



## *By Instinct Alone*

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## Chapter One

The car gave off a soothing mechanical purr as it devoured the road ahead, like a great beast savoring the bones of its last victim. What time was it? Nine p.m., ten maybe? Divine Wilson glanced at the digital numbers on the radio, and it took a moment for her brain to digest what she saw. Nine fourteen and she had had such a busy day at the courthouse she couldn't remember eating lunch, or even breakfast for that matter. As soon as the trial had been done, she'd checked out of the Southern Monarch Hotel and started driving back to Savannah. Unfortunately, it was a long drive and she had a good five hours left to go.

Hoping to distract herself from her burning eyes and growling belly, she turned the radio up, and the Eagles' *Hotel California* came on. She sang along for a few minutes then turned the radio down just as a commercial for acne medication came on. The thought occurred to her, and not for the first time, that maybe she should stop for the night, but she just as quickly shook it off. It wasn't *that* far, and if she pushed it, she could get in some good travel time. So, she kept pushing the accelerator down more and more, trying to shorten the drive time through Florida.

Divine felt the tension of the trial slip away with each mile that passed. For most of her life she'd wanted to be a defense attorney, and now that she was one, she wasn't so sure this was the kind of law she wanted to practice. Every case was stressful because someone's freedom was on the line. Worse still, she never knew if the person she was representing was really innocent or not. They always *claimed* they were as innocent as newborn babes before the Lord, but she always had that nagging doubt. She let out a big sigh and tried to keep her thoughts positive.

At least this last case was a complete success. Thank the good Lord her *proven*-innocent client was out of jail instead of facing some long sentence he didn't deserve. It was just another victory to add to her résumé.

A dashboard light came on indicating she needed to stop and get gas. Divine scanned the road ahead for station signs with a new sense of mission. But the road before her felt like the only splash of civilization in a world

gone dead. A mile passed, then two, with no gas signs in sight, only the ever-present pine forests on either side of the asphalt and those lonely highway lights. The low-fuel indicator light glowed brighter like it was *really* trying to get her attention now, and a warning chime sounded.

Divine was beginning to get nervous when she spotted an independent station nestled back from the highway in a cluster of trees. Sighing with relief, she pulled off the road and into the station.

The station looked like it had been built in the nineteen fifties, but the pumps looked modern. Divine got out of the car and arched her back. She debated whether or not to use her credit card. *Might be a good idea to hang onto my cash . . . just in case. You never know when something can happen, and it's good to have cash.* She stared at the convenience store, a rustic old storefront. The wood frame screen door was propped open so she just walked in.

As she stepped inside Divine breathed in the bold scent of tobacco and pickles. The place reminded her of the movie *Deliverance*, and she wondered if coming inside was a terrible mistake.

"Evening ma'am," a rough voice said from behind the counter. Divine looked into the hard blue eyes of an elderly gentleman. He wore a tattered baseball hat, a faded flannel shirt, and blue jeans. His hands were withered and covered in age spots. An old election sign was nailed to the wall behind him. It read "Vote Fred for Mayor!"

"Good evening, sir," she replied with a wary smile.

"Want to try one of our pre-made sandwiches?"

Divine approached the counter. "I was kind of hoping for a restaurant somewhere up the road."

The old man nodded like he'd expected as much. "The Denny's off the highway closed down last month. Closest restaurant now is about thirty miles down the road. It's a truck stop and, frankly, not very good."

Divine rubbed the back of her neck and let out a gust of air. There was no way she was stopping at a truck stop at night. Maybe a sandwich was a better choice. Suddenly the stress and fatigue of the day bore down hard and she felt a little dizzy. Driving another five miles seemed close to impossible,

let alone the thirty to the truck stop. "I'm trying to find a clean motel nearby. Do you know of any?"

"Sure," the old man said. "There's one in Wolf River just a few short clicks up the road. It's called The Lodge, and it's a nice, friendly place run by a husband and wife. Includes breakfast, too."

"Great," Divine said as she began to feel a little better. Since the shop clerk was so helpful, she decided to buy one of his sandwiches. "What kind of sandwiches do you have?"

"Roast beef or barbeque chicken," the old man said with a friendly smile. His teeth looked sharp but perfect, so Divine chalked it up to dentures.

"I'll have the roast beef," she said fishing into her wallet for some cash.

The old man rang it up. "That'll be four dollars, and here's a coupon for the motel." He handed her a crisp white flyer that read *\$5.00 off your first night at The Lodge!*

"Oh, and can you add another twenty-five for gas?" Divine handed over a twenty and a ten then took her change. She placed the coupon for the Lodge in her pocket and took the sandwich from the man. It was wrapped loosely in waxed paper. She hadn't seen anyone do that in years. "You can eat it on the picnic bench out front if you want. Most folks do. There's plenty of lighting out there," the old man said. He handed her a cold soda. "And this comes with your meal."

"Thanks." Divine took the drink and went over to the bench to eat. She dug into the sandwich, surprised at how ravenously hungry she was. She wolfed it down in seconds then glanced up at the tall trees that cast dark shadows all around her. This place was beautiful but creepy.

A woman approached from the side of the station. She was tall and thin, with dark olive skin and long, wild hair. Divine groaned inwardly. She wasn't much in the mood to talk to weirdos or hoboes. The woman smiled as she drew closer, flashing perfect teeth. "Hi."

"Hi," Divine replied as she reached into her purse to touch her revolver.

"The old man in the store told me you were heading to The Lodge. I have a room there, too. My car broke down a mile back. Would you mind giving me a lift?" the woman asked.

"I'm not comfortable riding with strangers," Divine said. She got up and threw her trash away. All the while, she kept a close eye on the strange woman. "I just stopped to fill up my tank." She went over to where her car was and groaned inwardly when the woman followed her.

"I'm not a freak," the woman said.

Divine gave her a tense smile. She didn't remember seeing any cars on the side of the road. "I'm sure you're not."

"But I really need a ride bad. If I don't get home soon, my boyfriend's going to beat the tar out of me."

Every common sense fiber told Divine to stick to her guns and refuse, but the truth was, she didn't want the woman to get hurt. This woman seemed to know exactly what to say, true or not. "Okay, but I'm just taking you to The Lodge. Got that? I assume you know how to get there from here."

The woman grinned, and Divine guessed her at about twenty. "Sure I do," the woman said. "Thanks for the ride."

Divine started filling up her tank. The woman waited nearby looking bored and occasionally looking up and down the road as if she were waiting for something. Or maybe she was *looking out* for someone. The woman didn't talk much, but she appeared harmless enough.

"All right," Divine announced when she was done. "Let's go."

The woman got into the passenger's seat and put her seat belt on. "What is your name?"

"Divine," she replied. "What's yours?"

"Mary," she said with a grin. "Just like the drink. You know, Bloody Mary?"

"Yeah, sure." Divine grinned and tried to think friendly thoughts. She put her signal on and drove back onto the road. Even though she didn't mind Mary, she couldn't help but feel uneasy. The woman had just seemed to pop up out of nowhere, and she wasn't buying that story about breaking down. Divine reassured herself that they'd be at the motel soon and her and strange Mary could quickly part ways.

Once again the long highway stretched out before her and a draining sense of fatigue filled her. Divine was sure looking forward to getting rid of this woman and getting a good night's sleep.

"There's the turnoff," Mary said as she pointed to a small sign that was partially obscured by trees. It said *The Lodge*.

Divine turned off, following a two-lane road canopied by large southern oaks. A full moon illuminated the road ahead. "Do you live at The Lodge?"

Mary stared out the window. "No, just getting away from my overbearing mother for awhile."

Divine didn't bother to ask what the deal with the boyfriend was. They passed a sign advertising RV hookups and campsites. It said *Welcome to Wolf River Camping Ground*. Divine stopped at a red light and a sheriff's patrol car pulled up behind her. Before Divine knew what was happening, Mary opened the door and took off running. The patrol car's lights started flashing, and he hit the siren a few times to indicate Divine should pull over. *What the hell does he want? Why isn't he after Mary? She's the one who's running away.*

Divine pulled into a parking lot and cut the engine. Except for the parking lot lights, the place couldn't have been more deserted. She watched the officer emerge from the squad car and was stunned by how striking he was. The officer was tall and broad with a black and tan uniform and a dark brown Smokey Bear hat. His eyes were shadowed by the lights above them. He stalked up to her window and leaned down. "Ma'am," he said with a slight Southern drawl. He touched the brim of his hat.

"Can I help you, Officer?" Divine asked.

The cop peered into the car with that no-nonsense grim expression all police officers had. "Who was that in the car with you?"

Divine had no intention of protecting the strange woman. "Honestly, I don't know. She said her name was Mary and said she was staying at The Lodge. I was just giving her a ride there."

"Are you in the habit of picking up strangers, ma'am?"

"No, but she told me her boyfriend would beat her if she didn't get back to there. I was going to get a room there, too, so I agreed to give her a lift."

The cop stared at her for a long time. Then he said, "May I see your license and registration, ma'am?"

Divine had grown up on the mean streets of Atlanta, and old habits died hard. When you were pulled over by the police in *that* city and you were African American, you sure as hell didn't make any sudden moves when pulled over. So, Divine said, "I need to reach into my purse to get that information, Officer. I also need to tell you I have a small handgun in there." She let that information sink in before doing anything else.

The cop's mouth dipped into a very serious frown. "Could you step out of the car, please?"

Divine knew that information about the gun was going to spook him. She got out of the car and stood by the trunk where he told her to. The cop took her purse off the driver's floorboard and brought it to the rear of the car. He gingerly placed it on the trunk like it might catch fire at any moment. He turned the purse upside down and dumped the contents of it all over the trunk.

Divine's temper flared. She planted her hands on her hips. "Is that really necessary? I already *told* you about the gun. Why you gonna empty my stuff all over the place like that?"

