whispered.

"She's your mate. You had no choice but to try to protect her," Brent agreed.

"Yeah, but she doesn't trust me. I told her we shouldn't be together if she couldn't." Raze looked Brent in the eye.

Brent snickered. "Damn, kid, and here I was thinking you were smart. What the hell do you expect? She's human. Up until a few days ago, she had no idea we even existed. She's been through a lot, Raze. You need to cut her some slack."

"You should be on your knees thanking God that he led her to you, and instead, you're worried about her trusting you when she's probably scared shitless? Don't be a fucking martyr, because that's what you'll be if you don't fight for her. You'll die little by little inside without her. She's the only salvation, the only light to the darkness you've endured that you will ever be offered." Anthony watched Raze with sparkling green eyes.

Maybe they were right. Maybe he'd gotten a little carried away a little too soon with the trust thing. Raze sighed.

"Is Damon a skilled hunter and fighter?" Brent picked up a bottle of water sitting in front of him, unscrewed the cap and took a long sip.

"He's good, but he's more cocky than anything. Damon has a big ego, and he's easily fooled when someone declares their obedience to him, even if it is an act. That's how I escaped, by acting like his superiority and intelligence was something I should have never questioned. Although, I can't promise he won't be a little wiser now that I screwed him." Raze smiled when he remembered how he'd nearly plowed Damon over with the Jeep at the rest stop.

"Then there is absolutely no doubt that he will come for you?" Anthony asked.

"None."

"So be it. We've only recently opened the sanctuary, and you are our first guest, but we do have several young lycans coming in next week. For now, it is you, Anthony and me. Our mates, Rindy and Karen, are also here, and while I don't want them involved, they can protect Janine while we take care

of Damon and anyone else who is stupid enough to come with him.” Brent glanced at Anthony and waited until he nodded in agreement.

“You should be safe enough at the cabin. Brent and I will patrol the area in shifts, and at the first sign of trouble, we’ll move Janine here with Karen and Rindy. This place has a Fort Knox security system, and once it’s activated, no one will get in unless they are let in.” Anthony walked to the front door. “We’ll get this problem taken care of.”

“Thank you for your help.” Raze was glad he’d heard about this place. There was no way he’d ever be able to protect Janine like this on his own.

Raze left the cabin a few moments later and made his way back to where he and Janine were staying. He walked quietly, and sniffed the air as he went, on alert for any sign of Damon or the other pack members. When he walked in the front door, the lights were out, and the place was quiet. He went down the hall and peeked into the bedroom, and his breath hitched in his throat.

Janine lay sprawled across the bed, the sheet barely covering her naked curves, fast asleep. Her blonde hair lay in haphazard sections across the pillow, and her cheek rested on the arm she had bent under her head. She was gorgeous, and he couldn’t understand why she had doubts about that fact. He wanted to crawl in the bed with her, simply hold her while he slept, tell her he’d been a fool earlier, but he didn’t want to wake her.

He left the door cracked, went back to the living room, and arranged his huge frame on the tiny couch. His feet hung over the end, and his neck scrunched at an angle he knew was going to cause an ache by morning. He was simply too tired to care. His eyes drifted closed, and he slipped into a deep sleep.

\* \* \* \*

*Raze stroked the inside of her naked thigh with his long fingers and Janine sighed. The sun was shining down on them through the thick trees, giving off a comfortable warmth that belied the cool fall weather. He pushed her gently back until she lay on top of a pile of crunchy leaves. She smiled when she thought of how she’d have to pick them out of her hair later, knowing they’d only remind her of this very moment.*

*He grinned down at her, his eyes glowing, mirroring the same desire she felt for him. She'd somehow come to terms with what he was, and had realized he'd never hurt her or make her do anything against her will. The way he touched her . . . It was as if she were a rare, precious gem. Suddenly, she understood why—why he touched her that way and why she felt as if she was that rare, precious gem when he did so. He loved her, and she accepted him, trusted him . . . loved him.*

*She had on a dress, and his fingers skimmed higher until they glided along the slick folds that were weeping just for him. She moaned and wrapped her arms around his neck to pull his mouth to hers. He kissed her hungrily, and let two fingers slide home.*

*She cried out, but he swallowed the sounds and dipped his tongue deeper. She arched to meet his fingers as they slid deeper into her wetness, and his cock nudged her thigh. She raised her leg until she could rub against him, creating the same friction on his erection that he was treating her to. Their kiss never broke as the swirling of her orgasm threatened to erupt out of control.*

*His thumb flicked her clit, and she plunged head long into the most mind shattering orgasm she'd ever experienced. Electricity shot through her skin, straight to her core. She bucked and cried out time and again, and just as she thought she'd reached the crescendo, he rubbed against her leg one final time and cried out in his own release, spurring her into another orgasm right on the heels of the first.*

