



MATING INSTINCT

CHARLIE RICHARDS

Sorry, humans, but you're not the top of the food chain anymore.

Gavin's a werewolf. A predator. And humans are prey, their flesh containing an enzyme werewolves need to survive. Each full moon, Gavin uses his supernatural strength, smell and hearing to create a methodical approach to hunting, which keeps him safe from being captured by the police. When he discovers his mate, a sex drive that'd gone dormant decades ago reawakens, distracting him and creating disastrous upheaval to his orderly life. Can Gavin not only seduce Brooke, the daughter of the profiler brought to town to hunt him, but convince her to accept her place as his werewolf mate?

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Mating Instinct

By

Charlie Richards

Dedication

*To my husband, for his patience when I turn
into a hermit with a laptop and for his never
ending support.*

Chapter One

Gavin stared at her and smiled. “Ah, you are beautiful,” he whispered under his breath. His pulse raced as he followed her, keeping a discreet distance. *Are you the one?* His werewolf blood stirred, even though the full moon was still ten days away. *Are you my next hunt?* That idea didn’t feel right...so what was it?

He watched her enter one of the mall’s stores. Feigning interest in an art display two shops down, Gavin waited for her to emerge. With her slender build, she appeared smaller than any of his prior prey. His meals normally consisted of someone with plenty of meat on their bones. Gavin’s prey needed to feed his six foot two inch, well-muscled body. Using his reflection in the window, he brushed thick brown hair away from his dark eyes and reminisced his conquest on the last full moon. Gavin prepared for the hunt days before the transformation, his werewolf instinct telling him whose flesh he needed to harvest.

Gavin pulled his mind back to the puzzle at

hand. He hadn't been able to take his gaze off the young woman. Thinking of her, he felt the blood pool in his groin, and his jaw tightened. Shocked, Gavin settled on a bench and took several long, slow breaths to control his unexpected erection. That reaction was new. Although he looked twenty-seven, he'd hunted as a werewolf for eighty-seven years and had never lusted after prospective prey. *Why are you different?*

When she came out of the store, she glanced around, her eyes searching. Her gaze slid over him and away before she headed further down the line of stores. Again, Gavin followed. She met with two other girls, neither of them of interest to him. Her conversation, however, he found more stimulating.

"Yeah, we've been here almost two weeks now. We moved in right before the full moon."

He missed her friend's reply.

She rolled her eyes. "A small town like this? Nobody interesting lives here."

If only she knew. Her thick, brown hair slid over her shoulder, and Gavin imagined how it'd feel sliding through his claws. He followed her home and discovered she lived two houses down and across the street from him. Staring out his upstairs window, he watched her paint the wooden fence bordering her yard.

Dressed in black jogging shorts, a red tank top,

and white socks and sneakers, he headed out the door. Walking briskly, Gavin warmed up his legs. He caught the girl across the street watching him, flashed her a grin, and picked up a jog, disappearing around the corner.

Forty-five minutes later, he returned to his street, this time on her side. Sweat glistened on his muscles, and Gavin walked to cool down. He saw that a man had joined her at the fence. From their similarities, he guessed a parent.

Slowing, he called a greeting, "Hello, there. Welcome to the neighborhood."

The father looked up. "Thanks. You live around here?"

Taking in the man's lithe, five foot eight inch frame, Gavin saw where the girl received her build. But her dark coloring must have come from the mother because the father had blond hair and blue eyes. "I do," Gavin replied. He pointed to his home. "Right there. The name's Gavin." He thrust out a strong, bronze hand.

The other man took it. "Richard Canton. This is my daughter, Brooke."

Appearing to look at her for the first time, Gavin smiled. "Nice to meet you, Brooke. Good job, you're doing there. I have a room or two I need to paint, but I've just been too busy."

"Really," Richard said. "What do you do?"

"I'm a carpenter," Gavin said. "I have a shop

out back. Mostly custom furniture and I've quite a backlog right now." He shrugged. "I'll get caught up eventually." Shifting, he made as if to go.

"Hey."

Turning toward Brooke, he raised a brow.

"Maybe you'd be interested in some help." He knew she saw her father's scowl, but Brooke ignored it. "I'm looking for summer work."

Gavin paused, silently praising himself. He'd known if she needed money, there'd be an offer of assistance. He hid his smugness behind a concerned look. "Well," he started. "I suppose we could work something out, but I'd need some time to move some furniture around. Can I get back to you?"

The father nodded gratefully. Gavin would give Richard a day or two to get used to the idea before inviting Brooke into his home. He moved on, nodding at Brooke and appreciating the smooth lines of her tanned face. He saw the gleam of interest in her hooded brown eyes and took a deep breath through his nose. His heightened senses caught her scent as he walked past her. *Mate*. The word echoed through his mind.

Gavin dismissed it and slipped into his house. This time he made no effort to squelch the lust coursing through his blood, an anticipatory smile curving his lips. Shutting the door, he leaned back on it, slid a hand inside his shorts, and wrapped

his fingers around his aching cock. He let the image and scent of Brooke fill his mind. A guttural growl rumbled through him and, with a few quick strokes to his sensitive flesh, an intense orgasm washed over him.

Standing in his upstairs bedroom, the window open so he could listen to the sounds of the night, Gavin watched a pizza delivery boy stride up Brooke's sidewalk. Brooke answered the door. Gavin appreciated the way her jean shorts hugged her legs and imagined sliding his hands up those bare thighs. His werewolf hearing allowed him to listen as the boy asked her if she attended his high school. A jealous rage tore through him at the boy's flirting, and a growl escaped his throat. *Mine!* His large hands clenched the window frames on either side of his head, and Gavin struggled for control. After Brooke told him she was only there to help her father get settled before heading to college, the boy left. Brooke's gaze strayed to Gavin's house, as if sensing his perusal. He stepped deeper into the shadows of his darkened bedroom, watching her disappear behind the closed door and formulating a plan to get Brooke into his home, and the sooner the better.

The next evening, emotions carefully held in

check, Gavin headed across the street. After knocking on the door, he turned to stare at the newly painted white fence, pretending to inspect it. The door opened behind him. Gavin knew Brooke stood there before turning. He could smell her. His pupils dilated as he breathed in her fresh, feminine scent mixed with lavender.

Schooling his features, Gavin turned to face her. *My mate*. Over the past couple days, he'd come to terms with the idea. Now he needed to confirm his suspicions. To do that, Gavin needed to get her into his bed. "Hello, Brooke," he greeted smoothly.

"Hello, Mr. ..." she paused, uncertain.

"Call me Gavin, otherwise, you'll make me feel old." He chuckled. That and he'd avoided using a last name for nearly a century. *Tax purposes only*. Her hesitant nod confused him, so he hurried past the awkwardness. "Is your father home?"

"Not yet."

His brown eyes glided over her form-fitting t-shirt. Giving her a charming smile, Gavin asked, "Any idea when he'll get in?"

She shook her head. "He's a policeman, so his hours can be strange."

The news should have made him wary, instead it excited him. A true challenge. *How do I steal a cop's daughter?*

Brooke's words cut into his musings, "Is this

about the painting? I do paint well, and I could use the extra money for college."

Gavin held her gaze for a moment. His face showed none of his internal struggle as his blood heated from her nearness. "Name your price." His voice came out huskier than intended.

Her brows shot up and Brooke smirked.

Forcing calm, Gavin crossed well-muscled arms over a broad chest. "You're welcome to start whenever. Like I said, I work in a shop out back. If I don't answer the door, come around." He grinned. "And if anything turns up missing, a cop lives right down the street," he teased.

Nodding, Brooke rolled her eyes. "I'm sure there'd be some other way to solve the problem without involving the police," she said, batting her eyelashes playfully and resting a hand on his arm.

He smiled, his skin tingling from the contact, and he wanted more. "I'm sure we could come to some agreement." He enjoyed the flirting of his mate. Taking a step away, he grinned back at her. "Then I'll see you tomorrow?"

"It's a date."

He chuckled at the comment. Gavin felt Brooke's gaze on him as he headed down her walk. A glance over his shoulder when he crossed the street showed him the appreciative look on her face. *So she likes what she sees.* Shutting his door, he made it to the bedroom this time before giving in

to the need to relieve the ache in his shaft. He dropped back on the bed, unzipped his jeans and wrapped a fist around his twitching shaft. He grunted at the contact, loving the stimulation after so many years without it. His hips lifted and lowered as he shoved his dick through his hand. "Hell, yeah," he groaned. Visualizing Brooke underneath him, moaning with pleasure as Gavin stroked them both to completion, Gavin's balls drew tight, his body stiffened, and his cock pulsed. He shuddered as spurt after spurt of cum sprayed across his chest and abs. *Not long now*, he vowed. *I'll have Brooke soon.*

The next day, Gavin barely heard Brooke's voice above the sound of his jigsaw. "Morning," he called, setting down the tool. He lifted his safety glasses and pulled out his ear plugs. Seconds later, her father appeared. "Richard," Gavin greeted, grasping the man's outstretched hand.

"This is quite a shop you have," Richard said, his gaze sweeping the space.

Following the other man's gaze, Gavin looked over the jumbled mess of spindles, pins and half-built furniture. The finished pieces rested close to the garage door, covered in drop cloths, waiting to be loaded into his van. All Gavin's business came by word of mouth and people paid in cash. Gavin

paid his taxes quarterly and led a discreet life.

"It gives me ample space, and I avoid commuting."

Gavin led the way to the house, held open the back door and ushered his guests into his kitchen. He bit back a chuckle when he glanced over his shoulder and realized Richard was the perfect size for prey. He forced a subdued smile and said, "Let's get Ms. Canton set up in the den, then we can talk."

He'd already moved his furniture, covered them with sheets and protected the hardwood floor with plastic. Handing Brooke the paintbrush, Gavin slid his knuckles across her hand and smiled. He knew she'd received the message when a small smirk played across her lips as she turned away.

Gavin stepped aside, saying, "I'll be in later for lunch. If you need anything before then, you know where to find me." Richard watched him intently, but Gavin remained careful to shield his desire for Brooke from the man's assessing gaze.

Richard turned to follow Gavin out of the house. Pausing, he glanced back. "You have your cell phone, honey?"

"Yeah, Dad."

"I'll see you tonight." When he stepped out of the house, Richard turned to Gavin. "I'm a cop. If anything happens to her, I'm coming after you."

Gavin's brows lifted. He found the father's bluntness refreshing. Nodding, he said, "Brooke mentioned that last night. We've never had a violent neighborhood, but it's nice to know you're around." At the man's narrowing eyes, he lied, "I won't give you any trouble."