"It's for both of our protection, ma'am. I'm sure you don't want me reaching around in your purse, and I want both of us to see what comes out when it's emptied." The cop nudged her things around and then picked up the gun. After taking a step back from her, he examined her weapon. To her great annoyance, he emptied all the bullets out of the revolver and placed them in his pocket. He put the gun on the hood of his squad car. "Do you have a permit for carrying a concealed weapon?"

"Yes, I do," Divine replied. "It's in that black billfold right there," she said pointing. "Can I get those documents for you?"

He nosed around a few more seconds, shining his flashlight over her stuff, then he let her grab her wallet. Divine took out her driver's license, registration, proof of insurance, and her permit to carry the gun. As she handed him the documents, she noted that his nametag said *Trooper Maxwell*. He was an attractive man even though it was hard to see his face under that

big old Smoky hat. But good-looking or not, she resented being detained by him, and when she got back to Savannah she'd be writing a letter of complaint to the Florida governor.

"What do you do for a living, Ms. Wilson?" he asked. He'd read he last name off her license.

"I'm a lawyer."

"You have a Georgia permanent address and license. What are you doing here in Florida?"

Oh, how she hated cops and their endless questions. "I just finished consulting on a case, and I'm eventually going to relocate here. That is, as long as it's okay with you."

Officer Maxwell gave her a stern look. She felt like a disobedient child getting the stare-down from her teacher. "It's not necessary to get short with me, ma'am. I'm just doing my job."

"Well, I haven't done anything wrong, Officer. I just gave another woman a ride. As far as I know, that's not a crime in any state. You're treating me like a criminal."

"Did you, or did you not have a passenger run from my squad car? You also had a gun in your purse. That's pretty suspicious stuff. What am I supposed to think about that?"

"I already explained to you about that woman. And as you've seen, I have a permit for that weapon, Officer. And what's more, I am a female traveling alone. I don't see anything strange with me wanting a little protection."

He nodded like he'd given her a point in a Ping-Pong match. "What kind of law do you practice?"

*Oh, here we go.* "I'm a criminal defense attorney."

Officer Maxwell stared at her. His eyes looked shiny and hard like two polished rocks. "You enjoy getting criminals off?"

Divine knew that was coming. She'd been expecting it. Law enforcement types thought everyone was guilty, the lack of evidence be damned. "I get *innocent* people off."

Finally he seemed to relax a little. He handed her back her documents. "Would you like me to escort you to the . . . ?"

A loud rustling noise came from the bushes a little way behind them. Officer Maxwell squinted toward the sound as if he had x-ray vision. A creepy feeling raced up Divine's back, and she shivered. "What's that?" she asked. "I sure as *hell* hope it's not that *crazy* lady coming back for a ride."

Maxwell grinned, which transformed him from kind of good-looking to downright handsome. "It's probably just a possum. You can go ahead and put your things back in your purse." He returned the gun to her without the bullets.

Divine had had enough of this bull. "What about my bullets?"

"I'm confiscating those, Ms. Wilson."

"What for? Oh, don't tell me, let me guess. You're taking them for *your* protection. Well, what about *my* protection? Don't I get any consideration at all? Or maybe this has everything to do with me being a person of color?"

Maxwell was just about to respond when there was another rustling in the bushes, only this time much louder.

"That ain't no possum," Divine said.

A loud roar momentarily deafened them as something large and hairy charged from the darkness. It grabbed Divine by the throat and slammed her against the car. The first two things that entered her mind were that she couldn't breathe and the *smell*. The thing smelled like it had been living in a dumpster for a week. She had to get this thing off her. She pulled the gun from her purse and fisted the weapon, then she slammed it into the side of the creature's head. The impact made her drop the weapon. The beast responded by dragging its long nails down her throat as it withdrew its paw. Then it snarled, spraying saliva over her face and neck. She almost threw up in disgust.

Then it was fighting with Officer Maxwell, who'd stormed over and pulled it off her. The monster and the cop were wrestling on the ground as Maxwell tried to free his hands long enough from the creature's mouth to unholster his weapon. Terrified for the policeman, Divine grabbed the nearest branch and started hitting the creature on the back. She hit it several

times until she broke the tree limb. The monster turned on her, back-handing her in the face hard enough to knock her to the ground.

A second later the thing ran off and disappeared into the darkness.

Ignoring her own pain, Divine rushed over to the cop. Maxwell was in bad shape. His face and neck were little more than a gory mess.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" she said trying to stem the bleeding with her bare hands.

Maxwell gurgled something to her.

"Don't try to talk," she said. "I'm going to your radio to get some help. Just don't move." Divine raced over to the squad car, grabbed the radio, and told the dispatcher what had happened. They said they'd send help right away. In the meantime they told her to cover up Maxwell so he wouldn't go into shock.

Divine didn't have a blanket or a jacket to keep Maxwell warm so she used the only thing she had; her body. Pulling the wounded officer into her arms, she pressed him close to her body and tried to comfort him by singing softly. The only thing she could remember the words to was an old church hymn, so she sang that.

"I'm going to die," he croaked.

"Oh, no, you're not," Divine said hugging him to her chest. "The good Lord has bigger plans for you than that. You're gonna be okay, Officer Maxwell. Just try to stay quiet."

His bloody hand squeezed her arm, and her heart broke knowing how much pain he was in. He pulled in a rasping breath. "Take out my gun . . . in case he comes back."

Tears fell from her eyes. Divine pulled out his weapon and laid it down next to her. Maxwell withered in her arms, and Divine begged God to bring help fast and save him.

Then, somewhere in the distance, Divine heard the sound of sirens approaching. At least one of her prayers had been answered. She just hoped He'd grant the other one, too.

## **Chapter Two**

Heath Maxwell had never been in so much pain in all his life. Agony radiated from his neck all the way down to his chest. His throat was so badly damaged he could barely breathe. His neck both burned and ached, confirming his fear that he was indeed mortally wounded. He was definitely going to die. Funny how he never imagined that getting attacked by a wild animal was going to be the way he'd meet his end.

The only bright spot in this whole nightmare was Divine Wilson, the woman he'd just pulled over. The brave woman stayed with him while he bled out waiting for the ambulance to arrive with no concern for her own safety. He longed to be able to protect her, but with his life ebbing away, it was simply impossible. She whispered in his ear that he was going to be okay, sang hymns to him—even though Heath wasn't religious, it was comforting—and did her best to stem the bleeding with her bare hands. Even though he was sure he didn't have very long, he appreciated her kindness. It meant even more to him since he knew she didn't like him much.

The paramedics arrived an eternity later. They tried to bandage his neck, but Heath could tell from the look on their faces they thought it was wasted effort. They loaded him into the ambulance, and he could hear Divine asking to go with him. He hoped they'd let her come. He needed her. Thankfully, a moment later, she was next to his gurney and they were off to the hospital.

Divine took his hand. Hers was sticky with blood but strong and warm. It made him feel a tiny bit better. He dragged in a rasping breath and signed for her to come closer to his mouth. Tears welled up in her eyes as she leaned down. "Thank you," he croaked out just before his vision went black.

\* \* \* \*

"Oh, my merciful God," Divine said to the paramedic in the back with her, "he's stopped breathing."

The paramedic started CPR and got Officer Maxwell breathing again, but just barely. He glanced to the front of the ambulance, at the driver. "Hey, Bob, how much longer? I'm losing this guy."

Divine felt her stomach drop to the floor. *Please don't give up on me, Officer. Please. Your family wants you to live.* "Come on, Officer Maxwell," she murmured. "Hang in there!"

"He a friend of yours?" the paramedic asked. He looked to be just barely twenty years old.

Divine placed one hand on the officer's forehead. "Sort of. We only met a few minutes ago, but he saved my life back there."

"We're here!" Bob the driver said. He pulled into the Emergency admitting area and threw the ambulance in park. The back doors were flung open, and they whisked the cop off to the operating room.

Divine's body was shaking as she tried to force her legs to follow the paramedics, but she didn't have the strength. A wave of vertigo almost made her faint. A nurse walked over. "You've lost a lot of blood, too. Why don't you come with me, and we'll take a look at that neck wound?"

Divine nodded sadly and went inside the hospital.

### Chapter Three

Divine was *scared*. The doctors took one look at Heath and rushed him off to surgery, which she expected, but when they saw her torn-up neck they sent her to a room, too. Fishing out a mirrored compact from her purse, Divine *really* looked at the damage to her throat for the first time. It looked bad, and she was starting to fear she may have to be hospitalized for a few days. A young doctor rushed in with a nurse. The doctor examined her and looked grim.

“Funny, it doesn’t hurt that much,” Divine said, trying to lighten the mood.

“That’s because you’re still in shock,” he said. Then he turned to the nurse and asked for a bunch of stuff that sounded painful. Divine tried to keep her cool as the nurse rushed out.

The doctor continued examining her neck. “What did this? Do you think it was a bear?”

“Honestly, doc, I haven’t the faintest. All I know is that highway patrol cop pulled me over and the next thing both of us knew, some animal was trying to have us for dinner.”

The doctor searched her face. He had the expression of a worried friend, and Divine decided she really liked him. He had an excellent bedside manner. “The paramedics say you stayed with the officer even at great risk to yourself.”

The nurse came in with a metal cart that held lots of scary-looking stuff on it. Divine tried not to stare. “I wouldn’t have left my worst enemy there like that. Besides, he saved my life. He probably did it because it was his job, but I’m grateful anyway.”

The doctor poked and prodded around the wounds, but Divine still didn’t feel any pain. That was really strange. “I must have some nerve damage because what you’re doing doesn’t hurt at all.”

The doctor put in a few stitches and wrapped her neck in gauze. “You should stay the night.”

“Oh, no,” Divine said. “No way. I don’t sleep well in hospitals.”

“Okay, then. I’m going to prescribe you something for pain anyway, just in case. I want you to see your own doctor in a few days so he can follow up with your care.”

