

Wolf's Promise Amanda Steiger

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Ashrin knows Shana is his mate, and he'll do whatever it takes to be with the woman he loves.

Ashrin, an immortal wolf-shifter, is astonished when he recognizes the reincarnated soul of his mate in Shana -- a human woman. However Shana, the daughter of a noblewoman, is betrothed -- to a man she does not love.

Shana doesn't know whether to believe Ashrin's claim that he is her true mate, that their souls are bound to one another, but Ashrin is determined to claim his mate, no matter what it takes.

Chapter One

Shana peered into the stone cell, where a black wolf lay on the floor. Two penetrating yellow-gold eyes stared out through the iron bars. A chill prickled up Shana's spine. The intelligence in those eyes was unmistakable.

Slowly, the wolf rose to its feet, rattling the chains that held it. Dark lips wrinkled back from long, white fangs, and Shana took a step back.

"Don't worry, milady," said Brun. He stood beside her, large and solid, his familiar presence reassuring in the darkness of the dungeon. "It can't get through those bars. Just don't look in its eyes, or it'll try to mesmerize you."

The wolf was almost as big as a pony. Thick, shaggy fur covered its body, not quite hiding the ragged wound in its side. Blood dripped to the stone floor. "Hasn't that wound been treated?" Shana asked.

Brun raised an eyebrow. "Would you want to go in there? Anyone who sets foot in that cell risks a messy death. We've tried giving the beast drugged meat, but it won't eat, so we're just waiting for it to weaken. We figure a few days without food will take the fight out of it."

"What then? What are they going to do with him?"

He combed his fingers through his thick, reddish beard. "Let the alchemists vivisect it, I imagine."

Shana shuddered. The wolf's eyes were still on her. "Is it true that they can assume human form?"

"Oh, yes. That's what makes these wolf demons so dangerous. They can pass for human, live among us undetected." Brun held up his lantern, illuminating the wolf's face. Light shone on the golden irises. "You can recognize them if you know the signs, though. They all have those yellow eyes, even in man-form. And a dog can smell the difference. That's how your mother's hunters caught this one." He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Quite a struggle, I'm told. The hunters had to fill him with arrows before he even slowed down."

A low growl rose from the wolf's throat. Shana's gaze drifted back to the wound in its side. "Why does he have to stay locked up like this? He hasn't hurt anyone, has he?"

"Demons kill folk all the time."

"But surely they aren't all bad."

He frowned. "I know you've a soft heart, milady, but your compassion is wasted on this creature. Demons are demons."

Shana bit her lower lip, staring at the wolf. Its eyes locked with hers and widened. Pointed ears twitched and swiveled forward as the wolf stared at her intently. She couldn't move, couldn't breathe. Her heart pounded in her throat as her skin warmed and tingled.

A deep, male voice spoke in her head. Can you hear me?

She gave a start.

The wolf's gaze never left hers. *You can, can't you? Do you know who I am?* "Milady?"

She barely heard Brun's voice. She couldn't look away from those eyes. Nothing else existed. Goose bumps rose on her arms and breasts, and her nipples stiffened until they felt sharp enough to cut paper. That voice sounded so familiar. Where had she heard it before? It made her think of dreams she'd had as a child -- dreams of running free through the forest, far from the confining walls of her home, with wind in her hair and soft, cool grass under her bare feet. Those dreams had grown less and less frequent as she grew older, but now she ached for that sense of freedom. Her tongue crept out to moisten her lips, and she took a step toward the bars.

"Shana!" Rough hands gripped her shoulders and turned her sharply away from the cell.

She blinked up at Brun's face as her eyes slowly regained focus. "What?"

He peered into her eyes. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine," she said, surprised at how normal her voice sounded. Her heart galloped, and her skin still tingled with a strange warmth.

He frowned. "I think you'd best go. The dungeon's no place for a young lady."

She nodded, dazed. As the guard led her down the dimly lit hall, away from the cell, she cast one last look over her shoulder, at the demon. Its eyes still watched her, unblinking and golden.

Brun led her up a twisting stone staircase, to a huge oaken door, and pushed it open. Shana blinked at the sudden bright sunlight.

"Are you sure you're all right, milady? You're pale."

She managed a slight smile. "I'm just a little shaken, that's all. It's the first time I've ever seen a demon up close. I'll be fine."

He frowned. "Would you like me to walk you back to the main house?"

"No, thank you." She stepped through the open door, into the grassy field outside the windowless stone building that housed the dungeons. The door creaked shut behind her, and the lock clicked.

Shana crossed the grassy lawn and slipped in through the mansion's main doors. She looked around, then crept inside. The hall was silent, sunlight spilling in through the tall, arched windows. Her boots clicked softly against the stone floor as she made her way toward the stairs.

A sharp voice stopped her in her tracks. "Shana."

She turned slowly.

Lady Olivia stood behind her, a tall, thin form in a dark gray dress, her long, brown hair tied back in a tight braid. Her moon-pale face was expressionless and cool, as always. Shana couldn't remember the last time she'd seen her smile. "Yes, Mother?"

"I saw you leave the dungeons. What were you doing in that place?"

Shana tensed. "I was just curious. Everyone was talking about the demon, but no one would tell me anything. I don't see anything wrong with just wanting a quick look."

She knew immediately that she'd made a mistake. Olivia's eyes widened. "You saw the demon?"

Shana bit her tongue.

"By the gods, Shana, do you have any idea how dangerous those creatures are?"

"They had it locked up," she said, but her voice was more subdued now. Her cheeks burned. "There was no danger."

"Of course there was danger!" Olivia clenched her fists, inhaling slowly, as if to bring her emotions under control. Her face flushed brick red. "Shana, demons are not natural creatures. Some of them can read minds, or enter a person's dreams, or even..."

"Even what?"

"There have been stories of possession. Of demons inhabiting a person's body."

Shana blinked. "Surely you don't think I'm possessed."

"Demons are extremely clever. He might have slipped into your mind and hidden himself. He may be lying in wait for the proper moment to seize control. You had better report to Alchemist Sedric and have him examine you."

Shana bowed her head, feeling subdued and a little frightened. Perhaps she had been foolish to visit the dungeon, after all. "Yes, Mother," she said quietly.

"One more thing," Olivia said, and withdrew a small black velvet box from her pocket. "A messenger brought it this morning. It's from Alan."

Shana winced, took the box, and opened it. A gold bracelet glittered inside. "It's lovely."

Beneath it lay a note.

To my betrothed.

How cold. But at least he was honest. Calling her *darling* or *beloved* would have been a lie.

"He also left a message. The date of the wedding has been set. It will take place in two weeks."

"Two weeks?" Shana's eyes widened. "So soon?" She heard the fear in her voice, but couldn't hide it.

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"Alan is a good man," Olivia said, her expression neutral. "He will keep you comfortable and provide for your children."