*Her body quivered with the sheer shock of the glorious physical and emotional rapture it had just been bombarded with, and her heart slammed hard against her ribs. She panted and looked up into his face, his gorgeous face. He belonged to her. She could see it in his eyes. She owned his heart. She felt the same, and wondered if he could see it in her eyes as well.*

*Her body was replete, but still ached for something. "Make love to me, Raze."*

*She needed him inside her where he belonged. She reached for him and widened her thighs in welcome of his possession.*

## Chapter Eleven

When Janine woke the next morning, her body was hot, damp and achy. She remembered the dream well. It had been so vivid, so real. She showered and dressed, and when she made her way to the kitchen, Raze was sitting at the small table sipping at a cup of black coffee.

“Good morning,” she said hesitantly, not sure what kind of reception she’d get from him after their disagreement.

He smiled up at her. “Good morning. Sleep well?”

Yeah. Too damn good with hot dreams of him. Her cheeks burned, and she quickly pulled a cup from the cabinet and poured some coffee in hopes of covering up her embarrassment. “Yes. Thank you. You?”

He stretched his long arms over his head. “I thought I wasn’t going to scrunched up on the couch, but I had some very interesting dreams that made me forget all about my sleeping arrangement.”

She turned and looked at him. He stood and came toward her until he was a breath from her, their bodies almost touching. He bent down and placed his mouth close to her ear. “I can see it too.”

She sucked in a breath and snapped her head up. The jerky movement sloshed hot coffee over her hand. “Ouch!” She set the cup down and started for the sink, but Raze was there before she could turn the water on. He flipped on the cold tap, and pushed her hand under it.

“Son of a bitch. I’m sorry,” he muttered.

“It’s not your fault I’m clumsy.” She didn’t think the burn was all that bad, and felt more of an impact from his touch than from the injury.

He turned her hand over after a few minutes to inspect it, and let out a long breath of what she supposed was relief. “Just a little red.”

She turned the water off. “I’m okay. Thank you.”

He tugged her toward the living room where he sat down and pulled her across his lap. She squirmed, but he held her to his chest firmly.

“Listen. I’m sorry about what I said. I shouldn’t have asked you for so much so soon. You’ve been through a lot in the past couple days, and it was wrong of me to ask for your blind trust at this moment in time. I wasn’t lying

when I said you were my mate, and I care for you, Janine. If there is a chance for us, even a slight one, I want to take it. You are the only woman in the world for me.”

She felt tears prickle the back of her eyes. “I didn’t mean to flip out on you when you bit me. I know you’d never do anything to hurt me. It’s just, yes, I have been through quite an emotional roller coaster, and sometimes the fear of what I’ve been through sneaks up on me.” She cupped his cheek in her hand. “I do care for you, Raze. I don’t know if we can make this thing happen between us. We are so different, but I’m willing to try.”

He squeezed her to him until she squeaked. “Damn. I’m sorry.”

She laughed. “Stop apologizing for everything.”

He grinned. “I will if you will.”

She nodded. “Deal.”

“Janine?” He tucked her hair behind her ears and watched her with those intense, gray eyes she was growing to—

*Oh my God! I do love him.* It hadn’t been just a dream. It had been a revelation. Somehow, somewhere along the line, she’d fallen in love with him. “What, Raze?”

“I would really like to make love to you. I mean, I know technically we have, but—”

She placed her index finger over his lips. “Please, and I swear to you we won’t stop this time.”

Oh, there would definitely be no stopping this time. Last time, he’d been inside her, but had never finished, and she craved to feel his release right along with her own. She giggled when he picked her up and carried her to the bedroom. They stripped their clothes off in less than a minute and she was soon flat on her back with Raze on top of her.

He framed her face with his big hands. “You, Janine Denton, are the most fascinating, beautiful, wonderful creature I’ve ever laid eyes on.”

When he looked at her that way, the desire glowing in his eyes, she believed him. He placed his lips on hers and kissed her long and deep. She wound her arms around his neck and toyed with the short hairs at his nape.



The achy demand that now seemed so familiar when Raze touched her started in her breasts and dipped low into her stomach.

His tongue played at hers and the spicy, clean taste of him assaulted her senses with a rush of heat, and she pressed closer to his big body. The sprinkling of hairs on his chest and legs tickled her skin, and she groaned at the sensation. It wasn't a tickle that made her want to laugh. It was a tickle that traveled under the skin and settled deep into her core, more of an itch that could only be scratched by Raze.