Divine nodded. “What about the officer?”

“He’s in critical condition for now. Check back in a few days, and hopefully he’ll be doing better.”

Divine eased off the table. She felt like a block of ice was sitting in her stomach. She sure hoped that police officer recovered. She felt responsible for him. “Okay, doc. Thank you.”

## **Chapter Four**

Divine waited two days to go and see Heath. She pulled up to the hospital and parked but didn't get out of the car. She didn't need to be here, but somehow she felt compelled. She and Heath had shared a near-death experience that no one else could possibly understand. All she wanted to do was make sure he was okay, and then she could . . . She could what? Go on with her life, go on pretending that everything was fine and wonderful? All she knew was she needed to see Heath and make sure he was going to be okay. Then maybe she could stop having all those bad dreams about what had happened.

His room was near the top floor, and Divine spent the whole elevator ride wondering if this wasn't a big mistake. What if he blamed her for what happened and told her to get out? What if he was so bad off he couldn't talk? She shrugged those fears off. After all, she didn't have anything to do with the attack. She'd just pop in his room for a minute and satisfy herself that the cop was recovering, that's all.

Heath was sitting up in bed. He stared out the window. He was much more handsome than she remembered. His dark blond hair was tousled like he'd had one hell of a rough night, and his face had the hard, haunted look of a man who'd seen far too much suffering in his short life. His body was long and muscular and definitely gave the impression he could take care of himself in a fight. Well, as long as he could see the enemy coming.

He had lots of flowers but no visitors at the moment. So Divine put on her most winning smile and came into his room. "You look better than I thought. They must be feeding you well."

To her great relief and joy, he smiled back. The smile brightened his brooding good looks and made her heart flutter. It seemed to pain him, and she had a moment of guilt. "I thought you'd be way out of town by now, considering what happened," he replied.

"I made a few calls and got some more assignments nearby." She shrugged. "For some strange reason, I'm not quite ready to leave the area yet. But enough about me, how are you doing?"

"I'm better," he said, self-consciously touching his heavily bandaged throat. "I'm glad you stopped by. I wanted to thank you for staying with me after the attack. I don't think I would have survived if you hadn't been there."

"I wouldn't have left a stray dog to that monster, whatever it was."

Heath nodded, and a thoughtful look came over his face. "Some of my friends think it was a bear."

"I don't mean any disrespect to your friends," Divine said, "but, honey, that was no bear."

"That's what I told them. But they just can't figure out what kind of animal could have made such severe injuries. It wasn't a wild dog or a wolf. Wolves haven't come down this far south yet, and it wasn't anything else they can identify. So they put down bear for the official report."

Divine pulled up a chair and sat next to his bed. "Are they looking for it?"

"Yeah, but so far nothing."

"Hopefully whatever it was went off somewhere and died. I'd hate to think of it hurting anyone else," Divine said.

He gestured to her neck. "Looks like you didn't get off without your share of scratches and bites."

She touched her neck as she recalled in vivid detail what they'd been through. "Most of my injuries look worse than they are. Besides," she said with a wink, "the women in my family are made of some pretty hardy stuff."

"I believe that." His hazel gaze met hers, and there was a strange feeling of connection between them. Divine sensed she *knew* him from somewhere, and not just from being pulled over. It felt like they had known each other a very long time. She dropped her gaze to his full lips and wondered what they might taste like. Would they be as soft as they looked, with just enough firmness to make her melt? She licked her own and suddenly felt hot and flushed.

"I'd better go and let you get some rest," she said.

He grabbed her hand before she could get too far away. "Will you be back to see me?" His grip on her hand was strong, insistent.

She swallowed. "If you want me to, of course I will."

"I want you to." Heath pulled her closer to him. "This is going to sound weird, but I feel better when you're around, like we understand each other. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah, strange as it sounds, I think I do." This came out as more of a whisper than a statement. Her heart was pounding so hard it seemed to be trying to drum itself right out of her chest.

Heath parted his lips and pulled her down toward the bed. Divine's mind was telling her to resist him, but something inside her refused to listen, something dark and primal. She leaned over until her mouth was only a fraction of an inch from his. He lifted his head and touched his lips to hers, giving her a kiss infused with deep desire and heady spice. His tongue slipped into her mouth and caressed hers, and for a few desperate moments, Divine was lost in his tender seduction, then her head kicked in and said, *are you crazy? You're in a hospital; stop kissing this man you barely know. Right now!*

This time Divine listened. She gently pulled away and felt a little dizzy.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm not sure what came over me."

She nodded. "It's probably all the drugs they've given you. You'll be feeling right in a few days." She headed for the door, all the while trying to catch her breath. "I gotta go."

"You will be back, right?"

She wanted to say *no* and a million other things that made sense, but instead she said, "Yes, honey, of course I will. Bye."

## Chapter Five

A few days later, after spending an exhausting day at the courthouse, Divine came home from work, poured herself some wine, and drew a bath. She added her favorite wild honeysuckle bubble bath and soaked the day's tension out of her. So many things came to mind: Heath of course, and how he was doing, an argument with a client over straightening his life out, and the compliment she'd gotten from one of the firm's partners on the quality of her work.

She closed her eyes and heard the faint sound of her cell phone ringing. Mumbling to herself, she climbed out of the tub, dried off quickly, and dug the phone out of her purse. She answered without looking to see who it was.

"Hello?" she said.

"Hello, Divine," a husky male voice said. It took her a moment to realize she was talking to Heath. She'd left her number by his phone in case he needed it, but she never expected he'd call. It had been a few days since she'd gone to visit, but he'd been on her mind *a lot*.

"How are you? Are they going to let you out of there soon?"

"Yeah. Tomorrow morning. Listen, have you been feeling . . . strange lately?"

She thought about it. "No. A little more tired than usual, maybe. I wouldn't be surprised if you were feeling off, though. They've been giving you a lot of strong drugs for the pain."

"What I'm feeling has nothing to do with the medication," he insisted. "Since yesterday I've been eating nothing but meat and my wound has healed so fast even the doctors are puzzled. And . . . there are other things, too."

Divine went over to the bathroom mirror and looked at her neck. It was almost completely healed; only a few minor scabs still showed. Funny, it should have taken at least a week for it to heal. She'd been so busy at work over the past two days she hadn't noticed. "Now that you mention it, my neck is almost all healed as well. I guess I wasn't as hurt as I thought."

Heath sighed. "Something else is going on here. I want to see you. I need to see you tonight."

The urgency in his voice was alarming. "It's late, Heath. I'm very tired and don't feel like driving down there this evening. I promise I'll come and see you tomorrow."

"No, it *has* to be tonight. If I call a taxi, can I come there and talk to you?"

"Are you crazy? You're going to leave the hospital before they release you? I don't really think that's a very good idea."

"I've never felt better in my life. Please, Divine. I have to see you. You're all I've thought of over the past few days. Let me just stop by for a few minutes, then I promise I'll go. Come on, I need to talk."

Divine hesitated, but the truth was she wanted to see him as much as he wanted to come over. Finally, she said she would go to the hospital and pick him up even though she felt like a fool for agreeing to it. He said he'd be waiting outside.

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Heath paced outside the hospital. He wore a white T-shirt and the blue jeans his friend had brought him for his release tomorrow. Outwardly he tried to look calm and collected, but inside he was going nuts. He wanted to see Divine more than anyone else on the planet. He could still remember the sweet, rich scent of flesh as she held him, wounded and fighting for his life. He felt like he was losing his mind. He had to kiss that flesh and do a whole lot more.

A car pulled up, and he saw Divine sitting in the driver's seat. Heath jumped into the passenger seat. "How far is your place from here?"

Divine gave him a strange look. "Only a few minutes. Why?"

Heath hastily yanked his seatbelt on. "Because I know this sounds crazy, but I really need to be alone with you."

\* \* \* \*

In the small confines of her apartment, Heath looked even taller than he had when they first met. His long, powerful frame moved with a predatory grace Divine had only seen in the fittest athletes. He took a seat on the couch and stretched his arm across the back. He seemed really wound up, like he was about to tear the room apart at any moment. It was a strange turn-on.

“Are you living here by yourself?” he asked.

“Yeah. It’s only temporary until I can find a house. I prefer houses.” She stood near the kitchen and tried to shake the urge to jump him and tear his clothes off. “Would you like a cup of coffee?”

“No, thanks.” He patted the cushion next to him. “Why don’t you come and sit?”

Divine hesitated, hoping she could control herself being that close to him. Finally her desire to be nearer won out, and she sat. He scooted closer.

“I didn’t thank you properly for what you did for me.” He touched his lips to her cheek and planted a tender kiss there.

Divine had been aroused by her share of men, but this was something else entirely. A furnace roared to life inside her, setting her hunger ablaze. She wanted this man’s lips all over her. “You don’t have to thank me,” she whispered. “It was the right thing to do.”

His lips rested on her cheek once more, and then glided a caress over to her mouth. His kiss was soft and tender at first, but soon built into something far more seductive. Heath wrapped his big hands around her and pulled her close to his strong body. He stroked up her back and massaged the tense muscles along her shoulder blades.

“I haven’t stopped thinking about you since the accident.” His voice was harsh, muffled by a building desire.

Divine put one hand on the side of his face and the other under his wide jaw and devoured his burning kisses. A barrier was coming down in her mind, a carefully constructed protection to keep her emotionally safe. But she wasn’t afraid of opening up to him. Nothing that felt this good could be all bad.

Heath pushed his chest against her breasts and crushed her against him. Divine broke the kiss and sucked in several lungfuls of air. She ran her hands

down his heavy arms and marveled at how perfect he seemed. He was nuzzling her shirt up and placing delicate kisses along her belly. She helped him by pulling her shirt off and unhooking her bra.

Heath affectionately mauled her breasts. He teased and licked the nipples, taking one and then the other into his mouth to lightly nibble each. His moan was muffled against her flesh. They stopped touching and kissing each other long enough for both of them to complete undressing then resumed their erotic play.