Shana stared at the floor. Alan of Fyrden was a dour man with bushy, scowling gray eyebrows and a voice like the growl of a sleepy dragon. He was old enough to be her father, or even her grandfather. Shana's fingers tightened on the bracelet. "It's just -- I hardly know him. Do you really think this is necessary?"

Her mother sighed. "You must be realistic, Shana. Our family fortune has dwindled considerably, and noble blood doesn't put food on the table. You and Alan will grow to care for each other. That was how it was with your father and I, may his soul rest peacefully."

"But I'm not attracted to Alan," she blurted out.

"There are more important things in this world than passion." She laid a hand on Shana's shoulder and smiled, though her eyes held a shadow of sadness. "You'll come to understand that as you grow older."

Shana lowered her gaze. She knew there was no handsome stranger on a white horse coming to carry her away. Only silly little girls believed in such things. She was twenty, too old for fairy tales. Yet a deep and bitter ache filled her heart. "I understand, Mother." She turned away to hide the tears in her eyes.

Chapter Two

Shana lay in bed, her eyes closed. Wind sighed outside her window, and thoughts drifted idly through her mind as she hovered in that space between sleep and wakefulness.

A warm breath caressed her neck, and her breath caught in her throat. Lips brushed her ear. "Shana," a deep, male voice whispered.

Shana's heartbeat quickened. She tried to open her eyes, but she couldn't move. Large, strong fingers caressed her neck, slid down her shoulder, and over her breast. Her nipple stiffened beneath the thin silk of her nightgown, and a callused thumb brushed over it. A muscled arm curled around her waist as the thumb rotated slowly around her tingling nipple.

What was happening? She ought to be panicking, yet somehow, she felt only a drowsy pleasure. A dream -- it had to be a dream. There was no danger, so it was all right to relax and enjoy it. Shana shivered as a hand cupped her breast, squeezed, and slipped beneath her nightgown. She wanted to see who was touching her. Her eyelids trembled, but still, she couldn't pry them open.

"You can hear me, can't you?" the man's voice whispered. It hummed pleasantly in her ear and in the center of her head. "You can feel me. I know you can." Hot fingers slid over her stomach, then lower. They brushed against the patch of downy, dark curls between her thighs, and a shiver ran through her. "I feel your body responding to me." His thumb grazed the hood of her clitoris. The blood rushed to her pussy, causing her labia to tingle and grow warm, plumping beneath his touch. Her clit pulsed as the pad of his thumb rotated slowly around it. Then one thick finger pressed between her labia, shockingly intimate, shockingly intrusive. Her consciousness narrowed until she was aware of nothing else, and she trembled as he explored her folds. A sigh caressed her neck. "So wet."

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"I am Ashrin," replied the deep voice.

She recognized that voice. It had spoken to her in the dungeon. Fear fluttered in her midsection. "What's happening? Are you really here? Or is this just in my mind?"

"It's happening inside your mind. But that doesn't mean it's not real."

"I don't understand."

"I entered you the moment you looked into my eyes." A hot tongue traced her ear. Lips grazed her throat, and sharp teeth pressed against her racing pulse. "I can hear your thoughts. Feel your emotions."

A dark thrill raced through her at the words *I entered you*. It brought to mind a different kind of intimacy. But how was this possible? If he could do such a thing, he would have taken control of the guards by now.

A deep chuckle vibrated in her ear. "They aren't receptive to my power. But you are. It's how you're able to hear my voice. How you're able to feel this" -- his palm ground against her aching clit --"even though I'm not here in the flesh."

Still, she couldn't open her eyes or move. Her body twitched as she struggled against the invisible restraints binding her.

"Relax. I would never harm you," he said, his voice oddly gentle.

Panic fluttered in her chest. "Then get out of my head."

"I can't do that. You are my only hope. You must come to me." His voice seemed to slide over her skin like dark velvet. It wound itself deep into her thoughts.

Was this demonic possession? Even now, was he taking over her mind, her willpower? Then his hand -- huge, hot, and possessive -- cupped her throbbing pussy, and her thoughts dissolved in a dazzling burst of sensation. The way he touched her, gently, intimately, yet possessively -- this was how she'd always wanted to be touched, what she'd yearned for in her darkest, sweetest dreams, but she'd never dared to think such feelings could really exist. This was the stuff of fantasy, surely.

Her fear subsided, and a warm blanket of calm settled over her once more.

He licked a hot, wet trail along her neck, over her collarbones, and down the slope of one breast. His tongue laved her nipple, and the areola puckered as his saliva cooled. Warm lips closed around the aching bud and pulled it deep into his mouth. He rolled the nipple across his tongue and around his mouth like a hard candy. Fangs pressed into tender flesh, hard enough to make her wonder if they'd leave a mark, as he sucked the nipple deeper, holding her on the razor-thin edge between pleasure and pain.

Heat radiated outward from that sharp, tingling point. When his mouth left her breast, she wanted to cry out in protest. Her breasts felt full and heavy, the nipples pulsing like tiny hearts. "You want this, don't you?" he whispered. His breathing had quickened and grown ragged.

"Yes." Let me experience passion, she thought, even if it isn't real. Let me taste it, just this once.

A thick, hot finger slid into the melting warmth of her pussy. Shana had touched herself before, but she'd been careful not to do anything that might break her maidenhead. That intimate contact hit her like a jolt of electricity. The finger moved in and out, a slow, delicious friction, then withdrew.

She sensed a huge form above her, then his hands spread her thighs wide. Something round and hot pressed against the entrance to her pussy. Though she still couldn't open her eyes, she could feel how enormous he was, and she tensed.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered. The bulbous head of his cock slid up and down her moist slit. It rubbed against her clitoris, giving her a wicked little burst of pleasure. The smooth, round head slid down her labia again, then his hips pushed forward, and her folds parted for him. She felt a great pressure against her entrance. Then, with a thrust, he entered her.

A twinge of panic shot through her as the thick, hard column of flesh slid into her tight virgin pussy. For a moment he remained motionless. She could feel the length and girth of him stretching her walls, pulsing urgently against her sensitive inner flesh,

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so large it was almost uncomfortable. Then, as he began to move, a slow, hot bliss spread throughout her body. He slid in and out of her, first in a gentle, rocking rhythm, then faster, harder, pounding into her tight core. The sweet friction of hot, hard flesh sliding against the soft, slick interior of her sex sent waves of heat rippling through her. Still, she couldn't open her eyes, but she could feel his gaze on her like a physical pressure. He trailed kisses over the slope of her left breast; then his mouth fastened onto her left nipple and sucked, sharp teeth pressing into her flesh.

Her back arched off the bed, and she gasped at the delicious sting of orgasm, then collapsed, panting and damp with sweat. Warm aftershocks of pleasure rolled through her.