Richard nodded curtly before heading down the driveway.

Gavin watched the father with interest for a moment, wondering what the man's cop instincts told him. He looked at his house, a smile playing across his lips. Richard couldn't possibly know that he'd just escorted his daughter into the home of a predator. His muscles tensed at the knowledge that the object of his lust now painted in his home. *Mate!* It took every ounce of willpower not to walk back in there and bed her. Would she resist? He almost hoped she would. The thrill of the chase never got old. On second thought, Gavin decided, good, old-fashioned seduction would work best. Still smiling, he turned and headed back into the shop.

Hours later, Gavin paused at the back door. Uncertain of his self-control, he'd put off lunch for as long as possible. He'd never felt a craving this powerful, at least not while a man. Entering the house, the smell of bacon assailed his nostrils. On the counter, he spotted several BLT sandwiches

along with extra cooked bacon. Gavin moved toward the den, his pulse pounding.

Leaning on the doorframe, he watched Brooke's body undulate as she danced to music on her iPod. He had to shove his hands in his pockets to keep from pinning her against a wet wall and fucking her until neither of them could stand. "Are you joining me for lunch?"

Brooke jerked around to look at him. Blushing, she popped the ear buds out of her ears and laughed. "You startled me. I didn't hear you come in!" Gavin just smiled. She started toward him. "I hope you don't mind. I needed a break and since it was after noon..." Her voice trailed off.

"Not at all," he said, watching Brooke brush past him through the doorway. Since he refused to move, she pivoted sideways, her breasts almost touching his chest. She grinned up at him, before taking the food and setting it on the table.

She held a piece of bacon between a slender thumb and forefinger. "Want one?"

"Love one," Gavin replied huskily.

Still not moving, he watched Brooke approach. Her brown eyes bore into his as she took a bite of the bacon. She held up the piece, offering it. Gavin's mouth curved into a slow smile before he accepted, tickling her fingers with his lips as he bit the cooked pork. Desire lit Brooke's eyes as she watched him. He knew she saw a similar lust

mirrored on his face when she put the bacon between her teeth and leaned toward him, offering it with her mouth.

Shifting away from the wall, Gavin placed his hands on Brooke's waist. He pulled her closer, lowered his head and bit half the bacon. His lips slid briefly against hers. In two seconds he swallowed, and Gavin's lips hovered over hers as he watched her chew. "You're so very young," he whispered, struggling for control. Could Brooke possibly know how she affected him?

"Perhaps. But I'm nineteen, and I know what we both want. I'll only be here a few, short months, so why wait?"

She knows. Gavin smirked. "And your father?"

Smiling against his lips, she whispered, "What he doesn't know..."

Gavin claimed her mouth, vowing he wouldn't let her leave. He gave in to his lust, picked Brooke up and set her on the counter a few feet behind her. He moved a strong hand between her thighs and pushed them apart, inserting his body between them. Brooke's long legs wrapped around his waist, pulling him closer, letting him feel the heat of her desire against his shaft. She moaned into his mouth when he rubbed his cloth-covered cock against her.

Sliding his hands under her shirt, he glided his knuckles along the smooth skin of her back.

Brooke trembled in his arms at the pleasure he elicited, and he unhooked the clasp of her bra. Moving his hands around her torso, just his thumbs rubbed over the sides and bottom of her breasts. She thrust into his palms, searching for more, and his pulse raced. He lifted Brooke's shirt and bra over her head, followed by his own. Her hands gliding over the muscles of his arms and shoulders sent a wave of heady desire through him almost eclipsing the sight and feel of her small, high breasts cupped in his hands.

Gavin dipped his head and tasted first one breast, then the other, working her nipples into hard, sensitive peaks with his lips, teeth, and tongue. When he lifted his mouth back to hers, he grunted at the feel of her wet, pebbled buds against his chest. His mouth worked hers with mastery, nipping her lips to gain entrance to her mouth. He slid his tongue between her teeth and stroked in and out, giving her a prelude of his next actions.

Lifting her off the counter, Gavin removed Brooke's shorts. If possible, his cock got harder when he found she wore no underwear. He slid two fingers over her folds, relishing in how wet and ready Brooke was. Brooke thrust her hips against his fingers, looking for that delicious friction that would push her pleasure higher. Separating her nether lips, he found her clit and

worked it for a moment, loving Brooke's whimpers as she rubbed wantonly against him. When Gavin's own need became painful, he unbuttoned his pants, lowered them on his hips, and drove his aching erection into her hot, wet body. He forced himself to pause, letting her adjust to his size, and a tremor worked its way through him. "God, you feel good, baby. I knew you would," he hissed.

"Stop, stop," Brooke hissed.

Fighting to stay still when all he wanted to do was stroke them both to oblivion, he growled, "What?"

Brooke's eyes widened, but she managed to get out, "Condom."

"Mmmm," he moaned, claiming her lips as he pulled out slowly before moving back in, relishing the feel of her pussy walls clench and relax on his cock. "I'm sterile and clean, baby. Don't worry about it." When she didn't respond, he completed another long, slow, satisfying stroke, his body vibrating in response to the wet warmth enveloping his rock hard shaft. On the upstroke, he ground his pelvis into Brooke's clit, and she gasped.

When Brooke scraped her nails down his back, Gavin took that as acceptance, and his control snapped. He jerked out and plunged back in. Brooke moaned against his lips as he pounded in

her, hitting her clit with each stroke. He felt the pulse of her climax squeeze him just as Brooke threw back her head and screamed. Seconds later, Gavin's own orgasm overtook him, and he shouted his own release. His cock pulsed in pleasure as his cum splashed deep inside Brooke. *Mine!*

His forehead resting on hers, Gavin struggled to steady his breathing. With one arm wrapped around Brooke's back, his cock still buried inside her, he lifted his free hand to her face and stroked her cheek. Kissing her swollen lips, he whispered, "Do you want to join me in the shower?"

"I'll pass," Brooke replied softly. "I'll just clean up in your bathroom, if that's okay?"

Gavin hid his disappointment with a smile and waited for Brooke's gaze to finally slide up to meet his. Still joined in the most intimate of ways, Gavin knew this woman was his, in every way that mattered. "Of course. Have you found the one down the hall?"

Blushing, Brooke nodded.

He chuckled. "Your home is my home, vixen," Gavin said, sliding out of her. Immediately, he felt a sense of loss. Forcing it aside, he kissed Brooke again before shifting his pants into a more comfortable position. "I'll be back shortly." Picking up one of the BLTs, he winked at his naked mate and headed toward the stairs.

After his shower, he found Brooke back in the den, painting. When she looked at him, Gavin saw her hooded expression. He knew the look. She feared that she was just another conquest to him. If only she knew the last time he'd had sex was thirty-seven years ago. Few women excited his wolf, so he'd stopped looking. And now almost every time he'd thought of Brooke in the last four days he'd ended up with an erection. He grinned and grabbed Brooke's arm, stopping her in mid stroke. Breathing in her scent, he cupped her face and kissed her thoroughly. "You are incredibly distracting, Brooke," he told her.

Scoffing, Brooke rolled her eyes. "Sure. If you want two coats in here, your den will take a couple days."

That was a skillful subject change. Gavin nodded. "Yes. Thank you. After that, I'll let you know what can be done next." He headed toward the kitchen, paused and glanced back. "Thank you for lunch."

She nodded. "I plan to finish this wall, clean the brushes and head home."

Irritation filled him. *Is she dismissing me? Or protecting herself?* Hiding it, he nodded again. "Fine. I'll see you tomorrow." Without looking back, Gavin returned to his shop.

Chapter Two

Returning from jogging the next morning, a tingle of awareness shivered through Gavin when he entered his home. Breathing deeply, he caught Brooke's scent and smiled. He ran a hand through his short, sweaty hair and headed toward the den.

For several seconds, he admired her butt as she bent and stretched. "Hello, beautiful."

Amused, she turned to him. "Hey, you weren't in the shop, and your back door was open. I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all," Gavin said, crossing to her. He cupped her cheek with one hand and turned it up for his kiss. "My home is your home, remember?" At Brooke's dubious look, he let her go. "I'll be in the shower if you need anything." Without waiting for a response, he headed upstairs.

Water cascaded down his muscular frame when he heard a floorboard creak. Eyes narrowed, Gavin watched the bathroom door open. Without

looking at him, Brooke slipped inside and closed the door. The clear glass of the shower stall hid little as her gaze slowly traveled up his body. Gavin felt his cock respond to her perusal, standing out proudly from a nest of dark curls. Brooke's gaze fixed on it.

He slid his fingers around his erection, stroking himself gently. Pleasure tingled through him. "Need something?"

Brooke's eyes snapped to his, and his lips curved when he saw her lust. He watched her remove her clothes, his dick twitching expectantly. Finally, when Brooke stood naked on the other side of the glass, he saw a glimmer of doubt enter her eyes. Gavin had no intention of letting his naked mate leave without satisfying both of them. He pushed the door open and crooked a finger. "Let's not let the water get cold."

Smiling, Brooke stepped into the shower. He wrapped wet hands around her shoulders, pulled her against him and deeply breathed in her unique scent. Lust flooding him, Gavin lowered his head and trailed wet kisses down her neck, collarbone and breasts. He heard Brooke sigh with pleasure. He slid his hands down her sides as he nibbled her neck.

He trailed one hand down Brooke's belly and slipped it into the curls. Gavin enjoyed the way Brooke gasped and shivered as his fingers

pumped in and out of her sheath. "So wet for me," he murmured against the nipple he sucked. The feel of Brooke's folds soaked with her juices made his cock ache. "I can't wait, Brooke. I have to have you."

Gavin lifted her wet body and pressed her against the glass. Brooke's hiss at the coldness of the wall changed to a moan of pleasure when he lowered her onto his shaft. Growling softly, Gavin held Brooke steady as he stroked in and out of her. She wrapped her legs tightly around his waist, digging her heels into his ass, and arched her back to meet his thrusts.

"Harder, Gavin. Harder," she urged, throwing her head back.

He complied, his hips jerking, feeling Brooke's tight womb massage his dick with each stroke. Gavin latched onto the tendons of her neck with his teeth, biting down hard. The pain pushed Brooke over the edge, and she cried out in ecstasy, her cream soaking his cock. One more stroke and Gavin joined her, roaring his completion.

It took over a minute for him to become aware of cool water spraying across his back. Lifting Brooke off his shaft, Gavin set her down. When she reached for the door, he grabbed her hand. "Whoa," he whispered. She glanced at him in surprise. "Where are you going?"