Heath picked her up and carried her out of the living room. In the bedroom he took his time, dragging his tongue along every inch of her exposed flesh. He caressed and tickled her pussy until she was trembling with desperate desire. His tongue touched her aching, moist center, circling the tiny bud over and over again. Divine's body became an instrument of pure lust being played by a master. He teased and nibbled her clit to the point that she was seconds from orgasm, then stopped. She took turns cursing and begging him, but Heath refused to let her come.

He grabbed the shaft of his thick cock and teased the creamed entrance of her pussy. He teased the swollen head, pushing it in a little only to pull out again. He toyed with her until his cock grew slick with her passion, then he pushed the shaft in. On the first thrust it slid all the way up to the root.

Divine gasped and pushed her hips up to let him get complete access to her hungry channel.

Heath grabbed the back of her thighs to anchor himself, then drove hard into her weeping core. He pumped fast and hard, tearing her passion apart and making her cry out his name. But even after the first few orgasms, he didn't stop pleasing her. He took her many times throughout the night, punishing her in delightful ways for her desperate lust. Finally, after a delirious night of glorious pleasure, they fell asleep wrapped in each other's arms.

## Chapter Six

Heath woke up at three in the morning feeling strange. He slipped out of bed and went to the bedroom window to stare out at the inky night. He wanted to be a part of that darkness. He longed to be out in it. Divine stirred and pulled the blanket over her shoulders. He was glad she'd come to pick him up. It felt good to be with her; it felt right.

"Thanks for coming to get me," he whispered.

Divine gave him a strange, sidelong glance. "You're welcome, but I still don't understand what the emergency was. They were going to release you tomorrow."

"I know. I just can't explain it. I had to get out of there."

He didn't want to get into the strange feelings consuming him. There was something feral building inside, a thing that defied explanation. An undefined rage bubbled inside him along with a desperate desire to find the animal that did this. It needed to be stopped and punished, but more than that, he wanted to be out running in the cool night.

He was different since the attack, different in a way that he couldn't pinpoint. And it was driving him nuts. He glanced at Divine. She was different, too. He knew because he could sense it. Just by being in the same room, he caught many different scents. The honeysuckle and lavender soap she'd used this evening, the Downy fabric softener that lingered on her clothes, the delicate perfume of her arousal, the musk of his semen and sweat on her flesh. The latter tore through his emotions and sparked a ferocious lust. He ached to tear into her with kisses and sink his cock into her yielding body. Heath squeezed his hands into fists to control himself.

Divine sat up in bed. She glanced down at his hands and frowned. Her intelligent brown eyes met his for only a moment. He could read the fear in them, but he didn't know how to reassure her.

"You sure you're all right?" she asked.

"Like you said, I think I'm just a little loopy from the hospital drugs."

"Hmmm." She relaxed. "Have you been dreaming about the attack?"

"Sometimes."

She nodded. "Me, too."

Divine climbed out of bed and came over to squeeze his shoulders. He wondered if she was feeling some of the things he was. "Why don't we go into the kitchen and I'll make you a decaf? Maybe something warm will help you sleep."

He didn't reply. He didn't need to. He pulled on his jeans and a T-shirt, and she put on a robe, then they walked out of the room. He followed, fighting the urge to grab her ass. He didn't want to come on that aggressive before they got to know each other. Holding back was complete torture. Stranger still, these feelings were completely out of character for him. He wasn't the kind of guy to get all grabby like others he knew. He was usually much more reserved, no matter how attracted he was to a woman. Everything that had happened since the attack was nothing short of *weird*.

Heath waited on the couch while Divine made him coffee. He sat like a kid desperately trying to be still in class. He fidgeted, shifting positions often, and couldn't keep his mind off sex. Images of fucking Divine came unbidden and refused to leave. By the time she brought his coffee, he was sure he looked tense and guilty.

She sat in the chair opposite the couch and put down the tray of coffee, cream, and sugar. Heath started to sweat.

"I didn't know what you liked with your coffee, so I just brought everything." She graced him with the most dazzling smile he'd ever seen. What a stunning woman she was.

He glanced at the coffee, but every time he thought about drinking it, he got sick. The room seemed so small and stuffy. "Do you think it's hot in here?"

Divine stared at him with her cup paused half-way to her lips. "No. The thermostat is set to sixty-eight degrees. I wouldn't call that *hot*."

"I'm hot. Do you mind if I take off my shirt?"

She slowly shook her head and sipped her coffee.

Heath stood, grabbed the hem of his shirt, and peeled it off his torso. He mopped the perspiration from his face but didn't sit down. After a long, tense moment, he unbuttoned his jeans and slid them down his thighs.

Divine stood up. She seemed alarmed at how strangely he was acting. "Listen, Heath, I don't think you were ready to leave the hospital just yet. Maybe you should—"

Heath didn't catch anything else she said. A rush of blood filled his ears and blocked out all sound. His body became a furnace, burning up all previous memories, and a few minutes later, he wasn't human anymore.

\* \* \* \*

Divine stared in terrified silence as Heath turned into a beast right before her eyes. She backed into the wall, wanting to scream but not daring to. All she needed was this thing turning on and killing her.

Heath's rugged face twisted in agony as it stretched into a long, razor-toothed muzzle. His tall, lean body collapsed onto his hands and knees, sprouting thick, dark brown hair down his back, arms, and legs. His leg hair became so thick and dense it partially concealed his very large, erect cock. The sight of his aroused sex had a strange effect on her. Inexplicably her fear dropped down a notch and rich moisture creamed between her legs. She felt drawn to him, summoned to join in some primal ritual that she didn't understand.

His transformation was almost complete, and she could make out what animal he was. Heath had taken on the form of a huge, muscular wolf. His coat was dark brown with hints of silver gray along the shoulders and back. His muzzle was larger than any wolf she'd ever seen in *National Geographic* photos, and his big, white teeth looked as though they could tear through steel, let alone flesh. This creature looked more like something out of a book of nightmares than a natural history book.

The wolf lowered its head and stalked forward, its long tongue lolling out of the side of its mouth. "Don't panic, Divine," it said in a harsh, gravelly voice. "It's still me; it's still Heath."

Divine placed her hand over her mouth and wondered if she'd lost her mind. This thing was *talking* to her. *This has to be a dream, because everything has gone totally crazy.* Things like this didn't happen in real life, did they?

“Please, Divine, don’t be scared. Help me,” he said.

*Oh, my dear Lord, what could he want me to do?* “I’m sorry. I don’t know how. I’m not even sure what you *are*. What do you want?”

He prowled forward and bumped his massive head into her hand. The softness of his fur compelled her to stroke him. Why wasn’t she tearing out of here screaming? He licked her hand tenderly. “What do you want from me, Heath?”

“Meat.”

## Chapter Seven

Divine rushed to the stainless steel fridge and threw open the double doors. She scanned the meager contents and grabbed two New York steaks wrapped in plastic. The werewolf crept into the kitchen behind her, almost giving her a heart attack. Its long nails clicked on the tile floor. She held up the meat. "I just have to open these. It'll only take a minute."

The werewolf sat on his haunches staring at her with silver eyes. He was a stunning creature: huge, powerful, and, from the looks of him, very deadly. He watched her with a calm cunning as she unwrapped the steaks and threw the plastic in the trash. She was just about to drop them in front of him when she decided to put them on a plate and warm them in the microwave.

An eternity seemed to pass as the appliance worked.

The bell chimed.

Divine popped the appliance open, and the heady scent of beef filled the air. She hadn't heated them up long enough to cook, only warm them through. But when she removed them something strange began happening to her. Her hands shook, and heat burned her cheeks. Maybe she was getting sick or something. She glanced down at the wolf staring at her. *Heath, this creature is Heath*, she reminded herself. He had the look of "if you don't give me something to eat soon, I am going to devour *you*."

Divine tossed one of the steaks on the tile floor. The werewolf pounced and began gobbling it down in big mouthfuls. But the other one she left on the counter. She began studying the red color against the cream countertop.

Her mouth watered, and the room began to spin. Strange images of forests and rivers danced through her mind.

"I don't feel right," she whispered. It wasn't directed at anyone in particular. Her head spun faster, and a ravenous hunger tore through her stomach. She closed her eyes for a second. She had to eat. Something was forcing her to bite into the other steak and eat parts of it raw.

Then, before Divine could get ahold of herself, she fainted.

\* \* \* \*

What was left of the night bled into a series of strange and disjointed memories. She remembered running faster than she ever had, through woods, streets, and alleys. Heath was always there, the monstrous brown wolf leading and guiding her. They hunted together, catching small things that were good to eat, and when they finally grew tired, they returned to her apartment and clawed open the patio's sliding glass door, which was quite a feat for two animals with no hands.

Divine lay on the bed, her chest heaving as she stared at the ceiling. She was human again. Or at least she *thought* she was. "What's happening to us?"

Heath scooted close. His sculptured naked body pressed against hers, bringing her to new and vibrant life. "We've changed," he murmured, gently turning her face toward his. "Whatever bit us, changed us. We're not human anymore."

Her mouth fell open in shocked surprise. Divine didn't believe in witches and vampires—and certainly not werewolves. She knew he had to be right, but hearing it was too much information too soon. "I don't want to be something else. I don't want to be an animal with nothing but instinct to guide me. I want to be human." Her terror was dulled by a dozen other confusing emotions. She was euphoric and petrified all at once. It was exhausting.

"Don't be scared of it." Heath placed his lips against hers in a tender caress. He dragged them across her cheek and nibbled on her earlobe. A white-hot desire ignited her hunger, which brought with it a rush of pure joy. Unable to control her hands, she let them stroke his chest and neck. The thick cords in his throat bulged with the effort of his control.