He pulled out of her. Hot breath gusted against her ear, and his tongue slid over her throat in a slow, wet lick. "We are bonded," he whispered roughly.

The words sent a dark thrill of pleasure through her, though she had no idea what he meant. Then she sensed him drawing away, retreating. "Wait. Don't go."

"Come to me," he said. "I will be waiting for you."

"Let me see you," she said, frantic. If this was a dream, then he would dissolve into nothingness when she woke. She wanted at least a brief glimpse of him before then. "Please."

"Open your eyes."

Her eyes slid open, and for an instant, a man's face filled her vision. His eyes glowed the same gold as the black wolf's, and long, dark hair hung down around his face. Firm, full lips parted, revealing a glint of white fangs. Then he dissolved like a mirage. She blinked. Though she could no longer see the man in front of her, his image still hovered in the darkness behind her eyes, imprinted on her retinas like a lightning flash. Shana let out a shaky breath.

"A dream," she said aloud. Of course -- it had been a dream. But her nipples still thrust against her thin nightgown, stiff and aching. She touched her pussy, and her fingers came away sticky and wet. She'd had erotic dreams before, but never one so intense, so real. A shiver ran through her.

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She tossed and turned for a while, then finally climbed out of bed. Restless, she walked to her dresser and began to brush her long dark hair as she stared at her reflection. She looked very little like her mother. She had her father's thick raven hair and black eyes.

A cool breeze stirred the curtains, and she shivered. Her thin white nightgown wasn't quite enough to keep out the chilly bite in the air.

She found her thoughts drifting back to the demon. Those staring golden eyes seemed to have burned themselves into her brain. They hovered in the darkness behind her lids when she closed her eyes, and the memory of them sent an icy finger sliding down her spine. She licked her lips and nervously fingered the handle of her hairbrush.

What if it hadn't been just a dream? Suppose the demon really had invaded her mind? Maybe he was there now, crouched in some dark corner of her soul, looking out through her eyes, waiting for the ideal moment to seize control.

Earlier that day, Alchemist Sedric had examined her, made her drink a foultasting greenish brew which he claimed would purge any taint of evil magic from her body, then sent her on her way. She knew her mother had great faith in alchemists, but Shana found it hard to believe that drinking tea made from newts' tails and owls' eyes would protect her from a demon's magic.

She wrapped her arms around herself and walked over to the window, staring out at the rolling fields and woodlands surrounding the mansion. Shana's gaze wandered to the edge of the woods. In the shadows of the trees stood a low, stone house with a flat roof and a single, stout oaken door: the dungeon.

She shivered and rubbed her arms. *You are my only hope*, he'd said. He'd sounded so unexpectedly vulnerable, almost desperate, when he spoke those words, and the memory of that desperation haunted her even more than his touch. What if it *hadn't* been a dream?

Regardless, the demon himself was surely real, and he was in that dungeon, imprisoned and tormented for the sin of being born. Like her, he was trapped, bound by circumstances beyond his control. Shana paced for a few minutes longer, then stopped, looking out the window, her fists clenched. She slipped into a loose fitting tunic, trousers, and a pair of snug traveler's boots, then picked up a lit candle on her nightstand. Thinking better, she set it down and blew out the flame. Someone might spot the light if she took it. She would have to feel her way through the darkness.

She left her room, easing the door shut behind her.

Chapter Three

Moonbeams shone in through the narrow windows as Shana tiptoed down the hall, holding her breath. Silent as a cat, she crept down the carpeted stairs to the main hall. The front doors were kept bolted at night, but there was a window in the kitchen that was usually left ajar. Shana slipped into the dark kitchen and squeezed out the window. With a thump, she landed in the clump of bushes below and picked herself up, brushing bits of leaves and twigs off her shirt. Moonlight silvered the grassy fields around the mansion, but the dungeon was smothered in shadow. Heart racing, she walked up to the door.

She realized she didn't have any clear plan how to get in. After a moment's hesitation, she knocked. The door opened and Brun's confused, drowsy face peered out. "Milady?" he murmured, knuckling sleep from his eyes. "What are you doing out of bed at this time of night?"

"I -- I'm sorry to trouble you, but I left something very important in here. I think I must have dropped it on the floor. It's a ring my father gave me before he passed away," she said, amazed at how easily the lie sprang from her lips.

Brun's forehead furrowed. "Pardon me, but couldn't this wait for tomorrow morning?"

"I'm sorry, I just can't get it out of my mind. I think I know where I dropped it. If you'll let me in, I'll go look for it myself."

He shook his head. "Just tell me what it looks like, and I'll find it for you. Your mother said you're not to come near --"

"Oh, I wouldn't think of asking you to find it," she said, slipping past him. "I've bothered you enough. I'll just be a minute or two." She smiled sweetly at him and started down the steep steps. Shana half expected him to follow, but he didn't. Her heart thundered as she made her way slowly down the stairs, feeling her way through the darkness, until she came to the stone hall below, lit by torches and lined by barred cells. Most were empty. It wasn't difficult to spot the one that wasn't. Holding her breath, she approached and peered in.

The black wolf lay on the floor, staring at her with those brilliant golden eyes. She dropped to her knees and gripped the bars, trembling. "I'm going to free you." Shana wondered if she'd gone crazy. "Just tell me what I need to do."

Sharp teeth flashed in a grin. And his voice was in her mind suddenly, deep and rough. *Lend me your strength*.

"But how?"

Just relax.

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Her breath caught in her throat as she felt something pushing into her mind. A shiver ran through her body as a sinuous stream of dark energy wove its way through her very soul. She felt her muscles weakening as a heavy fatigue settled over her. At the same time, the wolf rose to his feet. He loomed larger and darker than ever, his eyes blazing a fiery yellow. The bars of his cage glowed a sudden, brilliant white. A thin hum filled the air. Then the bars shattered and the chains fell away. Shana gasped.

The wolf stepped out of his cell. His paws, nearly as big as a lion's, touched the stone of the hall outside. His mouth opened in a feral grin, showing curved white fangs.

Shana shrank back, terrified, as yellow eyes burned into hers. She tried to stand, but her legs quivered and gave out beneath her, and her vision blurred. Panting, she strained to focus her eyes.

What had she done?

The wolf raised his head as the thunder of guards' footsteps echoed down the hall. He growled, fur bristling along his spine, and turned toward the sound. Three guards rounded a bend in the hall and stopped. The color drained from their faces. Two turned and ran. A third stood frozen as the demon advanced. He crouched and sprang, knocking the guard to the floor. Dark lips peeled back from his fangs.

"No!" Shana cried. "Don't hurt him!"