She smoothed her palm along the plane of his wide shoulder and brought it flat against his chest where she gave him a gentle nudge. To her surprise, he retreated and fell gently to his back on the mattress just as she had wanted. He reached for her and coaxed her to straddle his thighs. Her heart skittered and flip-flopped as she looked down at him.

He was magnificent, and he was all hers. She licked her lips as she perused his muscular body and marveled at how he let her tame him. She could practically feel the power of him vibrate under her. She ran her hands along his pecs and fanned them over his shoulders.

"You are always saying I'm beautiful, but this"—she patted him on the chest—"and this"—she caressed his forehead—"is beautiful. I don't think I've met a man who has such a perfect balance of beauty on the inside and out."

His eyes glowed brighter and he propped himself up on his elbows. "Kiss me."

She smiled and bent to do as he'd asked. His lips were soft, but firm and unyielding and his tongue did more than stroke her, did more than entice her, did more than inflame her. It claimed her. He hugged her to him, pressed his nose to her hair and breathed in slow. She liked it when he smelled her.

She kissed his cheek, delighting in the rough texture of his stubble against her lips, and continued down to his chest. When she licked at one of his nipples, he tangled his fingers in her hair and urged her closer. She continued down, traced the outline of each muscle in his abs, around his navel, and down the narrow line of golden hair until she reached his cock.

She wrapped her fingers around the base and stroked up and down slowly before sucking the tip of him between her lips. He growled and she smiled around him before taking him deeper. He tugged gently at her hair and showed her the rhythm he liked. She cupped his balls in her other hand and rolled them gently in her palm. He tasted good, and she devoured him inch by inch until his hips thrust up at her and his groans grew louder. He pulsed in her palm, and she thought he was about to come, but before he did, he encircled her upper arms and pulled her away from him and up his body until she straddled him once again.

He guided his hands to her hips, gripped them and slammed her down on him as he rolled up into her. They both gasped as he filled her, stretched her. They remained motionless for several seconds before he flipped her to her back and settled between her thighs, never breaking the contact of their bodies. He took her mouth in a demanding kiss as he slammed into her with a fury that matched the need burning in her.

She met his thrusts and a slow burn built with every stroke of his possession.

“You. Feel. So. Damn. Good,” He grunted between each dive of his hips.

She couldn’t speak. Her mouth open, small pants and moans escaped as he pounded into her. Suddenly, her orgasm crashed through her, and a scream ripped from her throat. She hung on to him as he continued to break through the waves of her release, causing hundreds of riptides of electricity to shoot through her. She thought she might faint from the intensity of the moment, didn’t think the insane pleasure cascading through every cell of her body could get any stronger, but she was wrong.

When he lifted his head and roared out his own release, she thought she’d die. Surely, one person could not survive such fervent paradise. She felt his seed pulse hot and deep inside her with each jerk of his hips, and nothing in her life had seemed so right as being with him.

Once the ripples of their release died down to gentle waves, he turned to his side and pulled her against him in classic spoon style. His warmth radiated into her, and she started drifting into sleep.

“Make sure you dream about me again,” his lips whispered against her ear.

Her eyes popped open. “What?”

“I was there last night, in your dreams.” He smiled when she frowned at him.

“How?”

“It’s another thing fated mates can do. We can share each other’s dreams.” He nibbled her shoulder. “Especially when they get particularly heated.”

And even after what they’d just done, her cheeks grew hot, and he chuckled. “Don’t laugh at me.”

“I’m sorry. I just find it endearing and cute the way you blush.” Raze kissed her on the neck, and other parts of her heated.

“I’m too tired to talk about this right now.” Janine yawned.

“Go to sleep. I’ll stay here with you.”

She snuggled tighter against him. “Good, because you are like my own personal, full body heating pad.”

He chuckled again. “Always at your service, ma’am.”

She smiled and slipped into a deep sleep.

## Chapter Twelve

Raze awoke with a start from the light doze he'd drifted into. Janine was still snuggled tightly against him. Her soft breaths fanned over his arm. The back of his neck tingled and he sniffed the air. Warning bells clanged loud in his head and he shook Janine.

"Wake up, Janine." She moaned softly. "Wake up. Now!"

She sat up abruptly. "Wha-what's wrong?" she mumbled.

"Get your clothes on." He scrambled off the bed and hastily dressed.

She must have noticed the urgency in his movements for the last vestiges of sleep left her and she scrambled off the bed and started pulling her clothes on. Once she was dressed, he grabbed her hand, and towed her along behind him to the door, out the door, and toward Brent's cabin.

"What's wrong?" Her voice was high-pitched and tinged with fear.

He didn't answer, and just as he made it to the cabin, Brent and Anthony stepped out from the woods onto the path.

