



Lycan Heat

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Chapter One

“Come on, Janine. I already agreed to come with you two to these God forsaken woods in the middle of nowhere. Can’t we at least listen to some good music?”

When her sister rolled her eyes at her, Sherry promptly rummaged through her bag until she found her MP3 player. After turning it on, she stuck the earbuds in her ears and cranked up one of her favorites by Lady Gaga. She was so not into country, and that meant anything concerning music or nature. She would much rather spend a weekend getaway lying on a sandy beach overlooking the ocean with cabana boys bringing her drinks—not that she’d ever gotten to do that either, but one day, she planned to.

Why her sister would choose to spend every weekend in the freaking jungle was more than her mind could comprehend. While she and Janine were close, they were polar opposites. Janine had always liked nature. The closest Sherry wanted to get to nature was the Discovery channel.

When Janine looked back at her, she playfully stuck her tongue out at her sister. Janine’s frown was proof of her lack of amusement. Raze, Janine’s husband, on the other hand, seemed to be enjoying the exchange between the sisters. The twinkling pair of clear gray eyes peering at her in the mirror gave testament to that fact.

Janine had met Raze only a few months ago, and while Sherry had been a bit hesitant about the guy, it hadn’t taken her long to realize that Janine and Raze were head over heels in love. She was glad Janine had found someone like Raze, but something about him was strange. She just couldn’t put her finger on exactly why she thought so. The way he moved, the way he watched her sister, reminded her of a predator. While she genuinely liked Raze, he still set her a bit on edge at times with his *intenseness*.

Sometimes she wondered if she’d ever find the right guy. She wanted that one-of-a-kind true love. She wanted a soul mate, a man who could make her toes curl with a mere smile or a brush of his fingertips on her cheek. She sighed. She definitely wasn’t going to find him out in the middle of nowhere because her ideal man would so not be the woodsy type. She didn’t want a

wussy man who liked pedicures, manicures, or who spent more time in the bathroom than she did, but she didn't want Tarzan either.

She was beginning to wonder how her sister had finally managed to talk her into coming with her and Raze on their routine weekend trek to the woods—Sanctuary, as Janine referred to it. Sherry had been refusing her invitations for so long, the thought of seeing the disappointed look on her face one more time had finally made her cave. Janine had done so much for her since the crash that had killed their parents. While Janine never expected anything in return, Sherry still felt indebted to her sister. She knew that if she hadn't had a sister as wonderful as Janine, she might have ended up under the state's care until she'd reached the age of eighteen.

It had been tough for them after the wreck. Money had been tight, but Janine had started a cupcake business, and had made sure she and Sherry were provided for. Her brows furrowed. Come to think of it, lately she hadn't noticed the pronounced limp Janine had been plagued with after the shattered leg she'd gotten as a result of that horrific accident. She'd have to ask her sister about that later. It was extremely odd that it would just go away since she'd suffered the limp for several years now.

She'd tried her best to be a good kid after the wreck, not wanting to cause Janine any more grief than she'd already suffered—than they'd both suffered—in their young lives. She was aware she hadn't always been an angel. Yet, Janine had always handled those situations with great care for her sensitive feelings. If taking a weekend trip into the freaking Amazon would make her happy, she'd do it. She only hoped after she proved to her sister once and for all how thoroughly she hated nature, she'd leave her be from now on where that matter was concerned.

She stretched and smoothed the green cotton of her sundress down over her legs. It was getting cooler out since fall started to take hold, but she hadn't been able to resist the opportunity to wear her favorite dress one last time before putting it away for the winter. She let her head rest against the back of the seat and must have dozed because the next thing she knew, the bouncing of the car jarred her awake as the smooth highway they'd been on was no more, and an uneven dirt lane took its place.

“We’re almost there.” Janine smiled.

Sherry forced a smile and almost giggled at the sight of her sister’s excitement. She thought her sister was gorgeous with her pale blonde hair and soft blue eyes. Her clear, creamy skin would make many women envious. She had been fortunate herself to have good skin as well, a gift from their mother. However, their skin was about the only similarity they shared. Janine was a bit taller and had more curves, and Sherry was shorter, thinner, and had a shape that resembled a ruler—straight and narrow. Also, Sherry’s hair was a coppery red and her eyes were green, as she’d gotten her father’s darker coloring.

“Thank God. This is the most uncomfortable backseat I’ve ever been in.” Sherry put her MP3 player back in her overstuffed bag.

“Oh, it’s not that bad, Sherry,” Janine teased.

Soon, they stopped in front of a small log cabin. Sherry tried to hide her shock at the rinky-dink, rustic cabin, which undoubtedly would lack modern amenities.

Janine laughed. “It’s very nice inside.” She opened her door after Raze stopped the car, got out and opened Sherry’s door. “Come on.”

Janine opened the back door on the Jeep and started to get their bags out, but Raze came around and tugged her hand away before she could pick anything up.

“I’ll get everything. Why don’t you go show your little sis around?” Raze bent and kissed Janine on the cheek.

“Are you sure?” Janine batted her lashes at Raze and stood on tiptoe to place her mouth against his.

His arms came around her and his mouth came down on hers hard in a deep kiss that made Sherry blush. When Janine moaned, Sherry cleared her throat and Raze reluctantly broke the kiss.

“Yeah. You can show me how grateful you are later,” he whispered.

“Yuck! There is someone else here who, by the way, does not want to watch you two slobber all over each other.” Sherry gave her sternest look, and kept the giggle threatening to spring from her throat at bay.

“Okay, okay.” Janine raised her hands in surrender and led the way to the cabin, but not before giving Raze one last sultry glance.

Good God. If looks could be rated, the one Raze gave back to Janine would be rated X—no, XXX. Sherry could swear his eyes had actually glowed with raw desire. While it was pretty gross witnessing the exchange between him and her sister, she had to admit, she wouldn’t mind in the least if a man looked at her with such raw intensity.

She was pretty surprised when Janine showed her the cabin. It was way more modern than she’d ever thought it would be, and it was clean. Unfortunately, there was only one bedroom. She had no doubt she’d be riding the couch this weekend, which she didn’t mind all that much as she didn’t want to accidentally witness anything intimate that her sister and Raze might be doing on this trip. Thankfully, there was a brand new sofa that folded out into a bed in the living room.

“We wanted to make sure you had some place comfortable to sleep. When you finally agreed to come, we ordered the new fold out just for you.” Janine proceeded to unfold the couch, lay across it, and sigh as if to demonstrate its softness.

“Thank you. I appreciate it because if you had made me sleep on the floor, I might have hurt you.” Sherry laughed.

Janine got off the sofa, and she helped her fold it back up.

“No. Thank you for coming. I know it isn’t your thing, but it really means a lot. I know you only did it for me.” Janine hugged her.

“Just don’t expect me to come out here again anytime soon.” She hugged her sister back.

“Promise me that you will give it a fair chance?” Janine pulled away a bit, her blue eyes pleading.

Sherry sighed in defeat. How could she deny her sister such a simple request? She squared her shoulders in resignation.

“I promise.” If this was all it took to make her sister happy, she’d give it an honest effort. Although, she was pretty certain she wouldn’t be any more impressed with nature than she already was—maybe more unimpressed.