The wolf looked up, then slowly backed off of the guard, who scrambled to his feet, panting raggedly, and dashed away like a startled rabbit. The wolf turned, staring at her. His enormous dark presence filled the hallway. Flesh rippled, and a moment later, a man stood there in the wolf's place, naked. He was tall and broad shouldered, with sun-bronzed skin, sculpted muscles, and a wild look filling his eyes. Her gaze traveled down his wide chest and taut abdomen, to the long, thick organ between his legs. A flush rose into her cheeks, and she looked quickly away.

Shana tried again to stand, but her limbs wouldn't obey her. Whatever he'd done to her, it had left her as weak as a newborn. She sat with her back against the wall, staring up at him with wide eyes as he approached. He bent and lifted her easily into his arms. His golden eyes were the last thing she saw before darkness slipped over her.

Shana woke to birdsong, the sigh of wind through leaves, and the warm touch of sunlight on her skin. Grass tickled her cheek. Her lashes flickered open and she looked around, brow furrowed with confusion. She sat up and gasped.

* * *

A naked man sat across from her on the grass, legs folded, watching her with bright golden eyes. His dark hair hung down past his shoulders, making him look wild and savage, but he had no trace of a beard. A long, diagonal white scar cut across his broad chest.

A jolt of fear shook her. She tried to stand, but her legs wouldn't support her. She sank, trembling, back to the ground.

He stood. "I wouldn't try to move. You're still weak."

"Who are you?"

"You know me. I'm Ashrin." He approached and crouched beside her. He plucked a large, cup-shaped leaf from a nearby plant and murmured a few words under his breath. The leaf filled up with water, and he held it to Shana's lips, but she didn't move. "Drink."

She hesitated. Her throat ached with thirst, but she wasn't sure she wanted to drink something created with a demon's magic. He slid a hand under her neck, his fingers warm and firm against her nape, and held her head in place as he trickled the water between her parted lips.

She pulled away and spat it out.

Ashrin frowned. "I'm not trying to poison you. You've been unconscious for hours. If I wanted to hurt you, I would have done so by now."

She looked up at him uncertainly. He did have a point.

Again, he filled the leaf-cup and held it to her lips. "Drink." She drank. The water slid down her throat like cool silk, and strength flowed through her. Shana sat up slowly. He supported her with a hand on her back. "Where am I?" she asked, her voice shaky.

"A safe place. This clearing is guarded by a powerful magic. We can't be found here."

She took a deep breath. "You. You invaded my mind." As the memories returned, anger swelled in her. She stood and backed away from him. "You possessed me."

"No, I did not." He leaned against a tree and crossed his arms over his chest, seemingly unconcerned about his nakedness.

She tried very hard not to look at the huge cock hanging between his legs. Even at rest, it was intimidating. *Was that really inside me*? She shook her head. That had been a dream. Hadn't it? Oh gods. "You were controlling my thoughts," she insisted. "You forced me to free you."

"I didn't *force* you to do anything."

She clenched her teeth. He was a demon. Of course he'd lie. And yet, throughout the experience, she hadn't *felt* possessed. She'd made the decision to help him herself. "Why did you bring me here?"

He advanced toward her. "Don't you know who I am?" he asked, very softly. "Search your heart, Shana. You must know. I felt your recognition when I looked into your eyes."

"I -- I don't know what you're talking about." The hairs on her neck stood on end. Was this some demon trick? "I want to go home. Now." Her voice shook.

"But you're unhappy there."

"That's none of your business."

"So you don't deny it?" He took another step closer.

Shana backed away. Her back pressed against a tree, and she realized their trunks formed an impenetrable wall around the clearing; they grew together in odd, twisting patterns, branches interwoven and overlapping. Her breathing quickened. "What are you planning to do with me?"

"I'm not planning anything."

"Then take me back."

He took another step toward her, trapping her between his huge, hard body and the tree. She lifted her chin and glared at him as his golden eyes pierced hers.

"You don't want to go back. Do you?"

"It has nothing to do with what I want."

Chapter Four

Tears stung Shana's eyes, and she shut them, embarrassed.

Ashrin gripped her chin between a thumb and forefinger, and her breath caught in her throat. The gentleness of his touch surprised her. "Look at me," he said quietly. Shana opened her eyes, and his gaze pinned her. "I've seen your memories. I know your situation. Your mother has arranged a marriage that you don't want. You could refuse, yet you bow to her will. Why? You had the courage to free me, even though you were afraid. So why can you not stand up for your own happiness?"

"It's... more complicated than that."

"Is it?" His thumb brushed her lower lip, and her breath caught in her throat. She stood, heart pounding, as his thumb glided back and forth across her lip, and the friction of callused skin against soft flesh made her dizzy.

She turned her face aside. "Don't." If he kept touching her like that, she wouldn't be able to resist him. Why did he affect her so?

Warm breath tickled her neck. "You enjoyed my touch last night. Why do you recoil from me now?"

She gulped, mouth dry. The rough tree-bark scraped her back, and his hot, muscled chest pressed against her front. She knew she should push him away, but somehow she couldn't bring herself to move. "That was a dream," she whispered, and wondered which one of them she was trying to convince.

His large, rough hand cupped her breast, and she gasped. Mouth dry, she looked down and saw her nipples jutting through the thin fabric of her shirt. His thumb circled one, and a jolt of heat shot straight to her clit. His tongue caressed her pulse, a shock of wetness and heat. "You're aroused. I can smell it." A rough growl had crept into his voice.

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Shana licked her lips. Her lower lip still tingled from his touch. He's a demon, she reminded herself. He was probably using his powers to inflame her desires. But somehow, she didn't really believe that -- it would be too convenient to blame this hunger on demon magic. She closed her eyes. For years, she'd dreamed of finding a man who ignited this sort of passion in her, but this was too much, too fast. "I can't do this."

He stroked her hair, the touch unexpectedly soothing. "What are you afraid of?" "This. Everything."

Golden irises shone in the sunlight as he studied her face. His fingertips traced the line of her jaw. "I could never hurt you. And I would sooner die than let any harm come to you. I know you understand that in your heart. Even if your mind doesn't recognize me, your emotions haven't changed."

Then his lips touched hers. At first, the kiss was soft, gentle, and then, as she relaxed into it, his mouth pressed more firmly against hers. Her lips parted under that steady, insistent pressure, and his tongue slipped into her mouth. He growled softly against her lips as his tongue rubbed against hers. Sharp teeth scraped her lower lip. When he finally pulled back, she was breathless, her lips swollen and tingling.

His mouth pressed against her neck. He licked, kissed, and sucked the creamy skin, and Shana moaned, trembling as she leaned back against the tree. Panting, she slid her fingers through his long, dark hair. It was softer than she'd imagined. Her hands glided down over his back; her fingertips found the ridges of scar tissue wandering like roads over his hot, iron-hard muscles. Those muscles shifted and bunched as he gripped her shoulders, pinning her against the tree.