"He's close," Raze said to the two men.

"We know," Brent answered. "Get Janine inside. Karen and Rindy are waiting for her."

"What is going on?" Janine struggled against Raze as he practically dragged her up the stairs.

"Damon is here, and you are in danger." He stopped and fixed her with a determined stare. "You have to go inside. The cabin's security system and Karen and Rindy will keep you safe."

"While what? You go out and risk your life for me? No. I'm staying with you." She gripped his hand tightly.

He cupped her face. "We don't have time for this. You don't stand a chance against any of the lycans. They'll tear you apart or take you again, and if they take you again, they won't give me a chance to rescue you. They'll kill you before they let me get my hands on you. They know you are important to me, or I would have never taken you with me when I left."

"I don't care. I don't want anything to happen to you." She glanced over at Brent and Anthony. "Or them for that matter."

“Get inside, Janine. Now.” Raze growled.

“I’d listen to him if I were you, *Janine*.” Damon stepped out of the woods, and ten of the pack filtered in behind him.

“Get off our land. This is a sanctuary, and you are trespassing.” Brent took a step toward Damon and stood straight, showing no fear.

“You have something of mine. I’ve come to collect it. Just hand over Raze and the woman and I’ll be gone.” Damon nodded toward Raze.

Anthony stepped up beside Brent. “Lycans and humans are not possessions. You do not own them, and our kind are permitted by our laws to leave a pack if they so desire, unharmed.”

“I do not recognize your law. We have our own laws now, and your laws are old, outdated, and quite frankly, ridiculous.” Damon smiled. “Surely you can see that.”

“The only thing I can see is a bunch of idiot, rogue pups who think their britches are bigger than they are. Same old story, different day.” When Brent spoke, the smile vanished from Damon’s face.

“I don’t want to have to fight you,” Damon sneered.

“No. Believe me, you don’t.” Anthony nodded toward the lycans behind Damon. “Because I guarantee you, you will lose.”

Damon snorted. “I think you are out numbered.”

“And I think you are out aged,” Brent replied.

By the way the smugness drained from Damon’s face, Raze was sure he’d had no idea that Brent and Anthony were ancient lycans. The older the lycan, the more deadly, and by lycan standards, Damon and the rogues he’d brought were young. Raze was even a few years older than Damon. The few ancients that had once been a part of the pack had long vacated the pups, not wanting anything to do with their nefarious ways. Damon’s hunger for greed had driven the strongest away.

Damon snarled. “Get them!”

Raze shoved Janine at the open door behind him and jumped over the railing of the deck, shifting in mid air. Brent and Anthony partially shifted. Claws sprang from their fingers and fangs burst through their gums. Only

ancients had the ability to partially shift. Raze hadn't mastered that ability quite yet, and landed on the dirt path on all four paws.

\* \* \* \*

Janine landed on her butt in the open doorway of the cabin after Raze had shoved her, and watched in horror as he leapt from the deck and turned into a huge, golden blond wolf. Damon and the rest of the pack shifted into wolves as well. Brent and Anthony, however, looked like monsters straight out of a Hollywood horror movie.

She gasped when someone started pulling her inside the cabin, and struggled. When she was released, she turned to see two women staring down at her.

"I'm Karen." The tall redhead with blue eyes spoke. "This is Rindy." She motioned toward the smaller woman with blonde hair nearly the same color as Janine's. "You need to get inside."

Janine looked back at the wolves now tearing each other apart. Growls, howls, snapping teeth, and yelps ripped through the still night air. "Will they be okay?"

"They'll be fine. Come on. It's dangerous out here." Rindy tried to coax Janine inside once again by tugging at her arm.

A particularly loud yelp made her decide that maybe she should wait inside. She stood, but just as she turned to go, a large wolf landed behind her and quickly shifted. Fingers wrapped in her hair and jerked her backwards. She landed with a thud against a hard chest. Tears sprang to her eyes as some of her hair ripped from her scalp, and another hand wrapped around her throat.

"You should have gone inside when your boyfriend told you to, you stupid bitch."

Janine shivered. She knew that voice well. It was Damon. Rindy and Karen stepped out, but Damon *looked* at them.

"One more step and I'll break her neck." To prove his point, Damon applied enough pressure to make Janine cry out.

When Rindy and Karen stopped, Damon sniffed at Janine's neck. Shivers of dread raced down her spine. Why hadn't she done what Raze had told her to do? She'd be safe inside now. She'd been so worried over his safety, she hadn't cared about her own.

Worse than that, she was putting Raze, Brent and Anthony in more danger. She'd given Damon the upper hand now. She would become a bargaining chip, one that Damon hadn't had until she'd insisted on not doing what she'd been told. If something happened to any of them because of her, she'd never forgive herself.