He wrapped his arms around her and crushed her bare breasts against him. His mouth was an instrument of delight, finding delicate places to tickle and tease. Her desire for him burned hotter, melting any hesitation and pushing her to touch and kiss him more. Her nose couldn't get enough of the smell of his flesh. Her lips longed for the taste of his mouth. While gliding her tongue down his body she boldly found his cock and lapped at the moist tip. Heath groaned and opened his legs so she could do as she

wished. He smelled like fresh-cut wood and good earth, very masculine. She drank in his scent, and it smoked its way right down to the bedrock of her soul. Nothing she'd ever experienced felt this good or *right*. She massaged his shaft and drew him into her mouth, sucking the rod long and hard. The salty taste of his seed teased her tongue.

Heath let out a half-groan, half-growl and pulled her away from his pulsing member. Seizing the initiative, he explored her flesh, nibbling here and there with love bites. His mischievous mouth found her creamy center, and his tongue teased the swollen bud of her clit. Divine grabbed the blankets in both hands and screamed.

Heath only chuckled.

Then he took her, climbing on top of her then opening her legs wide. He reached down and guided his cock to the threshold of her weeping pussy and probed his way in. After a feeling of intense pressure he was inside. Buried deep within her, his passion grew with each demanding thrust. Divine's pussy yielded to his animal lust and grew softer and more lush. Her pleasure was a complete experience, a rush from the depth of her sex to the top of her head. Every inch of her wanted more and more of him. She rode the waves of his savage hunger, gasping encouragement and soothing him with feather-light caresses along his knotted, twisting back. Then when she thought her delight couldn't reach any higher, she peaked harder and longer than she ever had before.

It physically devastated her in the best way.

Heath snarled out his own pleasure and emptied his seed into her. He rolled off and gathered her into his arms then squeezed tight. Divine was so tired she couldn't keep her eyes open. He nuzzled her for a few moments, and then a second later they both drifted off into an exhausted sleep.

## Chapter Eight

Divine woke wrapped in Heath's warm arms. It was strange, to say the least, especially since she wasn't the kind of woman to sleep with a man until they'd been together at least a month. Now they'd slept with each other a few times in one long and very confusing night.

She and Heath—well, heck—they weren't even *dating*. She barely knew him. Just then strange memories came flooding back: the two of them running through the city hunting, the feeling of desire and *connection* she had with him, the changing into a wolf. The last memory made her sit upright. The attack in Wolf River had turned them both into werewolves! She'd be insane to deny it.

Heath stirred next to her. He reached out groggily and stroked her back. "Good morning," he said with a lazy smile.

"Good morning, right back." Her tone sounded tight and strained.

"What's wrong?"

"Do you remember anything from last night?"

Heath ran his fingers through his hair. He gave off a smoldering sex appeal that heated her up all over again. "Just in bits and pieces," he confessed.

"Do you remember the part when we turned into werewolves?"

He laughed and glided his hand between her legs. "All I remember clearly is you and I."

Divine pulled his hand out and gave him a stern look. "Think, Heath. Something happened to you last night. Something happened to *both* of us, and it all has to do with that attack in Wolf River."

He frowned and opened his mouth but said nothing. Then his memory must have returned because he lowered his head into his hands and groaned.

She nodded in confirmation. "You remember now, don't you?"

"Yes, but I don't understand it. There's no such thing as werewolves. They only exist in the movies."

"I thought that, too, but I guess we're both wrong. The question is what are we going to do now? Neither of us can go back to our old lives like *this*."

His hazel eyes searched her face. "We need to go back to that town together. There's got to be someone there who can explain what's happened."

Divine stared out the window at the golden sunlight spilling into the room. Everything was so strange, especially her emotions. Was she happy? Was she sad? What on earth was going on inside her head? She just couldn't make sense of any of it. "I guess so."

Heath got up and went into the bathroom. He emerged a few minutes later and leaned in the doorway. He was easily the sexiest man she'd ever seen. His tall, powerful body was tan with detailed muscles along his arms, belly, and legs. His flawless skin was covered in light body hair that added to his animal appeal. His face was strong and fierce, reminding her of a hawk glaring down at its prey. A sexy thrill consumed her as her gaze dropped to his thick erection. It stood out proudly from a nest of dark brown pubic hair and was complemented by two very large balls.

"Funny, just looking at you brings back memories. I remember a lot more than just the changing and the sex last night," he said in a smoky bedroom voice. "Like when we first met. I remember the attack and how you stayed. I remember you holding me as I lay bleeding and dying in the street. I really thought I was going to die that night in your arms. Staying there, facing the danger that it might come back was the nicest thing anyone's ever done for me."

"I've never been so scared in my life."

He was prowling closer, his dark eyes burning. "But you could have run, and you didn't. You risked your safety to try and save me."

Heat rushed into her cheeks and warmed her sex. "I wouldn't have left anyone there like that." She was trying to downplay what had happened to them. She didn't want him to know how attracted she was. If you let a man know your heart, he's bound to break it.

He stopped in front of the bed. His erection pointed at her like it had chosen her itself. "Things are so different, like how I feel when I look at you."

"It's just the sex."

“No,” he said, placing one knee on the bed. “It’s more than that. Being with you makes me feel . . .”

Divine’s gaze moved to his lips. They were plum and inviting, but she didn’t move to kiss him. “Feel what?”

Heath grinned. “This is going to sound corny. Being with you makes me feel complete, finished.” He pulled her into his arms. “What about you? Do you feel different toward me?”

Everything was happening so fast. Divine hadn’t had time to sort out how she felt about being a werewolf, let alone having Heath as her lover. She didn’t want to hurt him, but she just couldn’t confess to things she didn’t feel, or at least wasn’t 100% clear on. “No . . .” she stammered. “I mean, I don’t know what I feel. . . . I mean . . .”

He let her go, and she cursed herself for being so damn honest.

She reached for him. “Heath, I didn’t want to . . .”

“Don’t.” He climbed off the bed and pulled on his briefs and pants. “You don’t owe me an explanation. Let’s just go to Wolf River and see if there’s anything we can do to get our lives back.”

Divine could see how deeply she’d hurt him. He avoided looking her in the eye, and there was a defeated slump to his shoulders. She wished she could think of something to say that would help him understand. But there was nothing. Heck, *she* didn’t even understand. The words had been said, and nothing could change them.

“We’d better get cleaned up. Let me know when you’re done with the shower,” he said as he left the room.

## Chapter Nine

Mayor Fred McHenry sat in his favorite booth at the Rising Moon Tavern nursing a Bloody Mary. He watched as the town manager, Doug Wimple, rushed into the tavern and made a beeline for his table. *Oh, joy, looks like more trouble. Can't I ever have an uneventful drink?*

"Excuse me, sir, but we need to talk," Wimple said. He had a light sheen of perspiration, which made his forehead shiny. "It's *urgent*."

"Isn't it always?" Fred sipped his drink. "Can't you handle anything on your own, Doug? I'm getting kind of tired solving all your problems for you."

Doug scooted into the booth next to him uninvited. He got *way* too close, and Fred scooted away to keep some distance between them. "This is different, sir. This is about Mary."

Fred let out a big, exaggerated sigh. *The town's biggest pain in the ass.* "What's she done this time?"

Doug licked his lips as his eyes darted around. "She attacked a state trooper and some woman from out-of-town. My sources tell me the woman is a *lawyer*. The two victims survived, but, word is, they've gotten the *blessing*."

"*What?*" Fred had nothing against bringing fresh blood into the fold, but there were procedures for doing it. One had to get permission from the town elders before bestowing the *blessing* on outsiders. And the person had to *consent* to being changed. To force yourself on someone without permission was a serious infraction and one Mary had been guilty of before. The only thing that had saved her the last time was that she was a little off her rocker. Well, hell, if Fred was honest, she was *a lot* off her rocker. Her momma had given him and the other elders assurances she'd be watched, but apparently she'd slipped past the old woman and done it again.

Fred downed the rest of his drink and rubbed his face. "Where is she?"

"No one knows, sir. We've been combing the town for days looking for her, but so far there's been no sign. That's why I've come to you. Maybe you could talk to her momma and see if she's seen Mary. The old woman refused

to say a word to us. She's probably afraid we're gonna lock Mary up again or worse."

"Damn crazy woman needs to be locked up," Fred mumbled. "Where are the two people she blessed?"

Doug chewed his bottom lip. "They've gone back home."

Fred scowled.

"But they don't live far," Doug amended. "We would have detained them and gave them instruction on the blessing, sir, but no one knew what had happened. The only way we found out was because we had a nurse from our town working at the hospital when the lawyer and the cop came in. She said the woman was released that night."

Fred waved Doug out of the booth. "We need to get them back here so we can properly instruct them on what they are. They can't just be running around the city with no clue."

Doug nodded vigorously. "I'm working on it, sir."

"In the meantime, I'll go and talk to Mary's momma and see what I can get out of her. If, by any luck, those two should come back to town, I want to see them right away. You got me, Doug?"

"Yes, sir. I got you loud and clear."

## Chapter Ten

Divine and Heath arrived at Wolf River in the late afternoon and checked into a motel. It was an old place, probably built in the nineteen fifties, but it was clean and the linens were fresh. Heath was still on medical leave, so he was fortunate enough to be collecting disability pay as he recuperated, but Divine's leave of absence was a little more challenging. Finally she just told the law firm she was house-hunting in the area and they seemed satisfied with that.

Heath never considered himself a romantic, but being alone with Divine reminded him of the few relationships he'd had in his life. Every one of them had been a disaster because he'd always had trouble opening up to women. He chalked it up to adolescent shyness that never wore off. But being with Divine wasn't like his experiences with other women. She was open and honest and always said what was on her mind. There was no mystery to decipher in the things she said, and he found that refreshing. Most exciting of all was his sexual attraction to her. It started when he'd pulled her over, but because they'd been spending so much time together, it had grown. Because of his troubles dating, he expected to be afraid of his feelings, but he wasn't. The only thing that bothered him was her reluctance to open herself up to what was happening between them.