Raze walked through the front door carrying all of their bags with what appeared to be little effort. Sherry was impressed as she had trouble carrying her own. He certainly wasn't lacking in muscles.

"I think that's everything." He let Sherry's bags drop to the floor by the sofa and carried the rest down the hallway.

"Why don't you get settled, and I'll figure out what's for dinner?" Janine went to the small kitchen and started rummaging in the fridge and cabinets pulling things out here and there.

"I'm not really hungry. I think I'll take a look around if you don't mind." Sherry unzipped one of the bags at her feet and started pulling out her clothes.

"I don't know, Sherry." Raze came back into the room before Janine finished what she'd been about to say. "Maybe you should wait until one of us can come with you."

"I promise I will not go far." Sherry laughed. "I'm just going to walk around the cabin. I'll stay close. Believe me, I will not venture into the woods." She yanked her tennis shoes free from where they were wedged in the bag. *I definitely will not go into the woods.*

She didn't like bugs or spiders or snakes or any other creepy crawly thing, and she was pretty sure the woods held plenty of them. She shivered.

"I'm warning you. If I see one spider in here, I'm sleeping in the Jeep." She gave the floor and walls a quick look, but didn't even see one cobweb.

"Why don't you go with her, Raze?" Janine chewed her bottom lip, a sure sign that she was worried about something.

"Are you afraid I'm going to fall down a well or something?" Sherry giggled. "We should have brought Lassie. What's that? Sherry's in the well, Lassie?"

"She'll be all right, babe. I'll keep an eye on her." Janine smiled as Raze wrapped his arm around her shoulders and kissed the top of her head.

When Janine sighed in obvious relief, Sherry frowned.

"Gee, you are starting to scare me. Is there a monster loose in the woods or something?"

"Um, not exactly." Janine's eyes widened for a second.

“I’m not going to go far. I still have my favorite dress on, and I don’t plan to get it dirty.” Sherry toed her flip-flops off, slipped her sneakers on, and stood.

“Go on, Sherry. I’ll be out in a couple minutes,” Raze called, but she was already halfway out the door.

Chapter Two

Anger seethed through Piers' blood and seemed to seep out through his skin. That bastard, Anthony Wolfson, was going to pay for killing his brother. Yeah, Daniel had gone rogue, but Piers had been positive he'd be able to help him, except Anthony got to him first. While Anthony was an ancient, Piers was only a couple years younger. Anthony would be a formidable opponent, but he would take him out no matter the cost to himself or anyone else that got in his way.

He stood at the edge of Sanctuary, blended perfectly with the darkening shadows of the trees. No human would be able to detect his presence, but most importantly, other lycans would never know he was there either—the deer scent he'd sprayed on would see to that. He'd seen his fair share of battles within the packs, had fought his share, as well, and had honed his skills to near perfection. He'd really had no choice. His survival had literally depended on it more times than he wanted to remember.

More and more lycans were going rogue. He didn't support their actions, and strived to help maintain the integrity of the ancient rules. Many rogues had been made to see the error of their ways, which is what he'd intended to show his brother. He gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. A tick started in his jaw and beat in time to his pounding heart.

He'd been watching Sanctuary for the past week, waiting for a perfect opportunity for an ambush. From the bits and pieces of information he'd overheard, he knew tomorrow night he'd finally get revenge. The lycans had planned a cook out, and their guards would be down. He scoffed. *Sanctuary*. Sanctuary was supposed to be a safe place, not someplace to get murdered.

His brother had been a misguided pup, but he doubted he'd done anything so terrible that he'd deserved to be slaughtered. The guilt Piers felt at not being there for his brother constantly gnawed at him. He'd been tracking Daniel for three years and had finally closed in on his whereabouts only to find out he'd been too late. Damon, the leader of the pack, along with his brother and some others, had all been killed during a confrontation at Sanctuary. His brother's pack had told him they'd simply been there to talk

to a former member who'd run and were ruthlessly murdered for the fact that they'd been labeled rogues.

Rumor had it that Anthony Wolfson was directly responsible for Daniel's death. Raze Jackson, the former pack member they'd been trying to talk to, and Brent Falls were also involved. If he had a chance, he'd be more than happy to knock some sense into those two, as well. Daniel and the others would never be so stupid as to intentionally start an altercation with two ancients. None of them would have been a match for Anthony or Brent.

He slid deeper into the shadows as the front of a dark Jeep came into view. His anger fired hotter. He didn't like complications, but life was full of them, most of which would bite you in the ass. He shifted into full wolf form and ran until exhaustion nipped hard at his heels and soothed the hatred burning inside him. He was miles from Sanctuary before he shifted back into human form and picked up the clothes he'd stashed earlier in an old, hollowed out tree. He quickly dressed and made his way to the cave he'd been staying in. After tomorrow night, he could head back home to his empty house and spend a few more hundred years alone.

Alone. That's what he'd been for practically his entire life, and that's how he'd die—however many years that took. He wasn't a blind idiot. He knew the chances of ever finding his mate were next to zero. There were too many rogues now. Rogues that thought it was acceptable to hunt down any female with the main scent and do what they wanted with them, including violating and killing them. Every female that carried the main scent had a mated scent, as well, but only the destined lycan mate could smell it. Females carrying the main scent were supposed to be watched over and protected until her mate was found. In fact, if another lycan harmed a female that carried the main scent, it was punishable by death according to lycan law.

Over the years, the ancients throughout the now dwindling lycan population had fought to bring the unruly pups back under control. While finding rogues and either reforming them or putting them to death was not an unusually difficult task, it was proving a losing battle for the ancients thus far. By the time the rogues were found, the damage that had been done was profound. Too many potential mates were being slaughtered. Every female

lost was a lost mate to a lycan, a lost opportunity at happiness, a lost chance for love. He was certain his chance had been forfeited long ago.

He stretched out on his back on the cave floor, clasped his hands behind his head, and peered up at the rocky ceiling. He'd dreamt of her, the one destined for him. Those were the only times he'd felt utter peace in his life, the nights he'd wished to never awaken. Her soft touch soothed him in a way nothing else ever had or could. Her breathy sighs as he covered her with his body drove him wild. She was imprinted on his soul. He'd know her in an instant, though he'd never met her. Her scent, her touch—he'd know the minute he laid eyes on her that she was his. And God help her if he did ever find her.

He'd never let her go.

The darkness inside him that screamed out for redemption was overwhelming at times. Redemption only she could give him. Protectiveness swelled inside him when he thought of how tiny she was in his dreams. He was big, probably too big for an angel such as her. His size and demeanor would scare the hell out of her. He grunted at the thought and frowned. The only downfall to the dreams was he hadn't been able to see her face clearly.

His palms itched to feel her skin, to peel her clothes off and to bury his face in her soft hair as she welcomed him inside her. Anger boiled to the surface hot again. It would never happen, and it was useless to fantasize about it. Besides, this wasn't the time or place for such a thing to happen anyway. He must focus on avenging his brother's senseless death. Nothing would get in his way.