*It'll be okay, Janine.*

*Raze?*

He didn't answer her, but she was sure it had been his voice in her head. Or maybe she was grasping at straws—thin, red, coffee stirring straws of hope that they'd all have a tiny chance in hell of getting out of this unscathed. Damon dragged her backward, her toes barely touched the ground. His hand squeezed on her throat, nearly cutting all her air off, and black dots danced before her eyes.

She must have blacked out because, when she came to, she was lying on the ground. The moon lit up the tops of the trees and shimmered to the dirt in various places through the thick leaves.

"I see you are finally awake."

Janine jerked up and tried to scramble to her feet, but she was suddenly pinned flat on her back. "Get off me, Damon."

He laughed, and in the distance, the sounds of fighting could still be heard. "I don't think I'll be getting off you until I get off."

Her stomach clenched, and she felt bile burn up the back of her throat. "Raze will kill you." Her fear kicked up even higher when she realized Damon was completely naked.

Damon snarled and grabbed her neck with his big hand again. "You're his mate, aren't you?"

She wasn't going to tell him anything. "If you let me go now, and promise to never come back, I'll make sure they leave you alone."

“Yeah, guess it must be hard to accept when your mate rapes you. He’s just as predatory as we are. He enjoyed every minute of it,” he spat.

“That goes to show what you know. He never touched me like that. He’s smarter than you. We both are. We only made you believe he did as you instructed.” When the scowl marred Damon’s features, quickly followed by a new burst of anger, Janine was sorry she’d run off at the mouth.

“What, you think I’m stupid?” Damon yelled the words.

“No. Just really full of yourself.” She cried out when he backhanded her on the cheek.

“I’m done with the chit chat, bitch. If Raze can’t do as instructed, I’ll make sure the job gets done myself.” His eyes glowed.

She screamed and struggled when he ripped her shirt from her, but he held her down easily. Suddenly, Raze burst through the trees and stood not ten feet from them with Anthony and Brent close behind. At any other time, she might be a bit embarrassed standing in the midst of so many naked men, but under the circumstances, she barely noticed. She guessed that they were probably comfortable with their nudity, was used to it, since they lost their clothes each time they shifted.

Damon sprang up and yanked Janine against him, his arm wrapped around her throat. “One step closer and she dies.”

“Don’t listen to him, Raze. Just kill the bastard.” The words lacked the anger she felt because her oxygen was severely depleted.

Raze raised his hand. “What do you want, Damon?”

“Since you so obviously snuffed my punishment to begin with according to your little bitch here, I can only assume that you care for her, and I believe she is your mate.”

Raze’s eyes snapped to Janine’s and she mouthed, “sorry.”

“Take me. Just let her go, and I’ll go back with you willingly.” Raze never took his eyes from Janine.

“No!” Janine cried out before Damon tightened his hold.

“I think your bitch here might be right. I have a better idea. Since she means so much to you, you should make her one of us. Don’t you think that would be romantic, Janine?” Damon snarled.



“Please, Damon. I’ll do anything but that. Name anything else.” Raze put his hands out, palms up in a gesture of surrender.

Janine was certain deep down that Damon wasn’t going to compromise on his command, and the way Raze was offering himself up on the proverbial silver platter made her want to cry, and then kick Damon right in the jewels. Raze was willing to die for her, and her life wasn’t at stake . . . just her humanity.

“This time, when I tell you to do something, you’ll do it, or I will. Your choice, but time’s running out.” Damon’s words came in a clipped, angry manner.

Raze’s fists clenched and unclenched, and his eyes glowed. Janine knew if he got his hands on Damon, he was a dead man, and as horrible as it might make her, she was looking forward to him ripping Damon to shreds.

“Don’t do this, Damon. Mates are sacred. They aren’t meant to be abused.” Raze’s words sounded forced through his clenched jaw.

“Tick, tock, tick tock.” Damon sniffed at Janine’s hair, and she closed her eyes.

“Damon, if you do it, I’ll kill you. I swear it.” Raze’s voice was low, and the underlying tone gave credence to his promise.

“Time’s up.” Damon laughed a wicked sound that sent shivers down Janine’s spine.

Damon yanked her head to the side and bared his teeth. She screamed out and waited for the pain.

“Wait!” Raze shouted.

## Chapter Thirteen

Raze's heart thundered, and his skin crawled with fingers of dread. If it came between Damon and him biting Janine to change her, it would be him even if it meant she would hate him. Raze tried not to let his gaze travel to Janine's torn shirt. The fact that Damon had his hands on her at all sent an inferno of rage pounding through his veins.