"The water's getting cold," she replied

uncertainly.

He drew her back to him. Without letting her go, Gavin adjusted the water. "That's easy enough to fix," he said. He watched a frown crease Brooke's brow and remembered the way she'd withdrawn the day before after making love to him. *Time to fix that.* "You come into my shower and think sex is the only thing to do in here?"

Shifting uncomfortably, Brooke's brown eyes searched his. "I told you. I'm leaving in just over two months. I'm not looking for a relationship."

"You have your father's bluntness." He chuckled. "Don't worry about that." Smiling at the young woman, he held up a bar of soap. "Let's get washed up." She didn't complain when he ran the soapy cloth over her body, then positioning Brooke in the spray, Gavin rinsed her. Holding up the cloth, he said, "Your turn."

"Excuse me? You just washed me."

Gavin let out a laugh. "No. You wash me." At her shocked look, he grinned, loving that he was the one to teach his mate such intimacies. "Fair's fair." Brooke took the cloth and rubbed. He let out an appreciative murmur and struggled to control a fresh wave of desire. "Mmmm, nice. So why did your father switch precincts?"

Brooke paused in her scrubbing for a second. "We're in the shower together and you want to talk about my father?"

He glanced over his shoulder at her. "I need to talk about something or I'm going to take you again."

She laughed softly. "If the water wasn't getting cold, that wouldn't be too bad." His jaw tightened as he controlled himself, and when he didn't respond, Brooke answered his question. "He's a profiler and a detective. He's here to find the serial killer that's been plaguing the area."

"Really," Gavin said, thinking quickly. So, they'd linked the missing persons with the deaths. He just may have to move again soon. "I've heard a little about it. They've been doing a pretty good job of keeping it off TV."

"They don't want to spook him."

Gavin nodded, rinsing the soap from his body before turning off the water. Maneuvering around her, he reached for a towel. He wrapped the blue cloth around Brooke before stepping from the stall. "Get dressed, darling," he ordered before opening a pantry and pulling out a towel for himself. Wrapping it around his waist, Gavin left the bathroom.

Sighing, he pulled on a pair of jeans. Things had suddenly become much more complicated. He heard a footfall and smelled Brooke's particular scent. Gavin didn't turn.

She said, "I'm going to head down to work on the den."

Nodding, he finally pivoted to face her. He pulled on his shirt and glanced around his bedroom, taking in the familiar matching mahogany furniture. It oozed masculinity and bachelorhood. "I was thinking of painting in here, too." He smirked. "But I don't think your father would appreciate you painting my bedroom quite so soon. How long do you think it'd take for him to be okay with that?"

Brooke's brows lifted a bit. "At least a month," she admitted.

He chuckled and moved toward her. "Then since you're happy with this arrangement between us, you'll paint the downstairs. You should probably slow down. It's not that big," Gavin added. "If I ever want to sell this place, a fresh coat of paint will help." Taking her hand, he spun Brooke around so she faced the door. "Off you go, baby," he whispered into her neck, enjoying her clean, feminine scent. Sliding a hand down her side, he squeezed her ass before slapping it to get her moving. "I'll be down in a few."

Two days later, he walked out of the hardware store with two ten gallon buckets of paint. It happened. His blood boiled in his veins. His breathing quickened. Growling through his teeth, Gavin searched the area. Standing just outside the door, Brooke pushed him, trying to get him to

move. He sent a glare her way before searching the street. *Who is it?*

"Are you okay?"

Brooke's voice interrupted his search. "Go to the van. I'll be there in a minute." Seeing the irritation on her face, Gavin knew he'd have some soothing to do later but needed to know his prey. Leaving the cans near the door, he headed down the street. His gaze shifting left and right, Gavin finally spotted the man his werewolf senses deemed acceptable. His eyes narrowed and he bit back a growl. "There you are," he hissed.

"Who's that?" Brooke asked from his left.

Glancing at her in surprise, Gavin said, "I thought I told you to wait in the van!" His tone came out harsher than he'd intended.

She rolled her eyes and slid a hand down his waist and hip. "Relax. I won't get in your way. Is this some guy you have to hustle for money?" Brooke teased.

Frowning, Gavin watched the man climb into a truck. "Come on. I need to follow him."

"You do?"

He nodded. "I have a delivery to make in a few days to this guy. I lost his number."

"Oh. Why didn't you just say so?"

Kissing her lightly, he smiled down at her. "Sorry, baby. I'm a bachelor." Gavin shrugged. "I don't normally answer to anyone."

Brooke scoffed, heading back to his car. "I hope this side trip doesn't take long. I need to have dinner ready for my father in a couple hours."

Three evenings later, Gavin stood in his bedroom. His big body trembled. The moon would be full tomorrow night, and he longed for a different kind of release. When his doorbell rang, he cursed irritably. "Now what?" he hissed.

Descending the stairs, Gavin jerked the door open. He found Brooke's father standing on the doorstep. Struggling to control himself, he greeted the man. "Hello, Richard."

"Gavin."

"Come in, come in," he said, waving the man forward. "Do you want a beer?"

"Sure," the detective answered. "Brooke's been spending a lot of time over here," he said. "Is everything going okay?"

"Everything's fine," Gavin replied, leading the man into the kitchen. Opening the refrigerator, he handed a beer to Richard before grabbing one for himself. Popping the top, he took a long swallow, trying to cool his burning blood. "She's already gone through the living and dining room. Once she finishes the kitchen, there's the hall and half bath to do, then I'm going to send her upstairs to the office." He paused, saw the man open his mouth and cut him off. "I gotta tell you, Richard.

Your daughter's like a machine or something. She doesn't bother me in the shop, and when I get in at night, she's painted several walls and already gone. I hardly see her, other than getting paint a few days ago, and she does a fantastic job!" He took another long swallow.

"I was wondering..."

Gavin shrugged. "She's not here anymore than a full time job, I suppose. Am I allowed to give her a bonus?" he asked. He hid a cringe at his thoughtless words.

Richard scoffed. "I worried she was bothering you. Or she wasn't doing a good job. She told me she was on her third room, and I got worried that she wasn't giving you your money's worth."

Smiling, Gavin shook his head. If only the man knew. "No, really, take a look." He led the other man back to the front room. "She helped me pick out the colors." The tan and browns blended nicely with his hardwood floors, black leather sofas and wood burning fireplace.

"It's nice," Richard said, glancing around the room. "Well, as long as she's doing a good job." After a long pull on the beer, he turned to Gavin. "I looked you up. You're up to date on your taxes, don't have a checking account and don't buy on credit."

Gavin forced a chuckle. He'd expected that. "Does the fact that I like to pay cash bother you?"

"No. It's actually kind of refreshing. More people should be like you." He clapped Gavin on the shoulder. "See you tomorrow."

Taking the empty can, he showed Richard out. It wasn't until after the door closed that he wondered about the man's comment.

The answer came the next day. Holding Brooke in his bed, satiated beyond his wildest dreams, her words broke into his thoughts.

"It's my birthday today."

"Really," Gavin said, rising up on one elbow. He traced Brooke's swollen nipple gently and smiled down at her. "Happy birthday. Turning twenty?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"I never would have guessed," he teased. "I hear women don't reach their sexual peak until they're thirty-five."

Brooke let out a laugh. "That's not funny." When he just smiled, she shrugged. "I can't explain it. Your touch is like a drug. I can't seem to get enough of it."

"Hmmm, then you know how I feel." Gavin nibbled her ear, before admitting, "I'll miss you if you leave."

"And if I don't, my father will find a way to arrest you."

Chuckling, Gavin pushed away from her. "True

enough. He'll definitely think I'm too old for you." Especially if Richard discovered his true age, Gavin realized, one hundred and fourteen years.

"Are you available tonight? I'm having a private dinner at Rooster's Pizzeria, and I'd really like you there."

Fear shot through him. "What time?" he asked.

"Eight."

Taking a deep breath, he said, "I'm sorry, vixen. I can't." Gavin didn't need to force the repentant look. He truly felt sorry. "I'm expected at Genero's at eight-thirty."

"Oh," she almost whispered. "What about after that?"

Forcing back a cringe at the lie, he nodded. "Sure. I'm not sure what time it'll be, but I'll swing by afterward." Gavin wondered what Brook would do when he didn't show. He kissed her slowly and thoroughly. "I need to get to work, baby."

She nodded, smiling. "I'll see you there."

Nodding, he rose and dressed.

Standing in his bedroom later, Gavin watched the first glimpse of the moon's edge appear over the horizon. Staring at it, he removed his shirt and shoes. His breathing quickened as his excitement built.

Pain tore through his body. "Arg," he grunted,

trying to control the familiar sensation. Groaning in pain, Gavin dropped to the floor. Seconds later, he rose to his feet. Most of his weight rested on his hind legs, ready to launch in any direction. Brown fur covered every inch of exposed skin. His yellow eyes took in the familiar room. His instinct driven mind thought about one thing. *Dinner.*

Gavin launched through the open second story window and landed gracefully on the ground. Growling softly in the moonlight, his yellow eyes glanced toward a house down the street. *No lights.* Gavin turned away and galloped down the road. Claws dug into the grass as he propelled himself across the lawns. Crossing three yards in five strides, excitement coursed through him.

Coming to the house he wanted, he sat his big body deep in the shadows and waited. Hours later, his prey came out. Keeping still on the green grass, the werewolf watched the man cross the yard, heading toward a truck, jingling his keys. Slowly, the werewolf rose. Moving carefully across the open space, he crept forward. Big paws barely marked the grass. Reaching a tree, he paused in the shadows. His low growl cut through the sultry night air. The man paused at his truck and turned toward the tree. He couldn't understand the words the man spoke, but he could smell the heady scent of fear.

Excitement rippled through his tense form, and

he launched forward. Claws dug deep into his prey's chest, and the man fell backward. The werewolf latched onto his prey's neck, ripping it, tasting it, as blood poured out around his jaws. Tearing the neck from the body, he reared up on his hind legs. Incensed beyond reason, he threw his head back and howled. Grasping the dead man's body, he pulled it into the bushes to enjoy the feast.

Hours later, the moon high overhead, Gavin lifted his head from his kill. Bloody flesh oozed around his jaws. A snarl grew deep in his throat. His keen ears picked up a sound across town, the sound of a woman's muffled cry. Keeping to the shadows, he launched forward and galloped through the night, his long, powerful limbs propelling him swiftly through the dark. He growled between his teeth, watching the lights flash before his yellow eyes. The signs didn't make sense. He knew they should, but as a werewolf Gavin couldn't understand them.