His hand slipped beneath the waist of her trousers and into her underwear. The lips of her pussy swelled beneath the burning touch of his fingertips, and when he dragged his rough palm over the silky little nub of her clit, a wave of weakness swept through her. Warm, strong arms encircled her, holding her close against his broad chest. She struggled to clear her mind. "No." Breathing hard, she placed both hands on his broad chest and pushed him away.

"What is it, Shana?"

She pulled free of his embrace, shaking her head, and backed away from him. He stood, gloriously naked in the sunlight, his cock standing erect: massive and swollen, with precum glistening on its tip. Shana licked her lips, then tore her gaze away. "I'm betrothed to another."

"You don't want the marriage," he said firmly, with no trace of doubt in his voice. "Why would you give yourself to someone you don't want?"

Shana gulped and shut her eyes. How was she supposed to debate him while he was naked? It didn't seem fair. It took all her attention just to keep her gaze from straying to his groin again. "If I break the engagement, my mother may send me away, and then where would I go?" she demanded, striving to sound practical.

Ashrin leaned closer. "You could stay with me," he said, his voice deep and soft, his lips moving close to her ear.

Her breath caught in her throat. "I certainly can't. I barely know you."

His lips brushed her neck, and a small, startled moan escaped her. "But you *do* know me. And I know you, Shana. I know you very well. Even when you were a little girl, you used to dream about escaping your home. You had a fantasy about running away to the forest and living with the wolves. They fascinated you, with their grace and power, their penetrating golden eyes. As you grew older, you began to have dreams of a man who could become a black wolf. When you heard that your mother's hunters had captured a wolf demon, you had to see for yourself, because deep down, you knew it was me. Our souls have been seeking each other. And some part of you recognizes me, whether you want to admit it or not."

She shivered at the warm, husky tone of that voice, wanting to believe the words, but afraid to. Was he really the one from her dreams -- or was this all some elaborate ploy? It would be so easy for him to manipulate her, having seen her memories and desires. "It's the truth," he said, as if reading her fears. "Only humans trick and deceive. My people have never had any use for lies."

Shana clenched one hand into a fist. Tears prickled at the corners of her eyes. "I don't understand," she whispered. "Those dreams were just dreams. How can you be..."

His lips grazed her ear, and the words froze in her throat. "Let me show you," he murmured.

She was suddenly very aware of how tight her shirt was. Her breasts strained against the fabric, and she ached to undo the lacings, feel the cool forest air wash over her skin, and his warm hands on her. Ashrin's gaze pierced hers. "Your body and heart know what they want. Trust your feelings. Soon, your mind will understand as well. But for now, just let your thoughts slip away. Let yourself understand with your flesh." Slowly, gently, he took her into his arms and laid her down on the grass, on her back. A shiver traced its way up her spine.

Strong, tanned fingers undid the lacings of her shirt, freeing her breasts. She knew she should pull away. Instead, she remained still, her breath fluttering in her throat as his hand brushed ever so lightly over one pale globe and covered it. It fit perfectly into his palm, filling it without overflowing. When his thumb brushed her nipple, Shana's lips parted, and she drew in a soft breath.

His arms surrounded her, pulling her closer, until the length of his body pressed against hers, hard and warm and so alive. His broad chest rose and fell as he breathed, and her breathing quickened in response.

She looked into his eyes. "Somehow, I feel that you understand me more than anyone ever has. How is that possible? We've barely spoken."

"Words don't matter. They are the domain of humans. We're already bound together, body and heart." His hand slipped down to caress the curve of her firm bottom, then squeeze gently. He touched her so knowingly, as if he were already well acquainted with her body and its needs. She reached up tentatively to touch his shoulders, then trailed her hands over his back, over the ridges of scar tissue that

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crossed and crisscrossed his skin. Those injuries weren't from the hunters who had captured him; these were old scars. Had he been hunted before? How many times had he been attacked by humans?

"Don't worry about that," he said.

"Don't read my mind without permission. It's rude." But she couldn't muster any real indignation. Not when her skin was tingling with life and warmth.

"I don't need to read your mind to know what you're thinking. I know you inside and out." His mouth touched the place where her neck joined her shoulder, and she felt his long hair tickling her breast as his firm hands moved slowly over her skin, over the curve of her hips. He undid the lacings of her trousers, then pushed them down. Her underwear clung to her wet pussy. He hooked a finger beneath the waistband and slid them off, exposing her. The cool forest air on her bare wet flesh made her shiver.

His palm brushed her flat belly, then moved lower. One finger traced the moist slit between her thighs. Her breath escaped her throat in a soft, shuddering gasp. She clung to his shoulders for support as his fingers pressed more firmly into her wet folds. A wave of sweet dizziness washed over her. Looking down, she saw his fingertip brush over the tiny pink nub of her clitoris. It poked out from beneath its hood, tingling, as his finger rotated slowly around it. She panted, her cheek resting lightly against his chest, where she could feel his thunderous heartbeat. She looked between his legs and saw his shaft hard and erect, the veins standing out in sharp relief. The sight of it sent a tremor through her whole body, and she sank to the grass.

His hands gripped her thighs, pushing them wide open, exposing her to his eyes. He leaned closer, and his warm breath stirred the downy curls below her belly. His thumbs parted the soft outer lips of her sex, opening her. He stared into her, and she felt his gaze as it roved over her sensitive inner flesh. His tongue poked out and traced the slit of her pussy in a slow, wet lick, making her whimper with need. The slick, wet probe pushed deeper, between her outer lips, and caressed her folds. "Ashrin," she breathed. He raised his head, and his gaze met hers.

"I want to touch you," she whispered.

Chapter Five

He smiled, took her hand, and pulled it toward his cock. She licked her lips and curled her fingers around the pulsing organ. It felt so hot, hard, and alive. A faint moan escaped his throat, and the pupils of his golden eyes dilated. Heart pounding, she slid her fingers up and down the length of his organ, from the bulbous head to the thick base. She traced a vein along the underside. Her fingertips moved farther back and slid over the rough surface of his enormous, tight balls. They twitched and grew fuller still, swelling under her touch. A bead of precum welled up from the tip of his cock. Eyes wide, she looked up at him. His lips were parted, his pulse pounding visibly in his throat, and his breathing shuddered as he struggled to control it.

He gripped her wrists in one hand and pinned them to the grass. His broad palm covered her aching mound, cupped it possessively, and squeezed. Shana trembled beneath his touch, moaning, as he ground his palm against her wet, slick folds. She panted, pushing upward against his hand, needing more. "Please," she gasped out, though she didn't even know what she was asking for. "Please."

His palm pressed harder against her. One fingertip teased the opening to her sex while the heel of his hand rubbed deliciously against her clit. He withdrew his hand and lowered his head again. His tongue lapped her clit, tasted the entrance to her pussy, then, without warning, he thrust his tongue into her as if it were a cock. She gasped. He moved inside her, sliding in and out of her pussy, licking her sensitive inner walls, withdrawing to stimulate the entrance, then thrusting into her again.