He grunted again and rolled to his side. The thought of killing another ancient, especially one with a mate, gnawed at him with teeth of guilt. It couldn't be helped. Rogues were punished for anything that went against ancient laws, and ancients should have to answer for their crimes as well. Although, technically, killing an ancient was against the rules, he felt the action of cutting down another lycan for a mere title was punishable no matter who did the killing.

He'd thought about asking Anthony his side of the story, but if everything he'd heard was true, he'd probably be attacked as well. Attacked,

outnumbered, and most likely, murdered. *Son of a bitch*. He hated it when doubt reared its ugly head. He'd been on the hunt for revenge for so long, now that it was imminent, he had time to think things through more carefully. He knew none of it really mattered in the end. Someone had to answer for his brother's death one way or another.

He closed his eyes and immediately started to doze.

* * * *

Raze followed Sherry as she tentatively walked around the darkening compound. Her flowery scent, while probably light to humans, was nearly shorting out his nose. At least the perfume was effective at masking her scent—to a point. A lycan wouldn't pick up her scent as far away as normal, which made him breathe a sigh of relief.

While she was marked with the main scent, which meant she was destined to be the mate of one of his kind, just as her sister had been, he was glad she wouldn't be an easy target. Janine had been trying to get Sherry to agree to come with them to Sanctuary for a long time. Raze had only recently turned his mate, and she was insistent upon telling Sherry what they were. While he was proud of Janine for not wanting to keep it from her sister, he wasn't sure he agreed completely with telling her.

He'd tried to make Janine see that it wasn't necessary to tell Sherry, as her mate may never find her—may not be alive for that matter. His woman was stubborn, though, and didn't want to lie to her baby sister any longer. He didn't blame her and would probably want to do the same if the situation were reversed, but the overwhelming urge to protect Janine from being hurt extended to Sherry as well. Because if anything hurt Sherry, it hurt Janine, and Raze would do anything in his power to keep Janine from suffering any more in her life. She'd already been through enough.

He wasn't for sure how Sherry would take the news, but he was sure that she was aware something wasn't all together normal. For one, even though he was sure Sherry trusted him, she seemed uneasy around him at times. Most humans did tend to get a little wary around lycans if only because their

instinct warned them something was different. He was also aware that Sherry had noticed Janine's limp, or lack thereof. Once he'd changed her, the malady, which was a result of a shattered leg sustained in the wreck that had killed her parents, had healed.

"What in the heck do you guys do up here every weekend?" Sherry kicked a pebble into the woods. "It's so quiet and boring."

"We think of plenty to do," Raze chuckled.

"Eww. I don't want to know anything about you and my sister's sex life." Sherry made a gagging noise.

"I wasn't talking about that," he laughed.

Although he'd never deny that making love to Janine was one of his most favorite, time consuming things to do. When they weren't making love, they were running in the forest, helping out at Sanctuary, or visiting with the other lycans.

"Really, because I swear to God you two are constantly groping or kissing." She smirked.

"You really should try to get in touch with nature a bit. It's quite beautiful."

"Yeah? I don't think so." Sherry looked around and frowned.

"Come on. Let's go back to the cabin. I bet Janine has something scrumptious cooking for dinner. He sniffed the air. In fact, he was sure of it. Another one of his favorite things—eating his mate's wonderful cooking.

Sherry nodded and followed him back.

Chapter Three

“Tomorrow afternoon we’re having a cookout and you will get to meet Anthony, Karen, Brent and Rindy.” Janine smiled as she sipped some hot cocoa from her cup.

Dinner had been marvelous, as usual. Janine had cooked ham and beans and cornbread. Sherry loved her sister’s homestyle cooking. She wasn’t bad in the kitchen herself, but Janine was by far the better chef of the family. After dinner, Raze said he’d do clean up duty, but Sherry insisted on helping with the dishes. Once the dishes were done, they sat around the table with big mugs of steaming chocolate—hers topped with marshmallows.

“Sounds like a good time to me,” she agreed.

She watched as Janine chewed her bottom lip and seemed as if she were going to say something several times only to stop. Raze watched her with a scowl.

“Okay, you two. What is up?” Sherry finally asked.

After Janine stared at her for several minutes, she finally spoke. “I have something to tell you, but I’m not sure how you will take it.”

“You look as if you’re going to tell me someone died or something.” She frowned. “Nothing terrible happened, did it?” She inched forward on her seat and watched her sister intently from across the table.

“No. No one died or anything horrible like that. It’s just that, well...” Janine trailed off and stared at Sherry.

“You’re scaring me. What is wrong, hon?” The way she stared at her made her anxious. She reached across the table and laid her hand over one of Janine’s and squeezed gently.

“I’m just worried that you will feel differently about me after I tell you, and it’s going to be a bit of a shock, I’m afraid.” Janine tried to smile, but failed miserably.

“No matter what you tell me, you are, and will always be, my sister. Nothing will ever change that, or the fact that I love you. Now you are really worrying me. What is wrong?” Butterflies of alarm danced around her belly.

“Promise me that you will keep an open mind because what I’m about to tell you is going to be very hard to believe. Trust me, I know.”

“Okaaaay. I promise.” What the heck could she possibly tell her that would cause her to be worried that Sherry’s feelings could actually change for her?

After several more minutes of silence, and Sherry looking back and forth from Raze to Janine, she’d had enough. But when she finally started to say something, she and Janine spoke at the same time.

“For crying out loud! Tell me what is going on—”

“I’m a lycan.”

“What?” She stood.

“We both are.” Janine nodded at the same time Raze did. “Well, actually, he always has been, and he recently turned me, with my permission.”

Sherry plopped back in her chair and stared at her sister with her mouth gaping wide open. Had she gone completely insane? Had they both? Wait, they must be playing a joke on her.

“Okay, okay. You got me. Ha ha.” She started laughing, and put her hands up in surrender.

It didn’t take her long to realize she was the only one laughing. She immediately stopped and sat in quiet contemplation for several minutes.

“Do you really expect me to believe this?” She raised a brow in question and looked at them both with what she hoped to be her best I-wasn’t-born-yesterday look.

“It’s the truth. Believe me, I can prove it, but it might be a bit much for you at the moment.” Janine reached for Raze and he wrapped his long fingers around her small hand.

“Seriously? I mean, you are seriously telling me that on the night of the full moon you two turn into big scary monsters and run around killing...” Her eyes snapped up to her sister’s. “Oh my God. Tell me you don’t kill people.”

“No! And we don’t turn into to monsters, and we don’t have to wait for the full moon. We can change at will, after the first time anyways, and we shift into wolves. We don’t kill people. We know exactly what we are doing

at all times. We can control ourselves just like when we are in our human forms.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Sherry cried, her brain on overload.

“I have to. You are a destined mate, and you need to know what could happen. You may be in danger.” Janine watched her nervously.

“A destined mate? What the hell does that mean?” Her voice rose with each word.

“Take it easy, Sherry,” Raze said in a low, soothing tone.

“Take it easy? Are you serious? You are sitting here telling me that you are werewolves and that I’m what? Destined to be one?” She shook her head. “I don’t think so. I hate nature.”

“Just let me explain everything, and then you can sleep on it and we can talk about it more tomorrow.” Raze smiled.

“Fine. Tell me.” Sherry leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms over her middle.