The strange red, yellow, and brown triangle sign caught his attention. Cocking his head, he stared for several seconds. Noise from a nearby alley reached his sensitive ears, and he padded toward it. Slowing, he skulked carefully down the narrow confines, tension filling him. He spotted three humans in the dark, two men and one

woman. One of the men held a woman by her arm. Hiding behind some crates, Gavin tried to control his quivering body. Suddenly, one of the men slapped the woman and rage tore through him.

Brooke.

The name flashed in and out of his mind. He knew her. *Mine!* His breath ragged, he launched from his hiding place. A roar echoed through the alley before being replaced by the crunch of bone in massive jaws. He latched onto the nearest man's arm. The woman's safety the only thought echoing through his instinct driven brain. The man's shocked and pained cry pleased the werewolf. Releasing his hold on the man's arm, he reared up onto his hind legs. Standing nearly seven feet on his back legs, he towered over the man. Massive claws dug deep into the man's chest as Gavin sank long, gleaming teeth into his neck. Blood from the broken jugular sprayed across his face, chest, and the wall behind him.

Gavin released the broken body as giddiness filled him. Few things compared to the joy of killing. The other man had released Brooke. He didn't understand the man's words, but he smelled his fear. The man held something shiny in his hand. Roaring again, he launched toward him. A loud boom echoed through his sensitive ears and pain sliced through his shoulder. Shrugging

off the pain, he leaped toward the man again. This time Gavin's talon-like front claws wrapped around the mugger's throat. Blood sprayed his fur as he tore the soft flesh away from the body. Releasing the man, he watched in satisfaction as his prey's eyes widened, hands flailed at the gaping wound, and his mouth opened and closed as he gasped for air. Slowly the man sank to the ground. Standing over the body, Gavin howled his victory.

The realization that another human stood nearby eased over him. Looking up from where he chewed his kill, his yellow eyes swept the alley. They focused on the woman. He whined, his body moving uncertainly from side to side. The pain in his shoulder began to register.

"Easy now," he heard but didn't understand.

Brooke.

Again the name swept through his brain. Letting out another whine, he watched the woman approach him. When she came within five feet, he limped away from her, growling low in his throat. She held up a hand, and he switched back to a whine. *The men can't hurt her now. What more could she want?*

She came toward him again, arms stretched in a placating manner. He growled in warning, not wanting to attack her, some part of his mind registering that it wasn't time yet. But unable to

control his primal urges, Gavin lunged forward, biting her outstretched hand. He released her just as quickly and danced away, crooning softly in dismay at his actions. Whining piteously, Gavin watched her turn away as another human called for her. She turned toward him one last time, hand cradled to her chest, and she spoke soothingly to him. He wished he could understand.

After she left in search of the caller, he picked up his kills and disappeared into the shadows.

Chapter Three

Groaning, Gavin stretched on his bed. Normally extremely careful, this morning he ached like he'd run a marathon. *What the hell happened?* A pounding echoed through his head. "Wait, that's the door," he hissed. Silence fell over his house, followed by creaking floorboards. Easing from the bed, he bit his lip in an effort to control the pain in his shoulder. The wound would heal in a couple days, but that didn't make it feel better now.

"Gavin?"

He recognized the voice. "Brooke," he whispered, before his knees buckled. The noise of him hitting the floor had her running up the last couple stairs. He managed to drag himself to the door before she could push it open. Sitting with his back to it, he reached up and locked it.

"Gavin? Are you all right? What's going on?"

He heard her concern, but he knew he couldn't let her see him like this. Blood covered him and

his sheets. He hadn't showered yet. After dressing the meat and tucking it in the freezer in the basement, the pain had consumed him, and he'd dragged his ass to bed and passed out. He still felt exhausted, and all he wanted to do was sleep. Running a blood encrusted hand through his hair, he massaged the back of his neck, trying to engage some thought.

"Gavin?"

The near panic in the voice on the other side of the door brought him back to his senses. Staring down at his bare feet, Gavin leaned his head against the door behind him. "I don't feel well, baby. Give me a few minutes." *That sounded pathetic enough, didn't it?* Silence descended on the other side of the door, and he held his breath.

Finally, Brooke said, "I got worried when you didn't show last night." He imagined her resting her head against the door as she talked. He felt terrible for lying to her, but as images flashed through him, Gavin realized he *had* shown last night, he just couldn't explain that yet.

"Give me thirty minutes, Brooke." His weak voice barely carried through the door. "I'll come down and explain."

Again, quiet greeted him. Finally, "Okay, Gavin. Do you want coffee?"

"No." He'd done that once. Coffee on the morning after was like feeding hormones to a

bear. He'd growled at everything that moved for two days. When he heard Brooke leave, Gavin struggled to his feet. He had thirty minutes to decide what to tell her. He pulled the sheets from his bed and the ripped pants from his legs. Wearing the same leggings every month saved him from destroying more clothes than necessary, but they sure turned into a mess after three or four moon cycles. These had just about had it. Bundling everything tightly, Gavin tossed them by his door. Stepping into the shower, he let the hot water wash away the blood. Finally clean and feeling better, he covered the gunshot wound with a small bandage. It already showed signs of healing, the edges puckered and scabbed. After pulling on clean jeans and a white t-shirt, he picked up the bundle of cloth and slipped from his room. He dropped the soiled clothes in the laundry chute and headed down to face Brooke.

Gavin found her sitting at the small table in his kitchen, hands wrapped around a coffee mug. His eyes narrowed when he saw the bandage on her hand. Easing into the chair next to her, he took that hand in his. She didn't fight him, just waited.

"I'm sorry I couldn't make it." Brooke's brown eyes watched him steadily. "I was on my way back from delivering the furniture when my van broke down. It wasn't a real good area, and while I tinkered with it, some punk tried to mug me."

He started to shrug, but ended up flinching. "I beat him off, but not before I got a knife in my shoulder. I was pretty messy, in a bad mood, and just wanted to go home. I walked. I'll call a tow truck this morning to have the van hauled to a shop." Gavin hoped she hadn't looked in his garage.

Brooke nodded. He watched a smile curve her beautiful lips. "Well, that certainly sounds like a viable excuse."

"I am sorry," Gavin repeated. Then glancing meaningfully at the hand he held, worry riding him hard, he asked, "What about you?" He remembered the meat in the freezer in his basement. It wasn't often he came home with more than one kill, and Gavin hadn't even brought home the man he'd intended. He'd left a body, dangerous mistake, especially with the new profiler in town.

She shrugged. "I got bit by an animal last night. No big deal. I think it was a really big dog."

"A dog?" Gavin asked. When Brooke nodded, she confirmed his fear. The images of biting her outstretched hand flashed through his mind. He hadn't meant to, but the instinct was hard to control. "Was there saliva in the bite?" At her confused look, he shrugged. "I've heard that saliva can transfer disease or cause infection."

Brooke shook her head. "No. It was just a

warning nip. It didn't want to hurt me."

"How do you know that?" She assessed accurately, but he'd never had the opportunity to talk to someone who'd seen him as a werewolf. He felt curious.

"Well, it actually came to my rescue," she claimed. "It killed a pair of muggers. One of the men shot it. It was bleeding. I wanted to make sure it was okay, but it wouldn't let me that close."

"Really? What were you doing in an alley?" Gavin almost bit his tongue. Brooke hadn't mentioned the alley yet. How he knew about it would be a little hard to explain.

Fortunately, she didn't seem to notice. "I stepped out of the pizza place to get some fresh air. One of the men grabbed me and dragged me back there. The dog must have heard my scream. He saved me." She frowned, suddenly. "It's weird, really. I went to get my father. I was gone only a minute, but when I got back there, both the animal and the bodies were gone!" Brooke shrugged. "No crime."

Gavin chuckled. "Wow. I'm glad you're safe, don't get me wrong," he added at her surprised look. "I've just never heard anything quite like that before."

"Laugh all you want, but that's what happened."

He nodded, sobering in the face of her

indignation. "I believe you, sweetie." Leaning forward, Gavin kissed her on the cheek. "What did it look like?"

Brooke's brow furrowed as she remembered. "I've never seen anything quite like it, actually. It was bigger than any dog I've heard of. Its head and jaws were massive. Its yellow eyes seemed to glow in the night like a cat. If it hadn't saved me, I know I'd be terrified of it! When it howled, a shiver went through me," she admitted.

"Pretty ugly?" Gavin held his breath.

"No. Handsome, in its own way."

He let out a breath at Brooke's answer, relieved that he appealed to his mate, regardless of his form.

She kept talking. "Its fur looked so soft, a deep, rich, dark chocolate. I wanted to bury my hands in it, but you could certainly tell that it was made to kill. Maybe someone let some wild animal loose in the city by mistake. Are there any zoos around here?"

"No, the closest one I can think of is an hour and a half away. If a dangerous animal had escaped, I'd think we'd have heard about it by now."

"Maybe I'll look into it," Brooke said, clearly distracted. "I'm going to start painting."

Gavin watched her go, buried in thoughts of his own. She was safe for another month and even in

his werewolf form, he didn't want to hurt her. He ran a hand through his hair, wondering when the best time to turn her would be. Before he'd explained or after? The wet ends curled around his collar, soaking his shirt. Uncertain, he sighed and dragged his exhausted body back to bed.

The next month proved similar to the one before it. Gavin worked in his shop and made love to Brooke. A week before the full moon, he discovered his prey while out delivering furniture. He felt his blood thicken with excitement as he followed the woman down the street. Hiding in the shadows, Gavin watched her enter a home three blocks from his own. A little closer than he liked, but he'd make do. At least it'd be easier to learn her movements this way.

Standing under a tree, the werewolf stretched up, peering through the window. The woman sat in a lounge chair, reading. He'd watched her for nearly two hours. Every once in a while, she'd yell to someone in another room and then return to her reading. He knew she wasn't coming out. Digging claws into the tree's bark, the beast climbed upward. He balanced carefully as he moved onto the limb. A low growl rumbled through him as he fixed his eyes on the woman in the house. Lunging from the branch, Gavin crashed through the window and landed in a heap of glass and fur on

the carpeted floor.

The woman screamed, jumping to her feet. Shaking himself, he fixed his gaze on his prey. She began to back out of the room, yelling to whoever remained out of sight. The werewolf leaped. Claws extended, they sank deep into the woman's chest as he knocked her to the ground. Lying on her back, she struggled to breathe under Gavin's crushing weight. He saw her eyes dilate with fear, and his growl turned into an excited snarl.