He was fucking her with his tongue, she thought, dazed -- that was the only way to describe it. When he probed a sensitive spot deep in her body, she moaned. Something pulsed deep within her like a second heartbeat, aching with need, but his tongue couldn't quite reach it. "Ashrin. I -- I *want*…" Her voice quivered and trailed off;

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she couldn't quite bring herself to speak the words, but he seemed to understand. He withdrew his tongue and straddled her hips.

"Ashrin," she whispered, marveling at how familiar and right the name felt in her mouth. *My mate*, she thought. Ashrin was her mate. She didn't understand how it was possible, but the knowledge was already inside her, in her blood, her bones, her aching sex. It was a knowledge that transcended logic and words, something written into her very soul. And she knew, without a doubt, that he felt the same.

Ashrin gazed down at her, heat in his eyes. Lightly, he bit one of her hard pink nipples, then ran his hot tongue over it. He trailed slow kisses over her stomach, his mouth pressing firmly against her skin. She felt the warmth of his lips lingering everywhere they touched, like a brand. A husky moan escaped her throat as he kissed his way from her knee down to her soft inner thigh, tantalizingly close to the pulsing center of her need. She writhed, wanting more.

He pressed a fingertip against the opening to her sex. Then, slowly, he pushed a finger inside her, easing it between her hot, slick walls. She let out a tiny gasp. He waited a moment. then carefully inserted another finger, stretching her a little wider. She wriggled slightly. "Does it hurt?" he asked.

"No," she lied. It did hurt, just a little, but she didn't want him to stop.

"Look into my eyes," he said.

Her eyes met his.

"Relax your mind."

She felt a flutter inside her head, felt the pain easing, fading away. Her eyes widened. "Did you do that?"

A tiny smile curved his full, firm mouth. "There are advantages to being a demon."

"But you *aren't* a demon," she whispered dreamily. "A demon is something bad. You're. different. What are you, really?"

"The name doesn't matter. I am what I am." He withdrew his fingers, then positioned himself over her. The smooth, round head of his cock pressed against the

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entrance to her pussy, and Shana tensed. They had done this once before, but this -- this was real. This would break the barrier of her virginity, and she would no longer be pure on her wedding night. Once they did this, there was no turning back. A cold sliver of fear slid through the hot fog of lust. But on some level, she knew it was already too late to go back. After tasting this sort of pleasure, could she really marry Alan and resign herself to a life of quiet duty as his wife? The very thought made her spirit shudder. Her body and soul cried out for Ashrin, for the feeling of his cock moving inside her, the intimacy of his thoughts in her mind, the heat of his hands on her skin.

Ashrin just waited, looking into her eyes, as if he were watching the thoughts play out behind them. Lust burned bright in his gaze, and his cock remained poised at her entrance, pulsing and engorged. His hands rested on the grass to either side of her body as he waited.

"I need you," she whispered.

Ashrin's breath caught in his throat, and his eyes widened. A tremor ran through his huge frame. His hips pushed forward, and his cock slid smoothly into her pussy, filling her.

She gasped, fingers tightening on his shoulders. The walls of her sex seemed to stretch impossibly wide to accommodate the length and girth of him. He held still within her until the discomfort faded completely and was replaced with a sweet, tingling warmth. He began to move, rubbing against that slick, sensitive flesh, each thrust pushing him deeper into her body.

The pleasure built as his movements quickened. Before long, she was moaning helplessly, unable to control the husky sounds that escaped her throat. She wrapped her arms around him, clinging to him tightly, clinging to his heat, his life, needing more of him, needing him deeper within her. She pushed upward, against him, their sweatdamp naked bodies sliding against each other. Then, when she hovered on the edge of orgasm, he slowed his pace, holding her there. A faint, hungry sound escaped her as she pushed upward, against him, seeking that final bit of stimulation that would bring her to climax, but he remained still, his hips poised over hers, his cock still half-buried inside her.

"Relax," he whispered. He smiled, and from the half-playful, half-wicked glint in his eyes, she knew that he understood everything she was feeling, that he was doing this deliberately, prolonging this moment.

Shana writhed beneath him, clenched her jaws and clutched his shoulders, nails pressing into his skin. "Ashrin, I need it!"

He thrust, bringing the head of his cock firmly against that sensitive spot deep inside her, and she gasped. The burst of pleasure was so intense it made her dizzy: a sharp, sweet sting that peaked, then slowly faded, giving way to a languid bliss. She lay on the grass, bathed in sweat, as he continued to thrust into her, each movement sending sweet aftershocks of pleasure through her pussy. A moment later, he released into her, and the liquid heat trickled deep into her body.

She lay limp and panting as he pulled out and lay down by her side. One large, warm hand stroked her hair back from her forehead. "Shana," he murmured, his voice low and close to her ear. He curled around her, surrounding her with his body.

"Is this real? It's not a dream?"

"It's real."

She closed her eyes, letting the drowsy happiness wash over her, afraid to do or say anything lest she shatter the fragile perfection of this moment. It was as if a raw wound deep inside her had healed; the feeling spread like warm honey into every corner of her body and heart. Her pussy ached pleasantly, like a muscle after a good exercise.

For some time, she lay in his arms, her sweat cooling as she waited for her heartbeat to slow. Then she rolled onto her side and lightly stroked Ashrin's muscled thigh. She watched his spent cock beginning to rise again and felt an answering pulse deep in her body as nerves tingled and blood rushed to her sex. Her fingertips brushed his organ, shyly at first, then curled around the hot shaft. It thickened and hardened in her hand, and she felt the steady throb of his heartbeat within. The skin sheathing the organ was smooth, almost velvety, but the flesh beneath it was hard and solid as iron.

He smiled, showing a glint of fangs. "You want more?"

"Yes," she whispered.

One finger lightly circled her nipple. He watched it stiffen, then rolled it between a thumb and forefinger, tugging lightly. "Are you sure your body is ready?" Even as he said it, his gaze moved over her, lingering on the patch of dark, downy curls between her legs.

She trailed her fingers down the length of his cock. "I need you now," she whispered, her lips moving close to his.

Chapter Six

A grin spread across his face, and he pushed her to the ground again. He nuzzled her damp labia, and they tingled, growing plump as blood rushed to them once more. One thick finger pressed down on a spot just above her clitoris, giving her a jolt of pleasure. He positioned himself over her, gazing down into her eyes. A moment later, his cock slid into her wet, aching pussy, and he filled her again. Eagerly, she wrapped her legs around him, pulling him deeper inside her. Her nails pressed into his shoulders as she arched beneath him, grinding her clit against his pubic bone as he thrust. She hadn't thought herself capable of coming again so soon after that spectacular orgasm, but now, she felt the pleasure swelling inside her once more, building with each stroke of his cock.