What the hell was happening? Were they serious? If this didn’t turn out to be a big freaking joke, or she didn’t wake up from this dream soon, she might seriously have a nervous breakdown. She leveled her gaze on Raze, tapped her foot, and waited.

Janine nodded at Raze when he raised a brow to her. He cleared his throat and began talking. “I’ll start at the beginning when I met your sister.”

“I’ve heard this story. You two met and fell madly in love when she went on vacation last year.” Sherry rolled her eyes in frustration.

“No. We left out some details.” Raze shook his head.

“Like?” She was going to have to have her sister and Raze both committed after this, maybe herself for sitting here and listening to this ridiculous story.

“Janine was kidnapped by the leader of a rogue pack I belonged to. Understand that I was a member of this pack long before it turned rogue. After that, I was stuck in it. Every time I tried to escape, I was captured and punished. I decided to try once again, and of course, was caught. It is very hard to get away from a pack of lycans. They are attuned to every sound and smell and they could make any expert tracker look like an inept fool.”

Raze lifted his hand when she started to ask a question, and she snapped her mouth shut and glared at him.

“My punishment for my latest failed attempt at escape was your sister. Damon, the leader I mentioned, kidnapped your sister from a rest stop, brought her to the den, and insisted that I was to...” Raze’s face turned red, and he took a deep breath.

Sherry was pretty certain the sudden ruddiness of his skin had nothing to do with embarrassment and everything to do with anger. In fact, it was almost as if it radiated off him. His muscles tensed, and he closed his eyes and took several deep breaths. Janine squeezed his hand before he finally continued.

“I was instructed to use her as punishment because Damon knew I was so vehemently against such depraved acts that he and the other pack members enjoyed practicing.”

“Oh my God!” She sucked in a startled gasp and looked at Janine.

“It’s okay, Sherry. Raze never hurt me or forced me to do anything I didn’t want to.” Janine’s face turned red, but the source of her mottled skin was obviously from embarrassment.

“I devised a plan to get us both out of there, and we made it here. A few days later, Damon and some of the pack came looking for us. He was determined to kill me even if it meant killing everyone else and using Janine to accomplish it. Things got a bit complicated for a short time, but Damon and the rest were dealt with. It’s not something that was easy, but they threatened your sister’s life, and I couldn’t allow anyone to hurt her, nor would anyone else allow that here at Sanctuary.

“Sanctuary is a place for rogues to come and learn that we must protect our destined mates, that preservation of the ancient laws is essential to our race’s survival. If our mates are killed, we will have no way to reproduce. I didn’t want to tell you all of this because I didn’t want to upset you, but Janine insisted. And now that we have told you, I believe she was right. You have to be aware of the kind of danger you are in and take precautions.”

She didn’t ask exactly what he meant by Damon and the others being *dealt with*, but she was no dummy. Anyway, if some scumbag threatened her

sister, he'd deserved what he'd gotten. They all had. Fear knotted in her stomach. If all of this was true, her life had just been turned upside down.

"I don't want to be a werewolf or have one as a mate." Her bottom lip quivered. "I'm not a woodsy type of girl." She fought back the tears threatening to spill. "Are you telling me that these things are going to be hunting me or something?"

"We aren't things. We are just like you or anyone else," Janine said softly.

"You are definitely not just like anyone else. Not if you turn into wolves. But I'm not judging. I need some time to think about all of this. I'm just a little bit freaked out right now."

Sherry abruptly stood, knocking the chair over. Her brain was numb. She was glad her brain decided to take that route as a few seconds earlier, she'd been torn between shrieking or bursting into a hysterical fit of tears that would have lasted for a few hours or until someone had slapped some sense into her. Her hands shook as she went to retrieve her pajamas from her bag so she could take a long, hot shower before going to bed.

"You know that no one here will ever hurt you, Sherry. Right? Raze, myself, and everyone that you will meet tomorrow would die to keep you safe. I love you, and I'm sorry, but it's not like either of us had a choice in this. It just is."

"Yeah. Fate crap and all, right?" Fate must really hate her. She massaged her temples and could feel a wicked headache starting. "I don't want to talk about this anymore. I want to take a shower and go to bed."

She was almost too scared to go to bed because her mind would start playing with all the things Raze and Janine had told her, and she'd probably end up having a panic attack. Maybe tonight would be a good night to take one of those wonderful tiny yellow pills her doctor had prescribed to her for her anxiety. She only took them when she absolutely had to. She sighed. She wasn't fooling anyone, least of all herself. She hated taking pills, and she was well aware that she had suffered much more than she would have had she not been so damn stubborn about taking them in the past.

After the wreck, she'd needed something to help her cope as she'd suddenly developed severe anxiety when she was away from Janine for too

long. It was because she'd suffered a great loss, and she had convinced herself that if she could keep her sister close, nothing bad could happen to her. She'd gotten better over the years, but couldn't quite shake the anxiety completely. When Janine had gone on her vacation, which now Sherry knew must have been a horrible experience, she'd been dating Mike. It had helped having him there when she'd gotten anxious over Janine's absence. Unfortunately, she had more brotherly feelings toward him, and he hadn't been extremely happy about that fact, but he was a good guy and graciously accepted it.

If she had known what had really happened to Janine when she'd been away, she would have probably had a nervous breakdown. She had a deep seated fear of losing anyone she loved, especially her sister. She didn't blame her for not telling her the truth about what had happened on her vacation. She'd known that she wouldn't take the news well about her being in danger. In fact, if she thought about it, all the werewolf stuff paled in comparison with the information that she could have lost her sister.

Werewolf stuff? She turned the tap on in the shower and was surprised at how fast the water turned steamy. For being out in the middle of nowhere, the accommodations were excellent—albeit a little too rustic for her taste. She stepped under the water and let the heat and gentle massage of water bumping against her shoulders relax her.

Janine was worried for her safety. Not only that, but now things had started to make sense. Like why for the past few months Raze had insisted on walking her to her car after dark, or the way he seemed to be on constant vigil over her and Janine. If she had simply listened to her instincts, she would have figured out something was going on. She had laughed and gone along with it, thinking that Raze had simply been trying to be the macho protective male of the family to further impress Janine.

Yet, now she had to admit, it had seemed more than that. It had been as if he'd been expecting something to happen. Remembering now the way he'd constantly scan their surroundings made her stomach lurch. Everything they had told her was starting to sink in a bit, even though her brain still refused to accept it all. She'd almost asked Raze to change in front of her so she

could prove once and for all that it had been a big joke, but something had stopped her from doing so. While the voice of reason screamed that werewolves were a myth, a tiny flutter deep in her chest warned her that she shouldn't be so quick to cast off things that seemed impossible because she hadn't seen it with her own two eyes.

After all, she had faith in a higher being, and she'd never witnessed said being in person either. She based much of her life on hope and faith, and those were two things that were not tangible. Too many people tended to base religion around a single entity, but what it boiled down to for her was believing that she wasn't alone. Believing that someone watched over her. Believing that her mother and father would be there waiting for her—wherever they'd gone after they'd died—when she passed from this world.