He walked toward Damon and Janine slowly. "I'll do it."

"I knew you'd come around, Raze. You've always been the chivalrous, white horse riding type," Damon mocked.

"Janine. Please tell me you won't hate me." Raze's breath stuck in his throat when she fixed her wide, blue eyes on him.

"It's okay. If I have no choice, I would rather it be you. It's not your fault. I won't forget that." She smiled and tears spilled down her cheeks.

He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment as relief and grief washed through him. He was about to betray his mate, the one person in the whole world he was supposed to protect with his life. She'd made it very clear to him that she did not want to be changed. Hell, she couldn't even fully accept what he was yet. He looked over his shoulder at Anthony and Brent, who'd remained silent during the confrontation with Damon.

They both nodded at him, and he was confident that Damon would be taken out the second the opportunity arose.

Raze stepped closer to Janine. He moved slow and kept his gait smooth so Damon wouldn't feel threatened. He had no doubt that he would snap her neck without a second thought. He gave Janine a tight smile and focused on Damon.

"Let's get this over with." He itched to rearrange Damon's face for him.

The situation was near unbearable. This was not how he wanted to change Janine. He'd hoped that, at some point in time, she would agree to let him change her, but not like this. He'd imagined a calm, cool, clear night in the woods, not unlike tonight, only he and she would have been alone. He would have held her in his arms, told her how much he loved her, and as they made love, he'd have claimed her completely.

Janine's breath was sporadic, giving away her fear, but other than that, she looked at him with determination and acceptance of what was about to happen. She was a spectacular woman, and she was his. He stepped closer and Damon forced her head to the side.

"I don't want you to hate me, Janine," Raze whispered.

"The only way I will hate you is if you let this creep bite me instead of you." She gave him a tremulous smile.

He was proud of how brave she was being. "I love you, Janine." He couldn't go through with this unless she knew how he felt.

She let out a small cry that sounded like a hiccup. "Oh, Raze." Tears pooled in her eyes and made them sparkle. "I love you too."

"Enough! Do it now!" Damon yelled.

"Do it, Raze," she pleaded.

She loved him. She actually loved him. He'd never thought in a million years that she'd return the sentiment. He tilted his head, kissed her neck and licked at the silken skin. He breathed her scent deep into his lungs and it soaked into every muscle, every cell, every part of him. She'd be imprinted on him for as long as he lived, and lodged in his heart for eternity.

Every fiber of his being balked at what he was about to do. He opened his mouth and his canines elongated. He lowered his mouth closer, closer to Janine, but at the last moment, he sank his teeth into Damon's arm and ripped a chunk of skin and muscle away from the bone. Damon screamed out his fury, and the split second of distraction allowed Raze to jerk Janine from his grasp and tumble her to the ground underneath him.

He tucked her close and rolled them a couple feet from Damon before helping her to her feet. By the time they stood, Brent and Anthony had Damon pinned to the ground. Damon snarled and howled, bit down on Brent's arm, shifted and tried to flee, but the ancient lycans were too fast. Brent changed and tackled Damon. Just as their bodies hit the ground, claws shot from Anthony's fingertips and he sliced through the thick fur and skin of Damon's neck, severing his jugular.

The wolf choked and shifted back into Damon's human form where he lay in a puddle of blood. He gasped once and was quiet.

“Sorry, Raze. I know you wanted to take him out, but we couldn’t risk him getting away.” Brent had changed back to his human form and the injuries Damon had inflicted on him before he shifted were healed.

“No worries. I’m happy as long as Janine is safe.” He held her close and gave her a gentle squeeze.

“You both all right?” Anthony seemed restless.

“Yes.” Janine hung on tightly to Raze. “Thank you.”

\* \* \* \*

Janine watched as Anthony and Brent disappeared into the woods. She shivered as the adrenaline rush from being scared started wearing off, and the cool night air settled into her bones.

“Let’s get back to the cabin.” Raze nudged her in the direction of their lodgings, but stayed close behind her.

She shivered again. Damon had deserved what he’d gotten, but it didn’t make what she’d witnessed any less tragic or terrifying. She was tired and a bit sore from being tossed around and manhandled. Worst of all was the way her head pounded from the hair Damon had ripped from her scalp when he’d first grabbed her.

“Yeah. I’m cold and tired.” She kept walking, and as the cabin came into sight, relief washed through her.

She couldn’t believe what had almost happened. She had thought Raze would change her, as Damon had demanded. Strangely, she hadn’t been that upset about the prospect. She’d been terrified at the thought of becoming a lycan, but it had become somewhat of a trivial matter when she thought Raze’s life was being threatened. When he’d offered himself up to Damon in exchange for her, she thought she’d have a panic attack.