When his hand slipped beneath her buttocks, and one finger pressed between the cheeks, she gasped and flushed. He held her gaze as his finger, still slick with the juices of her pussy, teased her tight rim. Her tongue crept out to moisten her lips. A moment later, she relaxed her clenched muscles, and his long, thick finger slid into her.

The pleasure was strange, dark, and unexpected. She moved beneath him, conscious of the dual sensations -- his cock moving in and out of her pussy as his finger fucked her from behind, stimulating her in ways she'd never imagined. Her rim clenched around his knuckle and seemed to suck at his finger like a mouth, pulling it deeper. A hard, deep thrust brought her over the edge, and she cried out, arching beneath him.

Afterward, they lay together, bathed in sweat, entangled in each other's arms. Shana hid her face against Ashrin's shoulder. As the waves of pleasure and bliss faded, cold fear trickled into her heart. She thought about her mother and Alan, and her future, and realized, with a flutter of panic, that she no longer *had* a future. She'd given away her virginity to a man she barely knew. Her breathing quickened, and her chest tightened. Tears stung her eyes.

Soft lips brushed her cheek. "Why are you crying?"

"Because everything is different now, and it can never go back to the way it was."

He tilted his head and regarded her through half-lidded golden eyes. "Is that such a bad thing?"

Shana rolled onto her side, drawing her knees up to her chest, like a child. "I don't know how I'll face my mother after this."

"Then stay." He brushed her hair gently from her face.

She shook her head and wiped her eyes with the back of one hand. In the throes of passion, it had been easy to give herself over to the feeling that this was right and real. Now, reason reasserted itself and cold fear trickled into her heart. Regardless of how she felt, she had no proof that she could trust him. "I don't belong here. How could I?"

She trailed off, meeting his gaze, and saw only sincerity there. Her doubt wavered. "You mean it, don't you?"

"Did you think I only wanted you for one night of sex?" He licked sweat from her throat, and the hot swipe of his tongue sent a shiver through her. "My people -- the beings you call demons -- are not like humankind. For us, the act of mating is binding."

A shiver of excitement rippled through her. She wanted so much to believe in this. In him. Still, a part of her insisted that she needed to hold back, to regain control. "I'm human. I'm not like you."

He was silent a moment, his expression unreadable. "There are few of my people left in the land," he said at last. "Very few. And our numbers continue to dwindle. It's difficult for us to find mates. However, it is possible for us to form mating bonds with humans, and even to breed with humans. But not any humans: only those who have a spark of the gift. As you do, Shana." Shana jerked backward as if she'd been slapped. "So that's it? You want to use me as breeding stock?"

"No. I want you as my mate. Only you."

Shana took a deep breath. Her heart raced. Was she actually considering this as a possibility? Had she gone mad? "Surely you must have a mate already. Someone like you."

"I did. Once."

Shana bit her lower lip. "What happened?"

Ashrin's gaze remained locked on hers. "She was killed by hunters."

The words hit Shana like a shock, and a vision filled her mind: men looming over her, sharp axes gleaming, dripping red with blood.

The vision faded. With a shuddering breath, she placed a hand on her racing heart. Where had that come from? Had she glimpsed one of Ashrin's memories? "I'm sorry," Shana said softly. She reached out to touch his cheek.

"It was a long time ago," he said. "Centuries." He met her gaze, and the look on his face sent a chill through her. "But I would never forget the touch of her soul against mine. When I met you, I was afraid to believe, at first. It had been so very long. For hundreds of years, I'd hoped in vain for something like this to happen, and I could scarcely believe it, but now, there's no doubt in my mind. Your body recognizes mine and craves mine. I feel your emotions respond whenever I touch you. There is no mistake."

Shana's brow furrowed in confusion, then her eyes widened. "You think I'm her? Your mate? Reincarnated? But that's..." She trailed off, staring at him.

"You've had dreams, haven't you? Of running through the woods by my side, of sleeping next to me, of me moving within you. You were born to a human, but your soul is the same." He touched her cheek, very lightly. "You don't belong to their world. You belong to the forest, to the night, to the moon. To me."

Shana took a deep breath, dizzy. It was impossible, what he was saying. And yet the words resonated deep within her, bringing back faint memories of snow beneath her paws and wind in her fur. "You're asking me to be your mate?" she asked in a small voice.

"My lifemate."

Her mind spun with the implications. "That's like marriage, isn't it?"

"If you were to put it in human terms, yes. But in some ways, it is even more binding." He took her hand in his and nuzzled her palm. "There is already a bond between us. Do you doubt me? Look." He touched her cheek again, looking into her eyes. Her breath caught in her throat as she stared back and felt herself drowning in the gold of his eyes.

A flurry of images spun through her mind. She saw herself through his eyes -- a sleek, white she-wolf with dark eyes, fur like spun moonlight. She saw herself lapping from a forest pool, felt her warmth curled against his body in a snug den, felt his raw, overpowering grief as he came upon her bloodstained corpse in the forest.

Shana closed her eyes, overwhelmed. The images evaporated from her mind, but the sense of him remained, like an impression on her very soul. "I -- I saw your memories."

"Yes. I saw yours when I entered you."

His eyes never left hers. She felt naked before that golden gaze. A small shiver ran through her, but she lifted her chin, straightened her back, and met his gaze. "How will this be any different than belonging to Alan? You claim to offer me freedom, but if I accept your offer, I'll belong to you, won't I?"

"But I'll belong to you as well. It is not like a human marriage, where the female loses all power."

A tiny chill prickled up her spine. Become the lifemate of a demon wolf.

The idea was overwhelming. Terrifying. Yet when she thought about returning home -- returning to her old life and leaving Ashrin behind -- pain ripped through her. And she knew beyond a doubt that, though she'd only known him a short while, she would always remember his scent, his eyes, the heat of his skin against hers. Those things had been imprinted on her soul. She realized, in that moment, that she had already made her choice -- if indeed, there had ever been a choice. There was no going back. She fell into his arms and began to weep, but the emotion swelling within her and overflowing through her eyes was not sorrow. It was joy.

Chapter Seven

That evening, they washed the sweat from their bodies in a cool forest stream. Shana stood waist-deep, the water rushing past her. Minnows tickled her ankles as she waded deeper. Ashrin stood behind her, the golden rays of sunset reflecting off his wet skin. He dipped his cupped palms into the water and trickled it over her hair.

A little shiver of pleasure went through her as the cool water ran down her spine. Droplets rolled over her breasts and dripped from her cold-hardened nipples. She gazed up at the stars.

His arms slipped around her waist. "What are you thinking, love?"

How strange it felt to hear him call her that. Yet how natural, as well. Shana lowered her gaze. "Nothing."

He nuzzled her cheek. "You can't fool me. What's wrong?"