She finished her shower, dried off, and dressed in sweats and a T-shirt. She normally liked a bit more girly stuff to sleep in, but didn't think it would be appropriate to wear sexy lingerie around Raze. Although, it would probably be fun to see if she could make him blush. All in good fun, of course, because she knew he only had eyes for her sister, which made her respect him that much more.

Chapter Four

He was dreaming of her again, but this time, it was something was different. Her features were clear to him. His heart nearly ceased beating in his chest at her beauty. Her red hair was thick, and shined like a copper penny. Her nose was small, her mouth was adorned by kissable pink lips, and her petite frame supported surprisingly full breasts that led to a tiny waist and gently flared hips.

“Who are you?”

Her soft, angelic voice nearly brought him to his knees. Her green eyes were wide as if she was scared—of him. A fierce wave of protectiveness followed by anger that she would be afraid of him slammed through his chest. Didn’t she know he was the one person that would never hurt her? He’d give his life for her, and if anyone else dared to hurt her, he’d take theirs.

“I’m Piers.” He kept his voice even and calm while his heart beat fast and hard. “What is your name?”

“She-erry.”

The joy of hearing her name warmed him and made his cock twitch in anticipation of claiming her. A shudder of pure, unadulterated lust shot through him, but he had to go slow. She was tiny, and his size alone must be intimidating to her. God, she was beautiful. He ached to reach out and touch her, tangle his fingers in all that glorious hair and tug her to him. Instead, he held his arms rigid at his sides.

“There’s no reason for you to be afraid of me, Sherry.” Her name was like heaven on his lips, and her flowery scent mixed with the mating scent that was for him alone teased him.

She looked around. They were in the cave, and he knew she’d be confused as it was the first dream connected to him that she would remember. It would seem so real to her—it was real...almost. Their connection was strong, and whatever they shared in their dreams would seem as if it had really happened upon waking. Their souls were in tune to one another even if their bodies, their minds, had never met.

She was his and he was hers. Nothing on earth could change that. He took a step toward her, and she backed away from him, her eyes warily watching his every move. He took several deep breaths to calm the raging urge to take her. He wanted her to come to him willingly, without hesitation, and that would take time.

"Where am I?" she whispered.

"You're dreaming." He decided to keep it simple. If he explained that she was his destined mate and they were actually connecting through their minds while sleeping, she'd probably slip out and wake up. He wasn't ready for the connection to be lost.

"Oh."

He moved slowly and sat down on a big rock just inside the mouth of the cave, and patted the flat surface beside him, beckoning her to join him. He watched the hesitation play over her face and was relieved when she'd obviously decided to accept his invitation and began to come toward him. Her movement was graceful, and the subtle sway of her hips made his fingers itch to touch her. She was made for loving, and he doubted she was aware of her allure or the effect she was having on him.

Her feminine movements were an unintentional seduction. They came natural to her and made him think of long, sweaty nights, silk sheets and the sound of her voice crying out his name over and over as he filled her, claimed her, gave her pleasure.

She sat next to him, careful to keep some distance between them, as if she could escape if need be. He'd give her that small measure of comfort, no matter how misguided it may be.

His cock twitched again when he saw the perfectly painted red toenails that peeked out from under the bottom of her sweats. Holy hell. He'd had women over the years, but not one of them had come close to driving his body to the brink of desire that now stirred in him. And all because of her dainty toes.

"Why are you watching me like that?" She looked around the cave once more before settling her gaze on him.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. Just intense or something." Her voice trailed off.

"You're beautiful."

His body flamed hotter when he saw the lovely shade of red that stained her cheeks. She was embarrassed by his compliment. She was so young, so innocent. She deserved much better than him. He'd grown to be a hard man over the years, and she shouldn't have been destined for him. He was not gentle or romantic. He'd never hurt her, but he was a man of experience and had grown weary of all the feuds and fighting amongst his kind.

Yet, he'd do his best to make her happy and to treat her with the respect and tenderness she deserved. Would it be enough? Where she was soft, he was rough. Where she was gentle, he was a warrior. Where she was innocent, he'd seen the selfish, deprived acts of

others that were carried out for the simple pleasure of hurting others. Why would fate bring someone like her into his world?

But he knew the answer to that. She was the light that would show him the way to his redemption. She was the only one that could save his damaged soul, make him whole once again. Simply sitting here by her soothed him, calmed him, put him at peace. And the turmoil she would cause inside him when he finally touched her would be ecstatic turmoil born of desire, not of anger or regret at the monsters his race was slowly becoming.

"No. I'm not, but thank you." She reached out tentatively and scraped shaking fingers through his hair as if silently thanking him for his compliment.

White-hot lightning shot to his groin when she touched him. Her fingers were like magic on him. He closed his eyes for a moment, reveling in her touch, and slowly opened them as her hand fell away from him, as if in slow motion, to her side.

She studied him. Her eyes dropped down his body as she perused him from head to toe, and when her eyes settled on his groin, his erection jerked in reaction. Her cheeks flamed bright red, and her full lips formed a small "o."

"You're so big. I mean, you're body is..." She hid her face in her hands in embarrassment. "I didn't mean, oh! Just forget it."

Her innocence was endearing to him, and he couldn't wait to show her how they could appreciate each other's bodies without embarrassment. He reached out and pulled her hand to him, placing it flat against his chest and then covering it with his own, the action done without thought. She gasped when she came into contact with him and electricity sparked between them.

"Don't ever be ashamed to tell me anything. You can always be yourself with me." He gave her hand a gentle squeeze of reassurance when it trembled against him.

"I don't know you."

"Yes, you do."

She shook her head in denial and he gave her hand another squeeze.

"Close your eyes." He didn't think she'd do as he asked, but after a few moments, her lids fluttered shut, and her dark, amber lashes rested against her pale skin.

He scooted closer to her, and her breath hitched. He kept her hand firmly over his beating heart. When he reached out and lightly stroked her cheek with the pad of his thumb, he barely kept a groan from escaping.

“Can you not feel the fire that burns between us, Sherry? Can you not feel how my heart beats for you under your fingertips? You and I are kindred spirits.”

He couldn't resist any longer and leaned in toward the slim column of her throat. He breathed her scent deep before his lips gently grazed her skin. She jumped, but didn't pull away from him, and he cupped her nape with his free hand to coax her against his mouth. As he continued to kiss her neck, her taut body began to relax and she melted into him.

He kissed a trail along her jaw line and to the corner of her mouth. Every instinct screamed at him to claim her, but he held on to control by a mere thread.

“Can I kiss you?” His voice shook with desperation.

Her eyes opened, and the passion that burned in their depths scorched him, matched his own desire. The slight nod of her head was all the response he needed, and unwilling to allow her the time to change her mind, his mouth crashed down on hers. A low growl clawed its way from his chest, and she moaned in response. She tasted like the sweetest honey, the forbidden apple in the Garden of Eden. She tasted like...his.

When she moaned again, he took advantage of her parted lips and slid his tongue into the recess of her mouth. She drove him crazy, mindless with wanting her. One kiss, one simple taste, one stroke of the tongue, and he was lost. He deepened the kiss, and his control snapped. Every urge, every demand that insisted he claim her roared to the surface.