The thought of Raze dying was more than she could bear, and at that moment, she’d come to realize that she never wanted to lose him, and if that meant becoming like him, so be it. To be honest, the wolf Raze shifted to was nearly as beautiful as he was in the flesh. She stopped, and he frowned at her.

“Something wrong?”

She nodded. “No. I was just wondering, since you are still naked and all . . .” She boldly looked him up and down, then promptly blushed. “Well, I haven’t really seen you up close after, well, you know.”

He grinned, and before she could blink, a big, golden wolf stood in front of her. She gasped and kneeled. Standing, the wolf’s back nearly came to her waist. Kneeling, she was eye to eye with him. She tentatively reached out to touch the thick fur and hesitated a mere inch from it. Familiar gray eyes watched her, and she could have sworn he smiled, but wolves didn’t smile, did they?

*It’s okay to touch me, Janine.*

“Holy crap!” She snatched her arm back. “That really was you in my mind earlier, wasn’t it?”

*Yes. We have to be able to communicate some way other than growling and howling while in wolf form.*

“Oh.”

She stretched her hand toward him again, and let her fingers glide through the golden fur. It was wiry, but soft. She laughed when he nudged against her and she plopped back on her rear. She stroked him and he sat beside her. After a few moments, he shifted back to human form and stood before her with his hand outstretched.

She took it and he helped her up. “Thank you, Raze. What is it like?”

“It’s amazing. It’s like you become one with nature. You are free, and the constraints of humanity seem to disappear. The power that emanates through you is exhilarating, and it’s as if you are in sync with the world.” His eyes glowed as he tried to explain what being a wolf was like.

They made it to the cabin and stepped through the door before he firmly closed it behind them. She reached out and ran her fingers along the smooth line of his shoulder and down his chest. He groaned and leaned into her touch.

She stood on tiptoe and placed her lips against his. “Make love to me, Raze.”

She gasped as he took her to the floor right in front of the door and began tugging at her clothes. She had thought he'd take her to the bedroom, but was glad when he hadn't, proving his need for her matched hers for him. Once she was naked under him, he nudged her thighs wide until he could settle his hips between them. His cock bumped against her already slickened entrance, and his mouth claimed hers.

Their tongues danced, tasted, and mated, and he rocked against her. She arched her hips up off the floor, and he buried himself to the hilt with one smooth push. His strokes were bold, deep, and matched the rhythm of his tongue. Her muscles clenched hard around him each time he retreated, and rejoiced when he slid back home.

She wrapped her legs around his waist and rocked in perfect time with his thrusts. She dug her nails into his hard ass, anchoring herself for his possession. The pressure built deep inside, and she arched up and took him even deeper.

"Raze," she panted.

"What?" His breathless answer told her in no uncertain terms that he was as affected as she by their lovemaking.

She looked up into his glowing eyes. "Change me. I want to be with you completely."

He smiled down at her and took her mouth again. He reared back and thrust deep, and she cried out as her release exploded through her. Her muscles clamped down hard around him, and he growled as he joined her. She could feel every rush of his hot seed as it shot from him into her womb, and could literally feel their souls intertwining. He was hers, and she was his. Forever.

He carried her to the bed afterwards, and she lay snuggled against him. "Why didn't you change me?"

He gently stroked her hair. "You aren't ready."

He was probably right, but she was still willing to do it for him. She would have gotten used to it, and she had no doubt that they'd be happy together. "Isn't it hard for you not to change me?"

He smiled and kissed her. “Yes. My instincts scream at me to claim you, but I will never do anything that might cause you pain for my own selfish needs.”

“I love you, Raze.”

“I love you too, Janine.”

He’d sacrificed so much for her, risked his life for her, and had denied himself for her. “I’ll be ready one day. I promise.”

“Doesn’t matter as long as you love me and we are together.” He rolled to his back and pulled her on top of him.

She raised a brow. “Again already?”

He chuckled. “I think you will find me ready again already a lot where you are concerned.”

The laughter died in her throat when he arched up and slid into her. The familiar fires he stoked to life inside her burned bright, and she’d never get enough of him.

## Chapter Fourteen

*One year later . . .*

Raze sat on a stool in front of the long counter in Janine's kitchen. The smell of cupcakes floated through the air and tantalized his stomach. He loved watching Janine bake, and he smiled when she put an extra thick blob of chocolate icing on a chocolate cupcake and handed it to him. Chocolate was his favorite, although he couldn't say he'd tasted any flavor she made that he didn't like.

He wolfed the cake down in two bites and she laughed. "What?"

"I don't see how you can eat like you do and still look like that." She motioned up and down at his body with her hand.