She was silent for a long moment, staring into space. "You said it's possible for demons to breed with humans."

"Certain humans, yes."

"Does that mean." She trailed off, biting her lower lip, and slipped a hand over her stomach.

"It's possible," he said quietly. Strong, gentle fingers combed through her hair. "Would that be so bad?"

"It's just... if we have a child, will that child be human? Or demon?"

"Both. And neither."

She stared down at her blurry reflection in the stream, wondering what life would be like for a half-human, half-demon child. "I suppose this is something we should have talked about earlier."

"Do you think it would have changed your decision?"

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She shook her head. "No. You're my true mate, after all. Having experienced how it can be, I don't think I could ever go back to my old world, my old life. Still."

He placed a warm hand over her belly, as if even now, a spark of life grew there. "Our child will have the love of his parents. Or hers. That is more than many have." He stroked Shana's hair and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her closer, and she let out a little sigh, her eyes slipping shut.

Their child would have love. And love was enough.

She didn't realize she was crying until Ashrin wiped a tear from her cheek. Feeling foolish, she turned her face away. "I'm sorry," she said. "It's just..."

"I know," he said gently. He leaned down. His mouth captured hers in a kiss, and her sorrows and worries melted away like icicles in sunlight. This was what she had wanted, what she'd hungered for her whole life.

She still didn't know how she was going to tell her mother, but Shana understood, now, that this was necessary for her. Her body and heart craved Ashrin, as his craved her. Though her body was human, her soul was not.

As Shana wrung the water from her hair, Ashrin climbed out of the stream, his huge, naked form dripping wet.

"I want to send my mother a message, to let her know I'm safe."

"We can arrange that. Wait right here." He strode away into the forest and returned a few minutes later with a sheet of pale, thin bark, and a quill. He handed both to her. "Go ahead. Write whatever you wish."

Shana wondered how she was supposed to do that without ink. She pressed the tip of the quill to the smooth bark and discovered, to her surprise, that it was filled with some dark substance -- not ink, but similar. She wrote out a brief message to her mother, promising that she was safe and that she would visit soon. She wasn't sure what else to say or how to explain her situation, so she left it at that. Then she rolled up the bark and handed it to Ashrin. "How will you send it to her?"

He held out an arm and gave a low whistle. A moment passed, then a huge black crow fluttered down from the treetops and landed on his arm. Ashrin held out the piece

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of rolled up bark. The crow clamped its yellow beak around it, launched itself into the air, and flew away. "He will carry the message to your mother," Ashrin said.

"A crow? Is it trained?"

He shook his head, and a tiny smile curved his lips. "There's more to this forest than meets the eye. Many creatures here are intelligent. That crow is a friend of mine."

She smiled back. "You're an unusual man, Ashrin."

"I'm not a man, remember?" Flesh rippled, and a moment later, a lion-sized black wolf stood before her.

Shana stepped onto the grassy banks and ran her fingers through his thick fur. "You *are* a man. And much more."

Ashrin's golden eyes slitted, and his mouth opened with pleasure as he leaned into the touch. She crouched beside him and buried her face in his thick ruff, and he turned his head to lick her cheek. Then he placed a huge paw on her chest, the pads rough and cool against her skin, and pushed her gently to the grass. She lay, eyes wide, pinned in place by that massive paw. The claws pressed gently into her skin; then he lifted his paw, lowered his head, and sniffed her pussy. His breath stirred dark curls still damp from the stream, and his voice spoke in her mind. *I smell your desire*.

Her heart thudded against her ribs. She watched, breathless, as his long pink tongue slipped out. Heat and wetness hit her in a jolt of sensation as he licked her slit; then his muzzle pressed more firmly against her. Sharp teeth grazed her labia, and blood rushed to her sex. His mind slipped into hers like dark velvet, and she saw herself in a flash through his eyes -- legs spread wide, her pussy exposed, the lips plump and moist.

He shifted his paws partially into hands, and she watched through his eyes as furry, clawed fingers spread her open, revealing slick, dusky pink folds. The rough pad of his thumb coaxed her clitoris out from under its protective hood, stroked it and teased it, setting her nerve endings on fire. She writhed, gasping, under the gentle, skilled touch of those huge paw-hands. His palms settled on her thighs, spreading them wider, and he thrust his muzzle against her folds. She moaned, her back arching off the grass.

He breathed in deeply of her scent, licked her folds. Then, to her shock, he opened his jaws wide and pushed his tongue deep inside her. She moaned, fingers digging into the ground as his tongue danced inside her, and a fluttering pleasure spread outward from her core, bathing her stomach.

Panting, she gazed at him through half-lidded eyes. He rolled onto his back, and she saw his cock, huge and red, sliding from its dark furry sheath. In his wolf form, his cock was even larger than normal, the shaft as thick around as her wrist. The pulse drummed in her throat as she slid soft fingertips over his organ, and he rumbled with pleasure. Fur-sheathed balls swelled, and she cupped them, feeling them twitch in her palm. A bead of clear fluid welled from the slit at the tip of his cock, and she swept it away with the tip of her tongue.

He sat up, his gaze fixed on hers. With one huge paw, he rolled her over onto her stomach. Sensing what he wanted, she hoisted her buttocks high into the air. Panting, she spread her thighs wide and reached behind her to separate her lips with her fingers. Another image flashed through her mind -- her pussy gaping open like a red flower, dripping wet, her asshole a tiny, tight pucker above it.

He mounted her, a mass of fur and muscle, and his cock slid into her from behind. It wasn't as thick as his muzzle, but even so, waves of heat rippled through her as he slid deep into her body. He moved atop her, within her, pushing deep, growling softly, and she heard herself growling too, as she pushed back against him. Their bodies moved as one, minds intimately linked, thoughts mingling, images and sensations flashing through each other's minds as they neared their climax.

They reached it at almost the same moment -- it crashed like a wave through their bodies, and he slammed into her once more, filling her with his seed. She lay, panting, on the grass, her eyes closed. When she opened her eyes, he was human again, lying beside her, his golden gaze touching her face like a caress.

"I love you, Shana," he said. "And I always will. This passion will never fade."

"Never?" she whispered.

"What we have is for always." He stroked her cheek with his fingertips.

Shana curled against him. As she nuzzled his broad chest, a soft sigh of contentment escaped her. He wrapped his arms around her and drew her closer, and she closed her eyes, listening to the steady thump of his heartbeat. But another worry tickled the edge of her mind. "Ashrin, demons live for a long time, don't they?"

He nodded. "We can be killed, but we don't age."

"But that means that I'll grow old and die while you remain young."

He smiled, his golden eyes half-lidded and peaceful. "It doesn't matter. Your soul will return to this world in another form, and I'll find you again. And again after that, if necessary. As many times as it takes, I will return to your side. That is my promise to you."

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