Pain exploded in his eyes. Gavin reeled backward, shaking his head. Half blind, he leaped toward the hazy form of his attacker. Jaws bit deep into an arm. He heard screaming and shouting. The scent of blood mixed with something else... lavender. The werewolf let go and shook his head again, his eyes still fuzzy. Turning, he saw another figure helping his prey rise to her feet. Roaring in pain and anger, he reared up and swiped the woman he'd bit with one massive clawed forepaw, shoving her out of the way. She went down, blood oozing from long scratches across her face and shoulder.

Dropping back to all fours, he skulked toward his prey, growling menacingly. The woman pushed away her helper, realizing it was her he wanted. She yelled and screamed, keeping his attention while the other woman moved away. Gavin let the helper go, not caring about her.

Launching at the older woman again, this time he latched onto his prey's shoulder with his crushing jaws. She yelled as bone snapped. Claws swiped her neck, tearing out her throat. Her screams stopped.

Lifting his head, the werewolf howled in triumph. The sound of sobs behind him caught his attention. The woman with the mace still lay where she'd fallen, but now, his vision clearer, he recognized the face. *Brooke! What is she doing here?* His sharp ears picked up sirens, still several blocks away. Lifting up his prey's lifeless body in his jaws, he leaped through the broken window.

Pacing his front room the next morning, Gavin waited impatiently for Brooke to show. He repeatedly played out the scene in his mind, knowing there wasn't anything he could have changed. She'd interfered with a hunt. When ten o'clock hit without her appearance, he headed across the street. Uncertain what he'd say, he stood on the porch for a minute before ringing the doorbell. No answer.

Cursing himself, he rang the bell again. Still no response. Stepping off the porch, Gavin walked around the side to a tree. Jumping, he grabbed a branch and pulled himself up. Balancing carefully, he eased toward the house. He spotted Brooke asleep in bed. He eased the window open and let

himself in.

As Gavin took in the scratches on her face and neck and the bandage on her arm, a strange excitement filled him. *Mate!* The beast in him howled in satisfaction. Gavin had known it was Brooke's destiny to become his mate. He'd realized it the first time he'd made love to her. What he still didn't know was how to explain it to her. Peering around her room, he saw bare walls and unpacked boxes. Then he remembered Brooke didn't plan to stay. Several books on a desk caught Gavin's attention. Books on werewolves.

"Well, well, well," he murmured, picking one up. *The History of the Werewolf*. Gavin flipped through several pages. "They got some of it right, but a silver stake through my heart will only incapacitate me." He cocked his head and grinned. "Only beheading will kill me," he added with a chuckle.

Brooke's soft groan drew his attention. Still holding the thin volume, Gavin sat down next to her on the bed. Her breathing changed rhythm, and he knew she'd woken. "Hey, vixen," he whispered, kissing her gently on the forehead.

Brooke's eyes slowly open. "Hey. What are you doing here?"

Her voice, barely more than a whisper, sent streaks of worry through him. Just how badly did he injure his mate? "I was worried about you."

"Hmm," she blinked slowly before refocusing on him. "How'd you get in?"

Gavin smirked. "The window." He laughed softly at her confused look. "I'm a guy in great shape. I can do that." Before Brooke could ask anything else, he frowned, "What happened, love?" He gently ran a finger over the bandage on her neck.

Her eyes shut, and Gavin saw tears squeeze passed the lids. "Easy now," he whispered. "It's okay. You're safe." Shifting on the bed, he positioned his back against the headboard and pulled her close. "Let it out, honey."

Brooke cried in his arms. Her reaction sent shivers of confusion through Gavin. He didn't know what to do or say, especially knowing that he'd done this to her. He waited patiently, letting his mate cry herself out. After several minutes, she began to snifle. "It was that big dog I told you about."

Gavin frowned. "The one that saved you a while back?"

She nodded. "Why is it that the most magnificent creatures are so good at killing?"

He almost missed the whispered question. Surprise flooded him. *Wow, likes me that much, does she?* Brushing the hair from her face, Gavin kissed Brooke's temple. "It's called survival, darling. Any creature has to learn how to survive."

"But why her?"

"Who?"

"I was at a friend's house last night, reading up on a couple college courses we're taking together. My friend's mother, Anne, was in the other room reading. The creature broke through the bay window to attack her! Surely there was more accessible," Brooke hesitated, "prey...out there." Questioning brown eyes turned up to look at him. "Why would it break a window to get to Anne?"

Unable to give her the answers she wanted, Gavin just shook his head. He touched a scratch on her shoulder.

She murmured, "It tackled her, claws digging into her chest. I sprayed it in the face with mace. That just pissed it off, and it attacked me." She shook her head. "Then it killed her anyway and took her body."

Gavin flipped the book he'd been reading onto her lap. "Is this what you think you saw?"

Fingering the werewolf picture on the book, Brooke scoffed. "You must think I'm nuts."

Letting out a sigh, he shrugged. "Why? Werewolf stories had to come from somewhere."

"That's what I think! And all the missing people and deaths have been found on or after full moons."

Now his brows shot up. Brooke had done her homework. "What does your father think of this

theory?"

"I haven't told him yet," she admitted. Suddenly, her eyes widened. "Oh, my God!"

"What?"

"I've been bitten by it! That means I could turn into one!"

"Would that be such a bad thing?" Gavin kept his tone teasing, trying to lighten the suddenly panicked air around her.

Brooke stared at him incredulously. "It kills people!"

"But it lives forever." He grinned. "And it has increased strength, speed and agility." When she stared at him as if he had two heads, Gavin laughed. "I read it in the book."

Brooke rolled her eyes. "Okay, I get the point. Every creature has its good qualities."

"You're father's home," Gavin whispered just before the front door slammed. Brooke gave him a how-did-you-know look that he ignored. "I'll swing by tomorrow, okay?" Cupping the nape of her neck, the passion in his kissed promised more than he could deliver at that moment. Boots on the steps had him biting back a moan and pulling away. Crossing to the window, Gavin pulled it open, winked at her and leaped out.

He ached. Groaning in discomfort, Gavin eased into a sitting position. It only took a glance down

for him to know what was wrong. Brooke hadn't been well enough to paint for three days, and his body hungered for release, hungered for his mate. Standing naked at his window, he looked down the dark street and distractedly rubbed the length of his erection, trying to ease the pain. No lights were on in any house. Did her body crave his touch as much as Gavin's craved hers? Pulling on jogging shorts that barely covered the broad flat head of his straining cock, he headed out into the night.

Again, he found himself climbing the tree to Brooke's window and letting himself into her home. After slipping the shorts off, Gavin eased into her bed. Sliding a hand under the old t-shirt she wore, he eased it over his sleeping mate's head. He stared down at Brooke's small, pert breasts, the nipples a dusky brown in the waxing moon's light. Cupping a breast, Gavin pinched the nipple. He silenced Brooke's murmur of approval with his lips, kissing her to wakefulness as he teased first one nipple and then the other into hard peaks. Her lips separating from his, Brooke slid a hand down his side, gripped the base of his cock, and gave it a hard squeeze before stroking it. He grinned, biting back a groan of delight.

"What are you doing here?" she hissed.

Gavin almost chuckled. "I think that's obvious, darling." He felt her stiffen next to him as she tried

to resist his touch. "Don't fight me, Brooke," he whispered urgently, his body vibrating with need. "I'll be gentle. I won't hurt you."

"But my dad..."

"Won't hear us if we stop talking," he interrupted. Reclaiming her mouth, Gavin silenced her objections. He buried one hand in her brown hair, the other he slid down her stomach, burying it in the dark curls covering her mound. As he spread her folds and slid a finger into her wet heat, he thrust his hard cock against her hand, silently encouraging her to renew her ministrations. He felt her moan deep in her throat as he spread her wetness over her button and pressed a hard circle around it. *Fuck, she is so ready for me!* Brooke's legs fell open, and her hips rocked her nub into Gavin's fingers as he banished her inhibitions in pleasure.

Releasing her lips, he trailed heated kisses down her jaw and collarbone, skipping lightly over the irritated red scratches on her face and neck. His beast screamed for satisfaction, and Gavin could wait no longer. Levering himself over Brooke, he rubbed the head of his cock between Brooke's wet pussy lips, loving how the warm glide shot pleasurable tingles through his balls and up his spine. When Brook rocked her hips, popping his crown inside her sheath, he could do nothing but slide his rock hard shaft into the only

place that felt like home in almost a century. Buried balls deep inside her, Gavin felt his cock pulse, and he struggled for control.

Returning his kiss to her lips to silence Brooke's squeaks of pleasure, Gavin bit back a moan of his own. "You're mine," he hissed against her lips. "God, I've missed you."

Concentrating on the woman beneath him, Gavin shifted inside her, increasing the pressure he knew she loved. Several strokes later had Brooke bucking underneath him as wave after wave of ecstasy swept over her. He felt the tightening of her muscles milking his cock, and he happily joined her.

His forehead against hers, he struggled to quiet his ragged breathing. Gavin leaned on his elbows, decreasing the weight on her, and smiled down at her. "Admit it. You're going to miss this if you leave."

Brooke smiled lazily up at him, gently sliding her hands over his well-muscled back. "My college is only two hours away. I have a roommate, but I'm sure I can convince her to keep her mouth shut."

"I may have to take you up on that," Gavin whispered back. "I don't think I can stop cold turkey. Look what happened after just three days." He tightened his groin muscles, making his semi-hard cock jump inside her.

Brooke giggled.

Two days later, Brooke slipped into his shop and called his name. "Hey, look at you." Gavin shut off his sander and lifted his safety goggles. "Up and around again, I see. How do you feel?"

She shrugged. "I've felt better, but up and around is preferable to lying in that bed." Brooke frowned. "I've been hungry a lot. I think my healing body is craving protein."

"Well, then I'll make us an early lunch," he offered. At her surprised look, Gavin chuckled. "You've done it enough for me the past month or so."

"All right. I accept."

Gavin dusted off his pants and removed his gloves. Heading through the house, he led her to the living room. "Sit." He handed Brooke a remote. "Watch TV and relax. I'll have lunch served in less than an hour."

Opening his refrigerator, Gavin glanced between the thawed steak and the ground beef. Cocking his head, his eyes narrowed in thought. He looked toward the living room where he knew Brooke waited. *Would she like it?* Making a snap decision, he pulled out the steaks. While the grill heated, he trimmed some of the fat from the meat, pulled frozen fries from the freezer, and turned on the oven. A can of corn rounded out the meal.

Forty-five minutes later, he returned to the living room. Leaning on the couch arm, he grinned. "I hope you're hungry."

"Starved," Brooke admitted. "What are you cooking? It smells sweet."