He stood, went to her, and pulled her into a hug. "Like what?"

She swiped playfully at him. "You know like what you egotistical male you. You know very well that you look like a freaking Greek god statue."

He pressed his lips to hers and slid his tongue in her mouth when she sighed. He could taste her forever and still long for more. "Then you are my goddess."

"Please." She smirked. "I have to finish these cupcakes up before we leave or you are going to have to explain to Brent, Anthony, Rindy, Karen and the new residents at the sanctuary why they don't have dessert this weekend."

He released her. "Hell no. The last time I distracted you from finishing the cupcakes, I thought they'd strangle me."

She giggled again. "Help me get these in the boxes then so we can get going."

The two of them had spent every week after the incident with Damon at Janine's house so she could run the cupcake business. But on Friday afternoon, they packed up and headed for the sanctuary where they stayed until Monday morning. It was a compromise he was more than happy to make for the love of his life.

They had talked about buying some land of their own and building a cabin, but they had both decided that helping out at the sanctuary was more



important at this point in time. Not to mention, Brent and Rindy kept a cabin open exclusively for them at all times, and Raze had more than enough room to run.

He helped her load a dozen boxes with chocolate, vanilla, strawberry and carrot cupcakes, all with different flavored butter cream icing. When the last box was full, he pulled her against him again. "I can't wait until tonight."

"Me either." Janine kissed him.

His cock twitched as it always did at some point when Janine was around. "Are you sure you're ready?"

"Yes."

Tonight was the night he would change Janine, and even though he'd been anxious for this night, he was happy that they'd waited until she was sure she wanted to take this step with him. He loved her more than anything, and always strived to make her happy. "I love you."

"I love you too."

He kissed her long and deep.

"Ewww. Will you get a room already? Every time I come in here, you two are going at it." Sherry plopped down on the same stool Raze had been sitting on.

"Sherry, what are you doing here? I thought you and Mark were going out tonight." Janine began stacking the boxes of cupcakes for Raze to carry to the car they'd packed earlier for their trip to the sanctuary.

"We broke up." Sherry shrugged.

"What happened? Did you finally figure out you were too good for him?" Raze smiled at Sherry, hoping she wasn't too heartbroken over the split.

"Something like that. It's okay though. I think it's been a long time coming. We've been more friends than anything for a few months now." She drummed her fingers on the counter.

"Want to come with us?" Raze grunted after Janine elbowed him in the ribs.

"Um, no way. Spending time with nature is not my thing. I'm going to catch a movie with some girlfriends tonight." Sherry hopped off the stool.

“Just wanted to stop by and say bye before you two headed out for the weekend.”

“You have fun,” Janine called to Sherry’s retreating back, and turned to Raze once she left. “Why would you invite her to come with us? You know it might be dangerous.”

“Not at sanctuary. Besides, to be honest, it could be dangerous for her anywhere.” Raze wanted to kick himself when worry etched Janine’s pretty features.

“I know, but I thought you said it would be less likely for her to be found in the city.” Janine chewed on her index fingernail.

“It is.” He pulled her to him. “I didn’t mean to worry you. She’ll be safe here. I just thought it might be good for her to get used to nature a little bit. I mean, what happens if her mate does find her?”

“Maybe she won’t like him.” She pouted.

“She’ll love him because, like us, they will be soul mates.”

“What if he’s like Damon? Oh God, Raze. I can’t stand the thought of —”

He placed his fingers over her mouth. “Stop. It will all turn out okay. I will keep her safe, and if her mate is a punk, I’ll talk some sense into him. Okay?”

She nodded. “I’ll hold you to that.”

The day he’d met Sherry, he’d known instantly that she was a destined lycan mate. Janine hadn’t liked the news when he’d told her. She’d insisted that Sherry was as far removed from anything that had to do with nature as one could be. While that would pose somewhat of a problem for a lycan, if her mate found her, he’d care for her enough to figure things out.

“Hey. We worked things out all right, and we had a pretty rocky start.” He nibbled at the soft skin on her neck.

She sighed. “Yeah. We did, didn’t we? I love you.”

“I love you more than anything. Now, can we get out of here because, if we don’t, I’m going to take those cupcakes we just packed, smear them all over you, and spend all night licking every crumb from your body.” He hardened when her blue eyes turned two shades darker with desire.

“Threats like that might backfire on you, Raze.”

He kissed her. “One can only hope.”

“You are incorrigible.” She sighed.

“And you are gorgeous.” He kissed her again. “Let’s go.”

He picked up a stack of the boxed cupcakes and headed for the car with her close behind. He’d never thought a year ago that his life would be like this. He had found his other half, and tonight, he would finally claim her.

The End

## *About the Author*

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

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

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