He released her hand against his chest, and her fingers trailed up and over his shoulders, lightly massaging his tense muscles. He tangled his fingers in her hair and held her tight against him as his other hand snaked up the hem of her shirt. When he covered her breast, need so strong coursed through him that it blinded every last shred of common sense.

He pushed her to the ground. The breath that whooshed from her lungs as he covered her and wedged one knee between her thighs only made him burn hotter. He massaged her breast and rolled the peaked nipple between his fingers, aching to taste her...all of her. By the time he realized she was pushing against his chest, she'd disappeared.

His eyes flew wide, and he stood. His breathing came in ragged pants, and he dug his fingers through his hair. There was only one explanation why he had finally been able to see her so clearly, talk to her—she was near. His mate was close, and his heart beat in rapture. Every muscle in his body clenched in anticipation while his cock strained against his jeans, almost screaming for her. No, not her... Sherry. Her name was Sherry.

He wanted to find her right this instant, wanted to claim her and never let her go. She could bring so much joy to him. Joy he thought he'd never find, and love. While he'd prayed that she'd been out there somewhere, he had very little hope of ever finding her. She could be anywhere in the world, and the probability of him finding her had been infinite. It had been the worst, gut wrenching feeling he'd ever had, knowing she was out there and being unable to protect her. He turned and punched the cave wall, welcoming the pain that shot through his fist.

He'd felt useless. Rogues could have gotten her, and he'd never be able to stop it, but no more. She was close now, and he would find her. As soon as he took care of the business concerning his brother tomorrow, he would search for her to the ends of the earth if he had to. He would never stop until he found her, and he would find her, and he'd never let her go once he did.

The problem now? She'd remember him from the dream, and he had frightened her. He had no one to blame but himself. He had lost control. He'd taken things too fast. But she had responded to him, and that gave him a small amount of hope. Dusk would be here soon, and he could get business taken care of. Afterwards, he'd be able to focus his full attention on her.

Chapter Five

Sherry's eyes flew open, and a gasp escaped as she shot upright from her bed. Her breathing came in ragged gasps. The man she'd just dreamed about...Piers had seemed so real. She put her fingers to her lips. She swore she could feel them tingle from his kiss, and her body was hot, achy. She'd never felt such intenseness with a man. He'd practically oozed sex, and had made her melt. Her hesitation of him proved no match after he'd plastered her hand against his chest.

It was just a dream. *Hell, if dreams were always like that, no one would ever get out of bed.* She shifted, suddenly uncomfortably hot, and realized that dampness coated the insides of her thighs. A dream man had done this to her, made her a writhing mess of hormones, and not even a real live man had managed to do that up to this point in her life.

She'd had a few fumbled, awkward attempts at sex, but a few years ago after too many uncomfortable situations, she'd decided that she'd wait to have sex until she met the man of her dreams. She snorted. *Man of my dreams. Ha!* She was young when the accident that had killed her parents occurred, and she knew that had a lot to do with her failed relationships. She was scared to get close to anyone. Scared because she knew they could be taken from her with such ease. A slip on the stairs, a wrong step into traffic, a drunk driver, and they'd be gone.

She stumbled to the kitchen, opened the fridge door, pulled out a bottle of cold water, and drank down half of it. Her heart raced, and she was so aroused she ached for him.

She laughed. How could she ache for a man she'd conjured up in her imagination? He wasn't real. It must be all the stress from learning about all this werewolf crap. Maybe it was her mind's way of trying to cope with it. Simply replace it with a man who intimidated her, but turned her on at the same time.

He'd been so big, too big for her. She'd always been intimidated by men of his size, as far as dating material, and he'd been the biggest man she'd ever met. Her cheeks heated when she remembered the bulge in his jeans—

biggest in more ways than one. She went to her bag, quickly dug out the bottle of pills, broke one in half, and swallowed it before she could talk herself out of it. She was going to go back to sleep, and in the morning, she'd figure everything out.

She snuggled back under the covers on the sofa bed, which had proved surprisingly comfortable, and closed her eyes, waiting for the pill to work. She already hated herself for taking it. It made her feel weak even though she knew better. Everyone needed help at some point in their lives, and she was no different. Finally, she started drifting into sleep. Glorious, dreamless sleep.

* * * *

"Sherry. Sherry. Wake up." Janine shook her harder.

"Geez, Janine. Why are you waking me up so early?" Sherry groaned and tried to burrow back under the blankets her sister was jerking off her.

"It's not early. It's almost one o'clock in the afternoon," Janine growled. "Come on. We are getting everything set up for the cook out. Everyone is already here—except you."

She groaned. "Okay. Okay. You go ahead and I'll be there in a bit." She cracked her lids open and saw her sister standing there with her arms crossed over her middle as she so often did when she was agitated.

"You're little bit will result in all afternoon."

"I promise. I'll be there in an hour or less." She would, too, even if it killed her, which it might.

"Swear to me."

"I swear. Now go."

"Okay, but if you aren't out there in an hour, I'm coming to get you. And, I'll bring Raze and have him carry you out there if necessary."

"I'll be there."

"All right. When you're ready, we are set up not far past and to the right of the cabin. Raze, Anthony, and Brent are already putting the meat on the grill, and Karen and Rindy are anxious to meet you."

"I'm getting up right now. Now get out there, and let them know I'll be along in a bit."

"Seriously, one hour."

"Go!" Sherry laughed as Janine giggled and then dodged the pillow she tossed at her.

Before heading out the door, Janine paused. "Um, are you okay? I mean, after our talk last night?"

"I'm okay, but I don't really want to talk about it right now."

"All right." She gave Sherry one last long stare before going outside.

She was proud of herself. She'd taken another quick shower, had put on her makeup, pulled her hair into a cute top-knot, and was dressed with ten minutes to spare. She'd dressed warmer than yesterday in a white cotton hoodie that zipped up the front over the pink T-shirt with "chic" written in silver rhinestones across it. A matching pair of cotton pants that hugged her hips and white tennies with pink glitter on the toes completed the ensemble. It wasn't anything extremely fashionable, but it was cute and comfortable.

She went to find Janine and the others. Following the voices in the distance, she walked slowly along the tree line. If she was honest with herself, it was quite beautiful out here. A Monarch butterfly flitted by her and lit on the bark of a tree. She stepped closer and gasped when it flew off the tree and landed on her nose. She laughed at the way its legs tickled her before the butterfly took flight once again. She watched it, mesmerized, until it disappeared into the woods.

Maybe she'd been a bit judgmental about nature. She would try to enjoy herself the rest of the time she was here. Just up ahead, two big tables were set up, one laden with food, the other surrounded by several chairs and draped in a checkered tablecloth. A grill sat to the side of the empty table and three men, one Raze, stood around it drinking beer and poking at the meat searing on the grates. Raze was not small by any means, but the other two men were huge.

Another cabin was set back in the trees, but looked more like a mini mansion than a vacation getaway. It was a stunning sight with its wraparound deck and rustic charm.

Sherry spotted Janine, who was talking to a blonde and a black-haired woman. When she saw her approach, she waved for her to come over and join them. Sherry hurried over to where the women were standing.

"Sherry, this is Karen." She motioned to the black-haired woman. "And this is Rindy." She motioned to the blonde.