"That would be a mix of the fries baking in the oven and the meat I pulled off the grill."

Following Gavin into the kitchen, she eased into a chair. "I've never smelled steaks like this before." Brooke eyed the plate warily. "This isn't cow, is it?"

"No. It's not."

"What is it? Venison?"

Gavin chuckled at her nervous tone. "Look at it this way. If I told you what it is, I'm afraid you wouldn't try it." When he saw her prepare to protest, he held up a hand. "Trust me, it's delicious. It's a delicacy in some countries."

"Yeah, so is snake," she muttered.

He didn't respond, instead he slid a small slab of meat onto her plate along with ample fries and corn. Taking a bite of his own meat, he closed his eyes in appreciation. *Delicious*. Gavin wondered if she'd try it. And if Brooke did, would she like it?

"It does smell good," she said, "and I'm really hungry."

"Give it a shot," he urged.

She obeyed, cutting a small piece off and forking it into her mouth.

He watched as Brooke chewed slowly.

A look of surprise flickered through her eyes. "Mmm, this is really good," she enthused, cutting another, larger piece.

Relief swept through him. "I'm pleased you like it." He popped a fry into his mouth and chewed. She surprised Gavin further by asking for seconds.

Brooke laughed. "I told you I'm craving protein."

He scoffed, not knowing how to tell her that protein wasn't all she needed. As her body changed, it would crave human flesh more and more until the moon changed her into a creature that could supply it. How could Gavin explain it without her flipping out?

"Tell me something," he said, changing the subject. "That first day you came over to paint, why did you come onto me?"

Brooke's eyes widened, before she flushed with embarrassment. Finally, she mumbled, "It doesn't matter."

Gavin narrowed his eyes, not liking his mate's secrecy. "Look. I love our arrangement," he told her, "but don't you think there's something wrong with it?"

She frowned. "A nice lunch. Asking personal questions. You're not going to propose, are you?"

Barking out a laugh, Gavin leaned away from her. "No, no. Of course not, honey." He continued

to grin. "You are incredible...and incredibly young. I just want to know if there's some way I can help."

"I am incredible, aren't I?" She smiled, coming around the table. Swinging a leg over, Brooke straddled his thighs and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Before she could distract him, Gavin grabbed Brooke's arms. "Whatever it is, it's not going to change what I think about you."

"You're not going to drop this, are you?"

He shook his head.

Resting her hands on his chest, she sighed. "My mother died when I was three. My father's a cop, so he works a lot. I moved from one nanny to the next." Brooke scoffed. "I wasn't a very good child," she admitted. "When I hit fourteen, I started experimenting with boys. I guess I was trying to fill the void caused by lack of family with physical contact." No longer able to meet Gavin's gaze, she fixed on some point over his head. "Last year I miscarried. My father put me in counseling. I'm going to an all-girl's college. I saw the way you looked at me and knew you wanted me. I guess I just needed to feel that closeness again before being sequestered away from the world for ten months."

"And that's why you leave every Tuesday and Friday at four?" Gavin replied, putting the pieces

together. "Counseling."

"You noticed."

"Not much gets by me about you," he admitted.

"So," Brooke quirked a playful smile at him, "what was I eating?"

Chuckling, Gavin smiled and kissed her gently. "You're persistent, aren't you?" Pulling her close, he nibbled her ear. Knowing he had to try to make her understand the changes in her body and since her explanation a moment ago explained so much, he decided to risk it. "Your theory is correct, my sweet vixen."

"What theory," she managed to get out.

"About the werewolf." The look on her face told him Brooke thought he teased. Moving the hair away from her neck, his nearly black eyes bored into hers. "You feel satiated because the meat was human flesh. I'm the werewolf. I bit you. You *are* my mate."

He trailed kisses down her neck, waiting for her reaction. It didn't take long.

Brooke leaned away from him and laughed. "Stop it."

He frowned in question.

"Stop making fun of my theory!" When he didn't smile at her, she straightened. "Oh, my God. You're serious!"

Rising from Gavin's lap, she looked over the remains of their meal. He stood, gaze searching

her face. "Think about it. I live alone. I have no family. And I use cash to stay off the grid. Come on, baby. Put the pieces together. I didn't show on your birthday. There was a full moon that night."

"That's how you knew I'd been in an alley," Brooke hissed, eyes turning vacant as she put the clues together. She took a step back.

Gavin nodded. He moved toward her, unwilling to let go of the heat they generated together. "When our bodies come together, they sing. You can't deny that. I complete you, Brooke. That's what you've been craving. It's why you started experimenting at fourteen. You were searching...for me!"

"Oh, no," she whispered. "You're the murderer. You...you dress up like a beast, so no one will recognize you."

"What?" *Hasn't she been listening?* "No, I...there's no costume, Brooke. I am a werewolf." Gavin's jaw tightened as she continued to back away. Frustration coursed through him, and he blurted out, "And you'll be one, too."

"No," Brooke whispered hoarsely. "That's not true!"

Gavin stalked toward her, certain that if he could hold Brooke in his arms she'd understand.

"Get away from me!" She screamed, long and loud.

"Stop it, Brooke!" he hissed, grabbing her

shoulders.

The kitchen door banged open. "Brooke? Where are you?" Releasing her, Gavin let the woman run to her father. "When you weren't home, I thought you may be here. What's going on?"

"He's the murderer," Brooke said.

"What?" Richard sounded disbelieving.

"He did it! You'll find human meat in his freezers!"

Gavin's eyes narrowed. *She hadn't been ready, after all, but time was running short.* He started toward the pair.

"Stay back, Gavin," Richard warned. He pushed Brooke down the stairs. "Get out of here, Brooke. Get to the house and call it in. My radio's on the counter."

Anger sliced through Gavin, and he felt his beast rise to the surface. Growling low in his throat, he launched himself at the detective. Richard stepped sideways, barely avoiding the attack. Both men stumbled out the door and onto the back patio. Gavin spotted Brooke running down the driveway.

"You're mine, Brooke! You can't escape your destiny!" A fist to the face refocused Gavin's attention on Richard.

"You will not touch my daughter," he hissed.

Gavin grinned. "You're daughter's mine, Richard. She has been for months."

The man yelled in anger, rushing forward.

Gavin dropped back a step. Using his heightened speed, he landed several blows to Richard's midsection, under the man's guard, before stepping sideways. He cackled. "What else ya got, detective?"

Richard pulled the gun at his hip. Gavin laughed again. When he reached for the grill near him, the gun sounded. Pain shot through his belly. Still chuckling coldly, Gavin lifted the grill over his head and threw.

Richard managed to get off one more shot before the grill slammed into his skull.

Pain ripped through his thigh, and Gavin roared in rage. After several seconds to control his heated emotions, he crossed to the unmoving man on the patio. Reaching down, he checked for a pulse. *Good. He'll live.*

His breathing ragged, he looked down the driveway and hissed, "Damn." Gavin heard sirens in the distance. He estimated ten minutes. Jaw clenched, he limped into the house and grabbed several bags of dried meat from the pantry. Heading upstairs, he ignored the blood oozing from his belly and leg, dripping onto the hardwood floors. *I'll heal.* Gavin shoved several changes of clothes into a bag, pulled up a loose floor board, and yanked a plastic bag of money from the dark recess. He stuffed the money into

his duffel. The sirens were close. Crossing to his window, he yanked it open and leaped out.

Several days later, Gavin relaxed in a tree and watched Brooke climb into her car and head to college.

Chapter Four

Four days before the full moon, he watched Brooke walk into her dorm. Gavin had known she'd headed north out of town, but it had taken a couple weeks to figure out which college she attended. He fought the urge to kidnap her. After the changes her body would be undergoing the last couple weeks, Gavin's logical human brain hoped she'd welcome him with open arms. But that didn't make controlling his wolf instincts to take his mate and run any easier, nor stop his need to at least touch her.

The gibbous moon glowed down on Gavin as he climbed the side of the building, his fingertips finding tiny crevices between bricks. Pulling out a wire, he made quick work of the latch on the locked window.

Standing inside the living room, Gavin looked around, getting his bearings. He stood in a common room containing a couple couches, coffee tables and a TV. A kitchen and dining area

overlooked the room. He took a deep breath and smelled the remnants of a fish dinner.

Gavin remembered turning to seafood and muscle-building shakes when his temper and protein cravings had gotten out of control, before he'd understood what was happening to him. Foods with a high concentration of protein kept the rages at bay, but it had taken months for him to realize that what he thought were hallucinations were actually memories of when he was in beast form. He hadn't had anyone to guide him. He wouldn't let that happen to his mate.

Gavin smiled. Moving left, lavender hung in the air. Slowly, he opened the door and crept into the room. Two beds, one on either side, lined the walls. Brooke lay in the one on his right, nearest the door.

"I didn't know if you'd come."

Gavin smiled at the whispered words. *She missed me.* He'd had a rock hard reminder of her for almost the entire week. Without a word, he crawled onto the narrow, single-sized bed next to her. "It took me a while to find you," he whispered. Cupping her face, Gavin kissed her slowly, his tongue dueling with hers, showing her how much he'd missed her. He slid his hand beneath the t-shirt she wore and cupped a breast. He flicked his thumb over Brooke's nipple and her body jerked. He smiled and did it again.

"I should have told you," she managed before moaning softly.

An irritated huff came from the other bed in the room. "God, it's about time you showed up. She can't not talk about you for five minutes!"

Amused, Gavin rose onto his elbows. "Really?"

"Yeah," the other bed kept talking, "Are you really as bad as the news says you are?"

His brows lifted. Gavin hadn't watched the news since his confrontation with Richard. He glanced at Brooke, but she didn't meet his gaze. "I guess that depends on what's been said," he told the other girl.

"Fine. Out of respect for my roommate, you two have one hour. If she's not back in bed by then, I'm calling the cops. Now take it outside!"

Gavin chuckled, liking the roommate. He rose from the bed and took Brooke's hand. "Come on, baby. We need each other."

Fifteen minutes later, they sat in the great room, as Brooke called it. He held his mate on his lap, his semi-hard dick still buried inside her. Gavin could feel her shift happily on his lap and felt his cock twitch, readying for round two. "You betrayed me," he whispered to get his mind off how good it felt to be buried inside her again.

After several seconds, Brooke admitted, "You scared me. I didn't understand."

"You were leaving in a couple days. I couldn't

wait."

"Why do we kill people?"

He liked how she said *we*. Gavin had wondered that himself and spent nearly two decades learning biology and anatomy to figure it out. "There's an amino acid in human protein that's not in any other meat. At least not any I've found," he told her. "We need it to survive."