Even though it was daytime, the hotel room was kind of dark. He lay on the bed and watched her with building hunger as she changed into blue jeans and a dark T-shirt. She was smooth and graceful like a jungle cat, and he never tired of watching her, no matter what she was doing. Her skin was the color of dark oak, an earthy color that was so beautiful it took his breath away. Her dark eyes were keen and intelligent, taking in everything around them and missing nothing. And then there was her passion: explosive and exciting. He'd never met a woman like her, and for the first time he dared to imagine the life they might have together.

She glanced at him and grinned. "Are you thinking about sex again? I swear, all you men are the same."

"I wasn't thinking so much about sex as how lovely you are."

Divine blinked several times. She seemed stunned by his remark, which was very sweet.

“What are you thinking?” he asked.

She folded her arms defensively. “I’m thinking that whatever happened to you has made you a little strange.”

“It’s happened to you, too.”

She relaxed and nodded. “I guess so.”

“How do you feel about me?”

“I told you, I’m not sure yet. I like you a lot, but I’m still sorting everything out.”

“Come on, Divine,” he said as his heart sank. “Give me something here.”

She sat down on the edge of the bed slowly. “I’m afraid too much is happening, too fast. I don’t want *whatever* is happening to us to disappear. I need to understand what the attack was all about. What are we? Are we *really* werewolves? And if we are, is this thing between us just . . . ?”

“Animal magnetism?” he said, finishing her sentence.

She hung her head, tired and defeated. “Yeah. Are we even supposed to be together, or is all this passion just about the werewolves and the sex?”

“I don’t think our attraction is only about sex,” he said it in a soft whisper, as if fearing what she said might really be true. He liked—no, he *loved*—being this attracted to her. It was a fierce turn-on that made his blood race like nothing he’d ever experienced before.

“Where are we going to start our search for this mystery assailant?” she asked.

“There’s a full report at the local police station. I figured we could start there and see if the officers who responded to the call added anything we don’t already know.”

“Good idea. I saw the station only a few blocks from here. It’s a nice day. Why don’t we walk?”

He made a sweeping gesture to the door. “After you, my lady.”

## Chapter Eleven

Divine sipped her coffee and watched as Heath flipped through the incident report. “Not much here,” he said, tossing it aside.

She scanned the café. Not many people in here this late in the afternoon. Aside from her and Heath, there was just an old couple and a middle-aged man doing a crossword puzzle. “Somebody in this town must know something.”

“I don’t know,” he said, raking his fingers through his dark hair. “I’m beginning to wonder if we have this whole werewolf thing right. Maybe we’re imagining that we’ve changed.”

Divine narrowed her eyes at him. “I’m not crazy, Heath, and neither are you. We certainly *both* didn’t imagine getting attacked by some kind of animal. And I *know* I didn’t imagine turning into an animal. Something happened to us, and we need to find out exactly what that was.”

He twisted his coffee cup around in the saucer. “What if we are werewolves and can’t be changed back?”

That thought had been nagging her as well. She closed her eyes for a moment. “We’re just going to have to find a way to live with it.”

A big, friendly looking man marched over to their table and graced them with a smile. “You folks mind if I join you?”

Divine and Heath exchanged a glance. *Who is this guy, and what does he want?* “Sure,” Heath said, sliding over in the booth to let the man sit down.

The man glanced at the waitress behind the counter. “June, could you bring me a coffee?”

“Yes sir,” she replied, cracking her gum.

“My name is Fred McHenry, and I’m mayor of this town. I just want to start off by saying I’m very sorry for what happened and we’re doing everything we can to make things right.”

Heath turned in the booth to face the man and frowned. “So, do you mind filling us in on what *did* happen to us?”

The waitress brought the mayor’s coffee, and he took several big gulps. “As I’m sure you’ve figured out, we have a special town here. Some of us are

shifters and some are other things, but we all get along and respect outsiders. . . . well, for the most part. However, there are a *few* residents that . . . ” He paused and stared out the window. “Well, let’s just say there are a few who ain’t quite *right*, if you know what I mean.”

“You mean they’re crazy,” Divine ventured.

“I wouldn’t exactly say *that*, but they do require extra supervision. Now normally that ain’t a problem, but every once in a while, one of our *special* folks gets out and does something bad or illegal. That’s what happened to you good people.”

“Where is the resident who did this to us?” Heath asked.

The mayor gave him a strained smile. “She’s been placed in protective custody at home. But that ain’t gonna change what’s happened to you two.”

“So, what you’re saying is we’re stuck being werewolves for the rest of our lives,” Divine said.

The mayor downed the rest of his coffee. “I’m afraid so. But it ain’t all bad. We have a great local police force for Heath, and we always have need of a good lawyer. Perhaps you folks might consider staying.”

A rock settled into Divine’s stomach. The thought that she’d be like this forever was very disturbing. “I don’t know . . .”

The mayor stood up. “Take your time, think about it. You’re welcome here as long as you want. If you decided to stay, we can offer you jobs right away and help you out with a place to stay. That ought to appeal to a mated couple like yourselves.”

“A what?” Heath asked.

“A mated couple . . . you know, life mates. Surely the both of you have felt the attraction between you?”

Divine avoided Heath’s gaze. *Here we go again with things rushing along way too fast.*

“I felt it,” Heath said in a low, intimate tone.

The mayor laughed. “Sometimes it just takes the ladies a little longer to adjust.” He squeezed Heath’s shoulder affectionately. “Once again, I’m very sorry about what happened, but I hope the two of you will embrace this new opportunity and decide to stay.”

Divine gave him a tight smile. “Thanks. And like I said, we’ll think about it.”

## **Chapter Twelve**

Night was coming, and it was going to be a full moon. Heath could feel the tension rising in him, the need to change and run and feed. Divine was wound up, too. She sat in a chair by the window. She stared out at the wooded lot beyond their hotel room. With every passing day she became more radiant and beautiful. She'd been lovely before their change, but now she was simply gorgeous, glowing with her newfound power.

He moved up behind her and placed a gentle kiss on the back of her neck. "What are you thinking about?"

"All of this. Everything that's happened and trying to sort out how I feel." She turned around to face him. "Heath, I'm not sure if I want to live here."

He pulled up a chair and sat across from her. "I've been wondering that, too. But what else can we do? We can't go back to our old lives the way we are. The moon isn't even up yet, and I can feel the pull. I want to change so bad it's killing me."

She caressed the side of his face. "Yeah, me too."

"I'm feeling very guilty about what happened to you. I can't help but think it's my fault. If I hadn't stopped to question you, none of this would have happened."

"But then I wouldn't have met you," she said with a dazzling smile.

"Do you believe that stuff the mayor said about us being a mated pair?"

She kissed him so softly it broke his heart. What he wouldn't give to let her have her old life back. He wanted so much to make this right for her.

She toyed with a lock of his hair. "I'm not sure what to believe, but I do have strong feelings for you."

"I've already told you how I feel," he said as he took her hand. He circled his strong arms around her and squeezed. She relaxed in his embrace, and her scent grew rich and inviting. Lust stormed his body. Hot, needy, and raw. He turned her around to straddle him and covered her face with kisses.

She laughed a warm and tender sound that only fueled his hunger more. He placed his hand on the back of her neck and pulled her into a steamy kiss.

“Don’t you feel that witchcraft between us, Divine? Don’t you want my cock in your sweet pussy?”

Her eyes fluttered closed. “Oh, yesss.”

That was all the invitation Heath needed. He slid her shirt off and ran molten-hot kisses down her throat and chest. His fingers found her stiff nipples, which he pinched and twisted. Divine moaned. It was a sexy, earthy sound that awoke every primal fiber in his being.

She grew more aggressive, running her fingers through his hair and whispering dirty words into his ear. She stripped quickly, grinding her hips against his throbbing erection. It sent a sexual charge all through him, and he loved it. He loved her. She made him feel more alive than any other women he’d ever known.

“You’re so beautiful, baby, and your pussy’s so wet,” he growled, touching the center of her weeping channel with his fingertips.

Her eager hands removed the rest of his clothes as her ferocious kisses caressed his flesh. She was a banquet of sexual excitement, and he never wanted this moment to end. Her moans filled his head and woke the beast in his soul. The change was coming; he could feel it.

He pushed his cock upward, seeking the sanctuary of her wet channel, but missed the mark on the first try. Divine reached down and grabbed the shaft. She eased the thick member into her heat, engulfing him in total bliss.

“Take it, baby,” he said through clenched teeth. “Take it all in.”

Divine bounced on his lap, working his cock into her yielding body. She wrapped her arms around his head and cradled it in her generous bosom. “Yeah,” she cried, “fuck me, Heath. Fuck me like that, just like that!”

He massaged her breasts with his lips and tongue, delighting as gooseflesh rose up on her arms and chest. She was close, and the change was coming. The sun continued to dip lower in the sky. It was already partially obscured by trees. Long shadows stretched across the room like stripes on a tiger’s back.

Heath pumped his cock in as deep and fast as he could. From the depths of Divine’s body he could feel the ripple of ecstasy indicate she was close to

climax. “That’s it, babe. Fuck that cock. Take it all inside that sweet, hot pussy. Fuck it ’til you come.”

Divine tossed her head back and let out a long, deep howl as the orgasm took her. Her pussy tightened around him, caressing the length with hard contractions. Her peak milked him, dragging him into the primal darkness of the change with her. His body changed, sprouting hair and changing shape as it mingled the agony of the transformation with the ecstasy of their coupling.

Then, before he knew what was happening, they were outside, running together under the light of the full moon.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Divine woke up and was immediately unsure of where she was. Of all the things that bothered her about being a werewolf, not having a clear memory of what happened the night of the change was tops on the list. The only thing she could tell for sure was that they were in someone's living room. She could smell Heath nearby, and it was comforting. He lay next to her with his right arm thrown across her belly. At least they were dressed, but she couldn't remember how they'd gotten that way.