Karen was tall, curvy, and had beautiful blue eyes, while Rindy was closer to her petite size and had gray eyes. Both the women were pretty in their own ways, but Karen seemed a bit more laid back than Rindy, who continuously scanned the area as if expecting something to happen.

"Nice to meet you." Sherry shook Karen's and then Rindy's hand.

"Anthony? Come meet Janine's sister, Sherry," Karen called out.

"You too, Brent," Rindy followed up.

Anthony was quiet and intense. He was also huge and had gorgeous green eyes accented by inky black hair. He smiled and nodded. "Nice to meet you." His voice was low and quiet.

Brent was big, as well, but not quite as hulking as Anthony. He had chocolate brown eyes, brown hair, and an easy smile she was sure any woman would find attractive. "Glad to finally meet you. Janine talks about you all the time." Brent put his arm around Rindy's shoulders.

"She does?" She quirked a brow in her sister's direction. "I had no idea my sister was so fond of me." She chuckled and gently elbowed Janine in the ribs.

"Is the meat about done?" Karen asked.

"Yep. Everyone grab a plate." Brent followed Anthony back to the grill.

"Would you like something to drink, Sherry?" Raze asked her.

"I'd love some water if you have it."

"Coming up." He turned to Janine. "You need anything else?"

"Yeah, but it'll have to wait until later." Janine leaned in and whispered to Raze, but Sherry still heard her.

She covered her ears. "La la la la. Don't want to hear this."

Raze dropped a quick kiss on Janine's mouth and started for the cooler by the grill. After Raze handed Sherry a cold bottle of water, some

movement from the woods startled her. Seconds later, a blond boy stepped out. He stood watching them.

"Come on over, Collin. Grab a plate and join us," Brent called out to the kid.

When he hesitantly made his way toward them, Sherry noticed he was older than she'd originally thought, probably in his early twenties. His eyes were haunted, and hinted that he'd witnessed much violence for his young years. He got a plate and sat down. After she got her food, she made her way to the end of the table where he sat all alone.

"May I sit by you?" She smiled, but his mouth remained in a grim line.

"Sure." His voice was surprisingly deep, but quiet.

"Do you live here, Collin?" He was attractive in a boyish sort of way, but he wasn't her type.

He nodded his head yes.

Okay, so he wasn't a talker either. She ate her food and tried several more attempts at starting a conversation with him, but he didn't take the bait. When he was finished eating, he took his plate to the trash can and walked back toward the woods where he disappeared into the shadows of the trees.

"He's only been here a week. He's had some bad luck," Janine told Sherry.

"That's sad. I hope he gets better." She hated to see others suffer. She figured it was due to the tragedy she'd lived through, and could understand, at least on some level, their pain.

"He will. That's what Sanctuary is for." Janine smiled.

She finished eating, took her plate to throw it away, then walked back over to where Janine was sitting with the others. "I'm going to run back to the cabin real quick and use the bathroom." Sherry said to Janine.

"Feel free to use the bathroom in our cabin." Rindy pointed over her shoulder to the log cabin she'd seen when she'd first walked to the gathering.

"Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Not at all." Rindy took a bite of a burger that looked almost as big as she was.

"Thanks. Be right back."

* * * *

Piers made his way through the woods toward his target. He was delayed when he spied the young, blond lycan. The boy hadn't stayed with the group for long before making his exit. Now that he was gone, Piers started to move in again. When he stood at the edge of the clearing, his gaze went straight to the lycan who had to be Anthony Wolfson.

He was big, bigger than the other lycans had described, but Piers wasn't deterred. He was sure he could take him. He found it hard to drag his eyes from the man who'd killed his brother, but he had to assess the battle ground. Besides Anthony, there were two other men and three women. He knew the women's presence was to his advantage since at least one of the males would protect them by keeping them away from Piers.

They all appeared to have just finished eating and were setting up a game of horseshoes. They were going to be playing close to the edge of the woods, and his opportunity to avenge his brother was close at hand. The deer scent he'd sprayed on himself would wear off soon and give away his true identity, but for now, they'd think nothing of his presence, thinking it was a doe or buck that had wandered close.

He tensed when Anthony moved closer to his position. Within moments, the ancient's nostrils flared. He'd been made. His plan of a surprise attack was compromised and he put plan B into action. He ran toward the log cabin, hoping that only Anthony would follow before the others caught on to what was happening. There was a small chance his backup plan would work since the others were a bit farther away from where he'd been standing. He was hoping the ancient would instruct both the other males to stay behind and protect the females.

He ran all out and knew Anthony was now on his tail. The first opportunity, he'd take him down quick. He didn't want to risk a drawn out fight, which might allow enough time for the other males to get the females to safety and return to help out.

Chapter Six

Sherry thought the cabin was a beautiful place and very modern, unlike the small cabin she'd been staying in with Janine and Raze. If she had a place like this, living in the middle of nowhere might not be so bad. She opened the front door and stepped out onto the deck. She looked up at the ceiling and admired the woodwork. She stepped back to get a better look and ran smack into a solid wall. She shook her head, thinking somehow she'd walked into the wall, when a strong arm snaked around her waist and she froze.

At first she'd thought that maybe Raze was playing around with her, but when every hair on the back of her neck rose in warning and instant dread swirled in her stomach, she knew something was very wrong. Her eyes flew wide, and a scream bubbled from her throat, but was cut off when Anthony ran into the clearing from the trees and froze.

"Let her go."

"I don't think so. You murdered my brother." His low voice sent shivers through her body.

Sherry watched as Anthony's brows drew downward as if he was confused by the man's accusation. What was going on, and how did she end up in the middle of it?

"Who is your brother?" Anthony asked quietly.

"You mean who *was* my brother. His name was Daniel, and he came here to talk to you about Raze along with Damon when you slaughtered him."

"That's not how it happened." Anthony remained calm, but his green eyes hinted at his agitation and worry.

"I heard more than one person tell me exactly how it happened, and they all had the same story."

He started moving down the stairs of the deck slowly, keeping her tight against his chest while he dragged her along as he inched toward the others. When they got closer, she noticed Raze and Brent standing in front of Karen, Rindy, and Janine trying to protect them while she tried to push around Raze.

"Sherry! Are you okay?" Janine's voice was frantic, and tears streaked her cheeks.

Sherry could barely breathe from the arm wrapped so tightly around her. She covered the hard forearm with her hand and was surprised when electricity shot through her fingertips. He tensed behind her, giving away the fact that he'd felt it as well.

"Please. You're holding me too tight. I can't breathe," she gasped. He instantly loosened his hold on her, but not enough to where she thought she could get free. She took a couple steady breaths before answering. "I'm okay, Janine."

"Please! Please, let my sister go. Take me. Just don't hurt her."

"No!" Raze yanked Janine to him as she tried to get around him again. She fought him like a hellcat, but he subdued her, and she sobbed against his chest.

"What do you want?" Raze glared over her head at the man holding her.

"He wants me." Anthony said, who was now standing about twenty feet from them with clenched fists. "He accuses me of killing his brother during the encounter with Damon after he came to deal with your desertion from the pack." He looked at Raze as he spoke.

"You're Raze, aren't you?"