Brooke accepted his explanation without comment. "When will I see you again?"

"The day of the full moon."

"Do you...do you have any meat on you?"

He knew to what she referred. "Are you hungry, vixen?"

"Starving," she whispered.

"Dried meat doesn't satisfy like fresh or cooked meat, but it'll keep you from attacking any of your roommates." After kissing her thoroughly, Gavin moved Brooke off his lap, immediately missing the feel of her flesh against his. Naked, he crossed to his bag and pulled out a sack of dried meat. Removing eight large pieces, he set them on the table and ordered, "Put these in a plastic bag and eat them sparingly. No more than two a day."

He knelt in front of Brooke and pulled her close. "I miss you, baby. Why do you want to go to college?"

Gavin couldn't hide his grin when she growled in irritation. "There are some things I need to

finish," Brooke said.

"Guess I can understand that. Done it a few times myself. I have four doctorates," Gavin admitted.

Staring in amazement, Brooke opened her mouth to question him. He cut her off with a kiss. "Whatever you want, baby. We have eternity, remember?"

Four days later, Gavin again scaled the dorm wall, using the glare of the setting sun as cover. Brooke sat with her back to the open window. Two other girls occupied the room. He saw Brooke stiffen. He realized it was because she'd smelled him when she reached back and signaled him to wait before continuing her argument. "I don't know why you called my father, Celeste. It's just sex!"

"Good God, Brooke! He's totally brainwashed you!" Celeste, the slender blonde standing in the doorway, replied. She glared, a hand fisted on her hip. "It's like Stockholm's Syndrome or something."

He could feel Brooke's anger building and hoped she could hold it together.

"Have you ever had sex with a man who makes you feel whole?" Brooke asked hotly.

"You can have earth-shattering sex with someone else, Brooke! The guy's a murderer!"

Gavin smirked. *Well, she has that right.* By this society's laws, he was a murderer. Peeking over the windowsill, he wondered how long it would take Celeste and the other girl to leave. He saw Brooke glance at the girl he didn't recognize. The woman rose and crossed to Celeste, shaking her head. "Leave her alone. She has a test in physics tomorrow. I'll study with her in a little while."

"This is the common room," Celeste replied indignantly.

The other girl shook her head, shooing her out the door.

Celeste scoffed. "Whatever."

Gavin watched her turn in irritation and disappear. Seconds later, Brooke swung a leg over and joined him on the wall.

"Hi," she whispered, kissing him quickly. "I'm really jittery. Let's go."

Nodding, he knew exactly what she meant. Heightened awareness heralded the change. Gavin descended, Brooke following. Thunder rumbled in the distance, and Gavin felt the first drops of rain cool his heated skin. His hands tightened on the stone. Reaching the bottom, he stared up at Brooke, watching her struggle, understanding her trepidation. He'd been a werewolf over eighty years. He knew his abilities would protect him. "Drop, baby," he ordered, taking in the men in the shadows. They hadn't

been spotted yet. "Drop!" he hissed.

"You'd better catch me," he heard her say.

The woman above him let go of the wall. Brooke fell into his arms.

A bullet slammed into his leg. He grunted in surprise. "We've been spotted."

"You've been shot!"

"I've had worse. Come on." Grabbing Brooke's hand, he started running away from the policeman. Gavin heard the man speak into his radio.

"I have a confirmed hit, but he's still on the move. I'm in pursuit. No, the girl is in the way. I don't have a clean shot."

Two more officers appeared around the corner in front of them. Gavin and Brooke skidded to a stop.

"Maurice De Luca, you're under arrest for murder, cannibalism, rape and attempted kidnapping."

"Rape?" He glanced between the officers. "I didn't rape anyone. The rest of the charges...well," Gavin shrugged, giving them an unrepentant grin, "those I did."

"You didn't kidnap me," Brooke whispered.

"They think I'm trying," he pointed out. "I keep thinking one of these decades I'll learn martial arts. It would really come in handy in this situation."

"Dad," Brooke hissed.

"Step away from my daughter, Gavin," Richard ordered from behind the two officers.

Gavin's gaze shifted from the guns the three officers held on him, to Richard, to Brooke. Suddenly, his mate sucked in a pained breath and swooned. Wrapping an arm around her waist, he caught her. A quick look over his shoulder showed him the moon had almost risen. He could feel the burning stir of his inner wolf. Brooke's first transformation had begun. Gently, Gavin lowered her to the ground and took a step back.

"What did you do to her?" Richard asked, moving toward her.

Gavin held up a hand, his voice coming out a low growl, "If you value your life, you'll leave me and Brooke alone."

Ignoring him, Brooke's father knelt beside the whimpering woman. Pain slammed through Gavin's midsection, and he doubled over. Lowering to one knee, he willed the conversion to be swift. Sinew popped and muscles shifted as bones changed. The pain in his leg ebbed as his shirt and pant legs split. Thick, soft fur covered him. The pain transferred to his mouth as teeth shifted and grew. He let out a howl, and seconds later, the werewolf rose from the ground. Glowing eyes surveyed the four men who watched in shock.

Taking advantage of their disbelief, Gavin shouldered Richard aside. He scooped up his writhing mate in one large arm and galloped toward the forest. Shots rang out behind him, and he felt the sting of bullets entering his massive body. He ignored them, knowing he had to get his mate somewhere safe to finish her transformation. He slowed amongst the trees. He felt Brooke jerk in his arms as pain stabbed through her.

Finally deciding he'd given them enough space, Gavin laid her on a bed of pine needles. Brooke's brown eyes opened, and he saw the yellow ringing the pupil. She was well on her way.

"Gavin," she whispered, reaching for him.

Lying next to her, he nuzzled her face, trying to offer reassurance. She cried out sharply, her hands clenching his fur.

Don't fight it, Brooke, he mentally told her.

It hurts.

He heard the pained voice echo in his head. Relief flooded him. The rumors were true. Werewolves could talk telepathically with each other. *It will pass quickly. Will the change to happen. Accept it.*

A smell wafted on the breeze toward him. The police were closing in. When he rose, the pain in his leg, chest and shoulder reminded him that although they couldn't kill him, enough pain would render him unconscious. A low snarl

rumbled through the beast, and he moved through the forest. His paws made no sound as he sought his prey. One officer appeared to his right. Moving quickly, he circled the man and attacked from behind.

His roar of aggression echoed between the trees, hardly dampened by the rain dripping between the pines. Claws dug into the officer's back, shoving him forward. The man went down, his gun skittering across the pine needles. The werewolf grasped the man's thigh in powerful jaws, snapping the bone underneath as he tore a chunk of flesh away. The man screamed and tried to roll away. Gavin's jaws wrapped around the man's neck, breaking it and ending the officer's struggle.

Everything else forgotten in his desire to feast on the warm flesh of his kill, he didn't notice the approach of a second officer. The man said something Gavin didn't understand and fired. He almost missed the sound of another body thudding into the officer because of the report of the gun. The man's shot went awry, slicing into the werewolf's shoulder instead of his head. Turning, he saw his mate latch her jaws around the man's wrist holding the gun, snapping it. The man's howl made her lunge at him again, and he smelled her excitement. Gavin knew that feeling all too well. Pride filled him as he watched his

mate make her first kill.

As she feasted, he circled her, taking in the change. Her brown fur appeared lighter than his own, and she had a slightly smaller frame, standing six inches shorter than him at the shoulder. Her shorts remained. The shirt had split at the left seam, still hiding her fur-covered breasts. *Magnificent*. He rubbed his body against hers before nipping at her playfully.

Growling, Brooke nipped back. Excitement filled him, and he let out a howl. After a second of hesitation, she joined in. He returned to his kill, enjoying the bloody flesh oozing between his teeth. His mate's growl drew his attention to a human standing amidst the trees several feet away. *Richard*. The name flashed through Gavin's instinct driven mind.

His mate stalked forward. Seeing her intent, he leaped between them. When she tried to move around him, he latched onto her leg and pulled her off her feet. Growling angrily, Brooke rose again. Seeing the blood on Gavin's shoulder, she bit into it. Pain shot through him, and he skittered away from her. She again turned her attention on the human watching the pair.

No. He roared, jumping forward again. This time he grabbed onto the scruff of her neck. Using his larger size, he dragged her away from the human. With a flip of his head, Gavin tossed

Brooke to the ground, proving his dominance. He put one large, clawed paw on her side, keeping her down. Finally, her yellow eyes focused on him. Gavin growled. He watched her drop her gaze, bare her throat and go limp, expressing her submission to his command.

Releasing her, Brooke slowly rose to sit on her haunches.

Gavin left her side and stalked slowly toward the man. He backed a step at Gavin's approach before pointing at Brooke and saying something. Confusion shot through him. The man was trying to communicate. He glanced back at his mate before refocusing on the man. Sitting down, he cocked his head and growled.

The man nodded, sighed and shook his head. He looked at Brooke again, staring at her for a long moment. He turned away and headed toward one of the dead officers. Carefully, he pulled a radio from the man's belt and talked into it. Frustration and worry shot through Gavin, wondering what had been said. Richard turned back to the large werewolf. He patted his chest, before pointing back toward the college. Then he indicated first to Gavin, then his mate, and pointed deeper into the woods.

Gavin understood. He'd called off the search and planned to leave. Brooke moved to sit next to him as they watched the man walk away. Once he

was out of sight, he nipped playfully at her. In return, she licked his shoulder, helping to clean the mess. Growling irritably at the pain, he limped away, moving to feed on his kill. Brooke returned to hers.

Later, after both satiated their hunger, the pair curled up under the trees to sleep.

The rain still fell the next morning. Brook groaned next to Gavin before jerking upright. He smiled, pulling her back to him. "Relax, baby."

"I'm covered in blood," she whispered.

"What do you remember?"

She remained silent for a moment. "Pain. And images mostly. I killed a cop. I think I ate him," Brooke added.

He could tell by the tone of her voice that she wasn't certain how she felt about that yet. Gavin nuzzled the back of her neck, smearing fresh blood on her. "Hmmm, there's a stream nearby. Can you hear it?"

Brooke lay quiet for a moment, before looking up at him in awe. "I can! That's amazing," she whispered.

Gavin rose, pulling Brooke to her feet after him. "Let's go get cleaned up."

At the stream, Brooke stared in shock as Gavin began to wash the multiple oozing holes decorating his chest and legs. "You've been shot!"

He heard the fear in her voice and glanced up. "Relax, love," Gavin said reassuringly. "This isn't the first time, and I'm certain it won't be the last."