A man crouched next to her. He was a stunning African-American man with the prettiest amber eyes. He smiled. "Hello, Divine," he whispered so as not to wake Heath. "My name is Kayne, and I'm a member of the town council. Would you like something to eat?"

She gently slid out from Heath's arm and followed Kayne into the spacious kitchen. Kayne gave her a plate of the most delicious sliced meat she'd ever eaten. Divine spent the next few minutes gorging until she couldn't swallow another bite. She pushed the plate away empty. "Thank you. I guess I didn't realize how hungry I was."

Kayne laughed, and it was a warm, friendly sound. "There's a lot to learn in the beginning." He put her plate in the sink. "I hope you don't mind, but Fred told me how you and Heath were changed. I'm sorry about that. The werewolf who attacked you has been something of a problem to the community. We usually do a good job of keeping her contained, but she must have slipped past her caretaker that night."

Divine sighed. "Well, what's done is done. I suppose there's no way to change us back."

"I'm afraid not, no."

"So, how difficult would it be for me to go back to my former life?"

He traced a pattern on the granite countertop with his index finger. "Of course you're free to do what you want, but going back to your other life is ill-advised. You're different now, Divine. Things are different."

"I was afraid you'd say that."

"It's not all bad. You and Heath have each other, and you both seem very . . . close."

"Is this mate thing just because we were changed at the same time?"

Kayne laughed again. "No. All that's happened is whatever feelings you had for each other have bonded the two of you together. The attraction is real and happened before the change. The change just made it stronger." He studied her for a few moments. "Maybe you don't have such strong feelings for him as you thought?"

"It's not that," she said with a sigh. "It's just that I feel like my life has been hijacked and I can't stop it. You know what I mean?"

He nodded. "Please believe me when I say, all of us in town are very sorry for what happened. We understand what a shock it is to suddenly discover your old life had been torn from you. That's why we've extended the invitation for the two of you to stay. We really believe that not only will the two of you grow to like it here, but you'd both be a great asset to the town."

Heath prowled into the kitchen. He looked mean and tense, and his gaze never left Kayne's. "Who's this?"

Kayne gave Heath a wary smile. "I'm just a friend trying to help."

Heath moved up behind Divine. She could feel the energy drifting off him like steam. "Are you now?"

She turned to stare at Heath. "What's up with you? We're just talking. Kayne was telling me a little more about the town."

"She's mine," Heath said in a low and menacing tone. "You understand?"

"Heath!" Divine said, embarrassed.

Kayne held up his hands. "It's okay, I understand. He's still disoriented from last night, and his instincts are running high. It's normal for men new to the change." Kayne took another plate of meat out of the fridge and offered it to him.

Heath's features softened, and he accepted the offering.

"When he's done eating, I'll take you both on a tour of the town and answer any questions you have."

"That sounds great. Thanks," Divine said. She shot a look at Heath that said he better behave himself. He ignored it and continued wolfing down the last of his meal. "What do you say?"

"Yeah," Heath said, putting the plate down. "Sounds great, but I sit next to Divine."

Kayne smiled. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

\* \* \* \*

The town was much larger than it first appeared. Kayne took them to the city hall, the courthouse, and the police station. Divine wasn't surprised Heath got along great with the other cops. He was a likable guy, and everyone seemed to remember him from earlier in the week. The other cops took to him right away. They were very nice to her as well, but Divine knew they sensed reluctance in her to accept this new and unexpected lifestyle.

Back at their hotel room, Divine listened patiently as Heath gushed over how great this town was. "It's exactly the kind of place I can imagine raising kids and living out the rest of our lives. Don't you think?"

Divine stared out the window. "I'm sorry, Heath," she said. "I'm not sold. I want to go back."

He stared at her like she'd just pulled a gun on him. "Go back to what?"

"My old life. The life I had before I got bitten."

"But didn't you hear Kayne? That life is going to be very . . . difficult for you. And as long as we're being totally honest, I *can't* go back. I'm different now, and you are, too. I don't feel a connection to that world anymore."

She smiled sadly. "I know."

"But you're going back anyway, without me," he said, giving her thoughts a voice.

"I'm sorry, Heath."

"Don't be. You can't help the way you feel. I understand, but I'm going to miss you like hell."

"I can always come back and visit."

He shook his head slowly. “You say that, but you won’t. You’ll get busy. You’ll move on. You’ll forget.”

She opened her mouth to say something, but no words would come. Was she making the right decision? She thought so at first, but now she just didn’t know. “I’ll never forget you.”

Heath wasn’t listening anymore. He grabbed his car keys off the dresser. “Come on; I’ll drive you home.”

## Chapter Fourteen

*Divine's law office a few days later*

"Is everything okay?" her friend Libby asked after poking her head into Divine's office.

Divine smiled, but it only came out as a strained grin. "Sure, why?"

Libby came in and closed the door behind her. She took a seat across from Divine's desk. "You just seem distant lately. Usually you're focused and right to the point, but ever since the accident you seem sad and distracted."

Divine rubbed her face and leaned back in her chair. Images of Heath came into her head: his long, powerful body, the gentle caress of his kisses on her skin, the quiet sexual hunger in his eyes. Her heart ached for him. "I was in a relationship that didn't work out. I guess I'm just feeling the fallout from that."

"Did you break it off, or did he?"

"I did. Things were just moving so fast, I couldn't get my head straight."

Libby laughed. "If only men came with an instruction manual!"

*Or werewolves for that matter.* "Yeah, right. Listen, Libby, do you mind if I catch up with you later? I have to finish this brief for court."

Libby stood up. "Oh sure, Div. Sorry."

She left, and Divine was consumed with guilt. Libby was only trying to be friendly, but Divine just wanted to be alone. She thought back to her brief time at Wolf River and running with the other wolves, and a profound feeling of loss filled her. When she closed her eyes she could smell the damp soil by the river and the music of the birds in the trees. Something big was missing from her life, something she had deprived herself of, and it was killing her.

Heath.

The recollection of his name brought gooseflesh up on her arms. Was it just the change from human to werewolf that had brought them together, or would it have happened anyway? She missed him with every fiber of her being. Even far from him she could feel his pull, the primal draw of his

power and the unquenchable need to be with him. Was this normal for all werewolves? Was this what love was really all about? Could she leave this life she knew behind forever and join him? With every passing day the answer grew louder. *Yes*, it said. *Yes, yes, yes*.

*Oh, Heath*, she thought, *why did this weird stuff have to happen to us?* Why couldn't they have had a *normal* life together? But then it occurred to her maybe she was seeing this all wrong. Maybe by fighting it, she was making it worse rather than just accepting what had happened.

Was she in love with Heath? She thought about him all the time. Every passing day without him was agony. If that wasn't love, she didn't know what was.

Her cell phone buzzed. She picked it up off her desk and grinned. It was a text message from Heath. All it said was "I love you. I miss you. Come home."

Suddenly her door opened abruptly. It was one of the senior partners. The older woman scowled like she'd eaten a lemon. "Don't you have to be in court in twenty minutes?"

Divine glanced at her watch and gasped. "Yeah, I'm on my way right now." She threw her cell phone in her briefcase, grabbed her suit jacket, and rushed out the door.

## **Chapter Fifteen**

“I saw it and thought about you. It needs work, but maybe that’s just what you need right now. Maybe you need something to keep you busy and take your mind off things,” Fred said.

Heath stared at the house and folded his arms. He’d been thinking about leaving Wolf River ever since Divine had left him, but every time he tried, he just couldn’t. Because he’d been bitten so badly, his transformations were unpredictable and harsh. On the eve of a full moon he’d change as soon as the sun set and didn’t turn human again until the dawn. Who was he fooling? There was no going back to his old life, even if he’d wanted to. But the worst part was the loss of Divine.

He missed her desperately. Most nights he sat alone in the hotel quietly drinking until he could fall asleep. When he finally did nod off, his dreams were filled with Divine. Her lovely face, her voluptuous body, and her sharp mind. He yearned for her like a man pines for a lost limb. Nothing seemed worth doing without her.

Fred had turned out to be a good friend. He checked on Heath every day and good-naturedly urged him to join the local police force. Heath appreciated the attempts, but nothing was the same without Divine. Nothing seemed worth the effort.

Fred shifted his weight from one foot to the other. He looked pensive. “I’m guessing you don’t like it.”

Heath forced a smile. Would Divine have liked it? He doubted it. It wasn’t ready for anyone to occupy yet. But maybe if he fixed it up, she would come out to see it. “How much is it?”

Fred brightened. “It’s free if you’re willing to put some work into it.”

“It’s a money pit.”

“That it is.”

“Divine would hate it.”

“Not if you put a little sweat into the house, Heath. Besides, like I said, working on this house will give you time to heal from a lot of stuff. What do you say?”

Heath let out a big exhalation. "I don't know, Fred."

Fred put his arm around Heath's shoulders and gave him a quick hug. "She tore your heart out, son. I know. I've been there. But listen, she'll be back. I'm sure of it."

"I don't think so."

"Why? Because she said she needed some time to get her head straight? That doesn't mean she won't change her mind. It's very lonely living in the outside world with the blessing. You shift alone, you hunt alone, and you exist alone, hiding your secret. You can't tell anyone because they'd think you were insane, and you can't show them because they'd run as far as they could from you. She'll be back; you'll see. She wasn't meant to live alone. She was meant to be with you."

"The only reason why we ended up together is because we were attacked together. If we hadn't been changed by Mary, there would be no connection."

"You're wrong, Heath. You two were meant to be together. The blessing only heightened your attraction. There's nothing artificial in the way you feel about her."

"That logic is flawed. She obviously doesn't feel the same way."

"Don't do that to yourself, Heath. Didn't you feel how much she cared for you when you two were together?"