Brooke reached a hand up, touching it gingerly. He flinched. "Yes, it hurts."

"Sorry," she whispered. Glancing over his frame, she saw several more. "The blood loss won't kill you?"

Gavin shook his head. "No. Our bodies reproduce blood far more quickly than humans. Eventually, if I get shot enough, it will render me unconscious while I heal, but bullets can't kill us."

"What about silver ones?"

He chuckled, remembering her books. "Maybe, if it's a big enough shell, and it lodges in our brain."

"A regular bullet to the heart wouldn't do it?"

Gavin grinned at her shocked look. "No, Brooke. But that would definitely make it look that way. My body would pretty much shut down as it healed the damage from the inside out." He grinned. "Stop worrying so much."

Brooke nodded slowly and turned to her own washing. Once they finished, Gavin pulled her close. "Baby, you can't go back to this college."

"I know. And we can't go back to your place. What are we going to do?"

He smiled. "I was planning on moving soon anyway."

"You were?"

"Sure. The police finally brought in a profiler to find me." Gavin grinned unabashedly at her. "It was time to go." When a pained expression crossed Brooke's face, his grin faded and he cupped her cheek. "It's okay, darling. We'll be fine. We migrate every five to ten years."

After a moment, she nodded. "What do you need me to do?"

After giving her a long, sweet kiss, Gavin helped Brooke to her feet. He pulled on his shorts and handed the ruined clothes to her. "Get dressed. Then sneak into your dorm. You need clothes. Do you have a cooler?"

"I think one of the girls has a small one."

"Good. Bring it, plastic bags and ice."

"What for?"

He leveled a serious look at her. "The meat." At her look of understanding, he added, "And don't forget your car keys."

Gavin watched Brooke go, worry gnawing at him. He shoved it aside and glanced around to get his bearings. Heading east, he found the area he'd left his own duffel. Gavin swung into a tree and retrieved the bag before returning to their kills. Pulling a knife from the bag, he carefully dressed the kills and pulled off the meat they hadn't eaten the night before.

He'd completed both bodies by the time Brooke

returned. Relief flooded him when he caught her scent over the spice of the wet trees. Seconds later she appeared, carrying a large cooler in one hand and a bag of crushed ice in the other. Across her back she'd swung a bag.

Smiling at him, Brooke said, "I worried I wouldn't be able to carry everything, but it's much lighter than I thought it'd be."

"That's the werewolf strength, baby," Gavin told her, kissing her gently before taking the cooler. After packing the meat on ice, they headed through the trees.

"Where to now?"

"Back to my place. I'm sure the police have gone over it, but there's some things hidden there that they won't have found and that I want."

"Like what?"

Gavin grinned. "Money. We may be werewolves, but we live in the world of humans. To blend in, we have to live like them."

Three hours later, he parked Brooke's car two neighborhoods away from his home. Moving between houses, they reached the place at dusk. Gavin sneaked in the back door and stared at the mess. Drawers were open, pantry doors hung askew, contents dumped. "Wow."

"You've never had to run before?"

He shook his head. "I'm normally one step

ahead of them, but..." he glanced at her and then away.

"I'm sorry I did this to you."

He smiled softly at her. "You're worth it, Brooke."

"Is Gavin your real name?" As he led her downstairs, he gave Brooke a questioning look. "The police called you Maurice De Luca."

He grimaced. "Yeah. Gavin's my middle name."

Gavin led her to a massive cooler set along one wall.

"They'll have taken that," she warned.

"Not what I'm here for." Amusement colored his voice. Placing large hands on the cooler, he shoved. The massive chest slid sideways, revealing a hole in the cement. From the dark recess Gavin pulled two, black suitcases. He handed them to Brooke and then pulled out two more. "Everything cash, remember?"

"These are filled with money?"

"Oh, yeah. You chose a really rich man to seduce, vixen."

Heading back across the driveway, Brooke paused. "Can I see my dad?"

Gavin opened his mouth to say something, thought better of it and nodded. Setting the cases in shadows, he led her across the street. They kept clear of the pools of light given by the streetlights.

When Brooke headed toward the front door, he pulled her back into the shadows.

"The house is being watched. This way."

He led Brooke to a small, basement window bathed in darkness. Opening it, Gavin glanced up at her. "What is it you guys have against locking things?"

She shrugged. "I don't think we've really been in the basement."

Gavin shook his head. "Come on." Carefully, he lowered himself into the dark room. It took only a couple seconds for his eyes to adjust. He helped Brooke ease through the small window after him. Climbing the stairs, they moved through the darkened house.

"Think he's home?"

"I'm home." The man sat alone in the dark. When Brooke reached for a light switch, Richard said, "Don't turn on the lights."

"Why?" she asked.

"I'm under surveillance. If they didn't see you enter, they'll know you're here if you turn on the lights."

"They didn't see us," Gavin said quickly.

The man rose from his chair, crossed the room and hugged his daughter. "Why?" he whispered hoarsely. "Why did you choose my daughter?"

The werewolf smiled at the grunted question. "Mating instinct. I waited eighty-seven years for

your daughter, Richard. She was made for me."

"What are you talking about?"

"All creatures seek the same thing—food, shelter, and companionship. A werewolf is no different. We just have a harder time finding a match. We don't have just human DNA to please." He grimaced. "Werewolf DNA is a lot harder to match, but the benefits are worth it."

"Benefits?"

Gavin smiled. "I would die for your daughter, Richard. She will be safe and well taken care of. I will fulfill her every desire. Her every whim. I promise."

"The promise of a murderer," Richard rasped. "What good is that?"

Gavin bit back an irritated response. The man wouldn't understand.

Brooke stepped between them. "Father, I just came to say goodbye. I love you, but I need him. When he says I was made for him, believe it. You asked me so many times why I went with all those boys, and I couldn't answer you. I can now. It was because I was looking for Gavin."

"Are you happy?" Richard asked.

Brooke nodded. The smile on her face begged her father to understand. He turned to Gavin, holding out a hand.

"Take care of my daughter."

He took the offered hand and grinned ferally. "I

will."

Doors banged open and windows broke. He saw Richard cringe, and rage tore through Gavin. Ten officers poured into the room. He yanked Brooke toward him, shielding himself with her body.

What are you doing?

The questioned echoed through his head. *It's what they expect. Stay with your father. I'll be fine.* Out loud, he said, "Stay back or I'll kill her." From his hip he pulled the knife he'd used on the bodies that morning. He pressed it to Brooke's throat.

"Let her go, Maurice," one of the officers ordered.

Gavin's eyes narrowed. He'd always hated that name. "I don't think so." Slowly, he backed up, taking Brooke with him. He made it to the back door, the officers moving with them. He kissed the back of her neck. *See you soon, vixen.*

Releasing her, Gavin slammed a shoulder into the door behind him and sprinted out the back. Shots rang out behind him. Pain splintered through his side, hip and leg, the latter buckling when the bullet shattered his femur. Forcing himself back to his feet, he hopped forward.

"No more," the enraged officer hissed. "You killed my wife."

The shot slammed into his chest, piercing his heart and exiting his back. He grinned, hiding the

pain. "Anne, right?" He saw the black hatred in the officer's eyes. "She tasted sweet," he managed to sneer. He heard Brooke scream and sent her one more thought before he dropped.

Chapter 5

It was pitch black...and damned cold. Gavin lifted a hand, but it struck a solid surface a foot above him. He frowned, took a deep breath and smelled damp soil. "Shit," he hissed as the images of his flight from Brooke's father's house returned, along with the memory of the pain.

He ran a hand over his chest, surprised to feel a course suit jacket gracing his chest. Lifting his other hand to join the first, Gavin ran his fingers over the coffin lid above him. *Buried alive. Damn police. It would have been easier to sneak out of the morgue and make it look like someone had stolen my body. Oh, well.* A beep cut into his thoughts and a tiny pinprick of light pierced the darkness.

He saw a watch he didn't recognize, but it flashed the time at him. *Ten o'clock PM. Nice and dark.* Returning to scanning the coffin, he found a seam, but couldn't get his fingers into it. Balling his right hand into a fist, he punched the wood. He felt a bone crack, but at least the wood creaked.

He hit it again and again.

Finally, the wood gave way, showering him with dirt. Ignoring the pain radiating up his right hand, he clawed at the planks and dirt. Shoving his shoulders into the hole, he pushed his way upward. After what felt like an eternity to his burning lungs, but was probably only a minute, his hand found open air and he shoved his way to the surface.

Gavin climbed free, shook the dirt off like the wolf he was and kicked the sod back into place. He looked around the graveyard and then up at the moon. *Waning crescent*. He's been out of it for over a week. A set of headlights flashed once near the road and a familiar smell wafted on the breeze. Gavin grinned.

A moment later, Gavin climbed into the old truck. "Hi, vixen," he whispered before claiming Brooke's lips, taking everything he wanted as he plundered her mouth like a parched man searching for water. Ignoring the pain, he ripped her shirt open with his right hand, shoved up her bra and freed her breasts to his wandering hand. Gavin was rewarded with a moan as she arched her back, pushing closer to his touch.

Needing more, he laid Brooke across the truck's bench seat, shoved up her skirt, and inserted himself between her thighs. Finding no underwear heated Gavin further and his cock pulsed

painfully against the zipper of his slacks. Running his fingers over her wet pussy lips, Brooke whimpered and bucked. Gavin's control snapped. Tearing the button from his pants, he pushed them below his hips and shoved his cock inside her welcome heat.

The coupling was fast and hard as Gavin pounded into Brooke. She wrapped her legs around his waist and lifted her hips to meet his every stroke, tightening her muscles and milking his aching cock every time he pulled out. Feeling the tingling at his spine as his balls drew tight, Gavin broke the kiss and bit deep into the tendon of Brooke's shoulder. Her climax rocketed through her, and she screamed.

Her channel spasming around his length set Gavin off. Two more hard strokes and he roared his release. "My mate," he murmured into her neck when he could finally speak.

"Yours," Brooke sighed. "Your mate." Brooke smiled up at him and ran a hand through his dirty hair. "You need a shower."

"Yeah?" Still inside her, Gavin rubbed his pelvis against hers. "So do you. Got a place in mind to do that?"

"How does Maine sound?"

Gavin grinned. "Terrific. I love lobster."

About the Author

Charlie lives on a mini ranchette in Utah with her supportive husband. She enjoys spending time playing with her furry, four-legged children—horses, dogs and cats. When she's not training to compete in jumper competitions with her boys, Apache and Tucson, she can be found curled up with her laptop, creating a sexy hero to pair with an adventurous heroine...or maybe with another hero.

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