Didn't Fred get it? Divine didn't want any part of this life. She didn't want to live like a freak with him in this tiny town. "Yeah, but it wasn't strong enough to make her stay."

Fred frowned. "You should call her, ask her to come back."

Heath ran his fingers through his hair. He didn't have the courage to tell Fred he called her every night but he just didn't have the guts to let the call go through. "I can't. It's too painful." He walked up to the house and pulled one of the loose shutters off. It fell to the ground and broke. Inside his chest, it felt like his heart had done the same thing.

"Go by and visit her, then."

A flash of temper brought heat to his cheeks. "I said no, Fred, okay? She doesn't want to be here, and she doesn't want me. She made that very clear."

Fred studied him with a stern gaze. "Women change their minds, Heath."

Heath couldn't talk about this anymore. It was killing him.

Fred sighed. "What about the house, then? Do you want it?"

Heath rubbed the back of his neck and squinted back at Fred. A note of guilt nagged him for being so short with the mayor. Fred was just trying to help. "Are you going to help me?"

"I don't know," Fred said with a mischievous gleam in his eye. "I'm not very handy."

"Do you know how to pound in a nail?"

"That's about all I can do."

Heath laughed. Some of the weight lifted from his chest. "It's not much, but it's a start." He stared at the house as he tried to imagine it all fixed up and him and Divine living there. "You really think she might come back?"

"I think so. She has a damn good reason to come back."

"What's that?"

"You."

Heath sat on the dusty porch. "I don't think I'm enough of a reason, Fred. But it's nice of you to say it."

"Time will tell, my friend. Time will tell."

Heath stood up and dusted off his hands. "I better order a dumpster for all the debris."

"Are we starting today?" Fred asked with a note of panic in his voice.

"You bet. Better get your work jeans on. We've got a lot of demo work to do."

They walked over to Fred's truck. "How do I get myself into things like this?"

Heath chuckled. "Because you just can't mind your own damned business."

Fred laughed. "Well, let that be a lesson to me."

## **Chapter Sixteen**

The next month was the hardest in Divine's life. Her days were filled with work, court dates, and meetings with defendants, but little else. When the full moon came, she transformed alone in her apartment surrounded by four white walls and no one else. The loneliness was devastating. So many times she thought about going to see Heath, but she couldn't find the time. Or maybe the truth was she was afraid to see him. She didn't think she could take it if he'd found someone else.

Tonight she sat alone in the dark of her apartment sipping wine. She scolded herself for making what increasingly appeared to be the wrong decision. Had she fallen in love with Heath after all? It sure felt like it. But she'd feel like an adolescent fool for driving back to Wolf River just to tell him she was wrong, especially if he had someone else in his life.

A knock on the door pulled her from her thoughts. She opened it and was surprised to see Wolf River's mayor. "Hello Divine."

She smiled despite her reservations about letting him in. "Hi."

"Mind if I come in?"

She let go of the door. "Sure, why not?" She returned to the couch and took a small sip of wine. "Can I offer you a drink?"

He came in and closed the door behind him. "No, thanks."

"I have to admit, I wasn't expecting to see you again."

"I really wanted to talk to you before too much time had passed."

Divine got up and poured herself another full glass. "Listen, if this is about moving to Wolf River—"

He held up a hand to ward off her objection. "It's more than just that. I came to talk to you about Heath. He misses you terribly."

She came back over and sat down. "I miss him, too. He's a good guy."

"Is that it?"

"What do you mean? What else is there?"

Fred took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "You can't be so blind as to see how in love with you he is."

"I haven't heard from him since I left. Oh, scratch that. He sent me a text."

"That's because he thinks you want to move on with your life. He doesn't want to make this any harder on you than it already has been. He loves you, Divine, and if I'm not mistaken, I'd say you were in love with him, too."

She swirled the red wine in the glass, watching as it coated the sides with a transparent film. "I am, but . . . I guess the truth is I'm scared of being unhappy. Wolf River is a nice place, but it's a *small* town. I don't see much of a career there for me. I like living in the city."

"I know exactly where you're coming from because I felt the same way when I first got changed. I spent years running from what I had become, but all that did was make me miserable. Tell me the truth. How many times have you left your apartment at night since you've been back?"

He had her there. "I haven't," she admitted. She'd been holed up in here, afraid to venture out because she might change and terrify people. So, instead of accepting what she was and embracing it, she'd secluded herself. This was no good. There was no freedom in how she was living, only fear.

"Is this life really better than living in a small town with people just like you and a man who loves you?"

Divine laughed. "You've got some damn good instincts. And I hate to admit, you're pretty convincing. You should have been a lawyer."

He smiled. "I was. I was one of the best. But I came to realize, as you will too, that home is wherever people love and care about you. No one lives by instinct alone. Everyone needs love. When you have all that, geography doesn't figure into it."

"What if Heath doesn't want me back?"

"He does. He's been quiet about it, but I can see how much he loves and misses you. Come back to him, Divine. Come back to all of us and live a better life."

"When you put it that way, how can I refuse?"

\* \* \* \*

Fred brought her to the forest just outside of Wolf River. The moon was bright in the sky, which bathed her in silver moonlight. The pull to change was overwhelming, and Divine decided not to fight it anymore. She let the change come, delighting in the mixture of pain and pleasure that coursed through her body. She was finally free—reborn—and it felt fantastic.

She ran through the woods, taking in the sights and smells. Soon she was met by other wolves from the town. She recognized all of them by their scents. She ran and hunted with them until almost dawn, then she found *him*.

Heath approached her from a thicket of brush. He was big, with dark fur accented with silver that seemed to reflect the fading moonlight. He approached her like she was something strikingly unexpected and if he moved too fast, she might run away.

He lifted his great head and took in her scent. “I thought you had left for good,” he said telepathically.

“Me, too, but Fred convinced me I was being an idiot. He’s pretty smart, that Fred.”

Heath looked amused. “I have a house now. Come home with me.”

Divine’s heart leapt with joy. “Maybe I can stay for a while.”

“I was hoping you’d say that. And you know you can stay for as long as you want.”

“What if I want to stay forever?”

He licked her face. “All the better.”

## Epilogue

Divine lay in bed next to husband Heath. She had changed back into her human form a few hours ago, but he was still a wolf. With trembling hands, she ran her fingers through his thick fur and savored the softness. His scent was animal with a faint hint of human, but to her it was comfort and safety. “I love you,” she whispered in his ear, to which he responded by nuzzling her.

In fact everything about Wolf River felt like home now. The people, all various shifters and some werewolves like them, had welcomed them into the community with open arms. Divine had to admit she wasn’t expecting such kindness from the residents, but it made all the difference. On nights when the moon was full, the werewolves in town would change and everyone romped through the forest, hunting and playing. It was so wonderful and much more than she could have hoped for.

As far as her career went, she still worked for her law firm part-time. The rest of the time, she worked with two local lawyers who were drafting new laws to protect the local environment from land developers.

A few rays of sunshine shone in through the window illuminating the silver highlights in Heath’s fur. The warmth of the day triggered the change in him, and she watched as his coat disappeared only to be replaced by flesh. When he was completely human, he smiled at her.

“Good morning,” he mumbled.

“I thought you were going to sleep all day,” she joked.

“Don’t tempt me.”

The phone rang, and Heath rolled over with a groan to answer it. He listened for a moment then handed it to her.

“Hello?” Divine said.

“Hello, Divine. This is Fred.”

She exchanged a confused look with Heath. “Oh, hi, Mayor.”

“You can just call me Fred. Listen, I called you because . . . well, we have a problem and I thought you might be able to help.”

“All you have to do is ask. What’s going on?”

“You remember Mary, the troubled girl who bit you and Heath? Well, she’s done it again; only this time her victim didn’t survive the attack. The Wolf Council wants to put her down, and there’s no one who will speak up for her except her momma. I was wondering if you’d be willing to represent her in front of the council.” He paused as Divine absorbed what he’d just told her. “I know it’s a lot to ask, and I’ll understand if you say no.”

“I didn’t say no. Where is the girl?”

“She’s in a cell at the jail.”

“Has she made any statements in her defense?”

“I don’t believe so. But Mary has always been a little . . . off. I may be sounding like I’m making excuses for her, but she’s not really responsible for her actions.”

“Hmmm. Okay, I’ll do it under the condition that if I manage to save her, she needs to be put in a real hospital for shifters where she can get the help she needs. Deal?”

“I can’t see anyone having a problem with that,” Fred said. “Deal.”

Divine hung up and stared at Heath. “I’ve been hired to defend our attacker, Mary.”

He squinted at her. “What? Why?”

She shrugged. “Because no one wants to and I *am* a defense attorney.”

He was thoughtful for a few moments. “And if you get her off, then what?”

“She goes to a special hospital where she can get the right kind of care.” She studied his face but couldn’t read his emotions. “Are you angry?”

“No. These past few months have been the best of my life. I love living here with you, and I love the life we have together. If you think you can help this girl, then go for it.”

That was why she’d married this man. Not because he was handsome or charming or brave, but because he believed in her. What more could a woman ask for than that?

“What are you thinking?” he asked.

“I’m thinking you’re a pretty neat guy and I love you.”

Heath pulled her into his arms. He gave her a sexy, wicked smile. “I love you, too, babe. Now go out there and save that wacky chick.”

Divine couldn’t help herself. She threw her head back and laughed. Then she put on a suit, grabbed her briefcase, and went out to save Mary.

The End

## *About the Author*

Michelle Marquis is the pen name for science fiction and paranormal author Michelle O'Neill. Born in Los Angeles, California, Michelle has lived all over the US and even some places in Canada. She is owned and cared for by her family (who tolerate her writing insanity), an aging Doberman and a mischievous Irish Terrier named Guinness. Michelle often writes like a fiend and has authored many novels and short stories for the internet both mainstream and erotic.