Raze nodded at the man who had Sherry in a death grip.

"You are part of the reason my brother is dead. As it must be painfully obvious what I want, and also that I'm not going to get it, at least at this point, I'll be taking her along with me to make sure I have another chance."

He started dragging her toward Janine's Jeep. She kicked and fought, but it was like a fly fighting a giant. Once they got to the Jeep, he opened the driver's door and pushed her inside. He kept pushing her until she was sitting in the passenger seat, and got in beside her. She tried to jump out, but he grabbed her by the arm, his grip relentless and unbreakable.

She was terrified. Was he a rogue? Was he going to hurt her? He hadn't hurt her yet, but who was to say what he'd do to her once they were alone? She began praying that she'd get out of this alive and that she'd see her sister again.

* * * *

They watched helplessly as the Jeep pulled away. Janine sobbed uncontrollably against Raze's chest.

"We have to go after her. He's going to hurt her," Janine cried out through ragged breaths.

Her crying tore at his heart. He was going to make the bastard pay for upsetting his woman. "I don't think he'll hurt her."

"How can you say that?" She gripped his shirt hard with both hands.

"I think she's his mate."

"Wh-what? No. No, it can't be."

"He could have hurt her very easily, but didn't. Didn't you see his eyes when she touched him?"

Janine shook her head.

"He looked like I felt when I first met you—a lost man who'd just been saved." He stroked her back, trying to comfort her. "Trust me in this. I don't believe he will hurt her."

"We still have to figure out how to get her back. She'll be terrified." Janine laid her cheek against his chest, and he hugged her tight.

"We'll get her back, but if I'm right and she's his mate, he won't give her up easily."

* * * *

Fate was a bitch. When he'd gotten close to the deck of that cabin and caught her scent, the impact of her being there nearly dropped him to his knees. How hadn't he known she was that close? He knew the answer to that. He'd been too focused on revenge—that mixed with her flowery scent had been enough to mask her closeness. Had she not had that damned perfume on, he'd have known of her presence last night. She was in the Jeep—the one he'd just stolen—when it had driven up yesterday. He could smell her scent, her sister's scent, and Raze's scent, who was obviously her sister's mate.

He felt bad about upsetting her sister. Hell, he felt even worse about scaring Sherry, but he'd had no choice. They would have never let him near her again had he not taken her now.

He glanced at her, and his chest tightened when a tear escaped down her cheek. He gripped the steering wheel so hard it creaked under the pressure.

"I'm not going to hurt you."

"You kidnapped me, and I'm supposed to believe you aren't going to hurt me?" She brushed the tears off her cheeks with the back of her hand in a choppy motion as if she was angry that she'd let him see her cry.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't here for you." Not yet anyway.

"We are almost to the highway. Can't you let me go and just take the Jeep?" she pleaded with him.

"Sorry." And he was. Not for taking her, but for scaring her, and for their first meeting taking place as a hostage situation. She deserved better, but it was too late now. He'd find a way to make it all up to her somehow.

A few silent hours later, she'd fallen asleep. Her head rested against the passenger window, and her coppery hair tangled over her face. She was so beautiful. His body was in a state of constant aching for her. He wanted to claim her, love her, show her how much he cherished her, but he knew he had to take it slow with her. She was flighty, and he couldn't blame her for being wary of him.

He'd have to prove to her that she could trust him, that he'd keep her safe and never hurt her. Throwing her down and jumping her wouldn't be the way to earn that trust. His cock hardened when she moaned in her sleep. Since his place was still several hours away, he'd planned to stop at a motel for the night. There was one about twenty miles up the road, but the fuel light had been on for a few miles now, and he'd have to stop and fill up before they reached their destination.

He could already picture how she'd look lying naked on his bed. Her red hair flowing over the pillows, her gorgeous green eyes burning for him, her pink lips parted in invitation, and her thighs slightly parted in welcome. He growled in frustration. He needed a fucking cold shower to calm his dick down.

He took the next exit and pulled up to what looked like a deserted gas station—most things looked deserted in these parts. He parked next to the pump closest to the road, and slid a sideways look at her. The long lashes that rested against her skin and her even breaths told him she had not awakened. He gingerly stepped out, activated the pump with his credit card, and filled the tank. Within a couple minutes, he was back on the road. It was dark as pitch out now, and the ghost town he'd just gassed up in grew smaller in the mirror as he drove away along the road thickly lined with trees. He stopped at the stop sign at the end of the road that signaled he'd reach the on ramp for the highway shortly.

Just as he started to roll on, Sherry awoke with a startled gasp, jerked the door open, and ran through the edge of the tree line. He pulled to the side of the road and parked the Jeep. He wasn't worried about finding her. He'd have no trouble. His main concern was for her safety. She wouldn't be able to see in the thick woods, and she could fall and hurt herself.

He sprang from the car, locked the doors, and shoved the keys in his pocket. If she had any idea how his body came to life at the thought of chasing her, she'd be petrified—more so than she already was. Lycans loved a good chase, and chasing after his mate brought out primal demands that were close to impossible for him to control. He took a deep breath and went after her.

Chapter Seven

She ran through the dark forest until her lungs felt as if they would burst. Branches and thorns caught her clothes and scratched her face and arms as she blindly fled through the thick woods. She was scared and confused. When she realized the man who'd kidnapped her was the man from her dreams the night before, she'd nearly fainted. But how was that possible? The memories of the way he'd touched her, kissed her, stoked her body to life had rushed back to her brain like a shock of cold water dumped on her.

He was huge and intimidating. His golden brown eyes were intense, predatory...beautiful. When he looked at her, she felt as if he were staking a claim, and his black hair framed a face that could tempt Aphrodite herself. He was built like a Viking warrior—sleek, strong, hard, mouth watering, and the black T-shirt and jeans he wore hugged his perfectly sculpted body. But her attraction to him was what confused her most. She wanted to run her hands along every hard contour of his body, outline every indentation of gorgeous muscle that shrouded him.

She'd never felt such an intense, sexual attraction to a man. *And it had to be to a man that kidnapped you?* She couldn't go on much longer. Her legs shook with the exertion of running, and piercing pains shot through her heaving sides. She had to escape, but a sinking feeling in her stomach told her she'd never outrun him, and even if by some small miracle she did, she had no idea where she was. What was worse? Being caught by him again or being lost in the middle of the woods? She knew absolutely nothing about surviving outdoors.

Her paces slowed and she was about to surrender to exhaustion when she ran into a hard, male body. She didn't have to see him to know exactly whom she'd run into. His clean, woodsy scent assailed her, and she was almost relieved when his arms came around her. He held her securely against his chest as she gasped for breath. She eyed him, a little peeved at the way his breathing came slow and even as she labored against him. He brought a hand up to her nape, tangled his long fingers in her hair, and tugged her head back.

She expected to feel his mouth on her skin, but instead, he lowered his face to her neck and sniffed.

She had every intention of protesting until his lips touched hers. After that, she was lost. What was it about him, a man she should loathe, that made her lose all logic? She'd wanted to feel his mouth on hers just like in her dream, but this time, there would be no waking up.

His kiss wasn't gentle or coaxing, but more of a soul-searing promise of things to come, a promise of the pleasure he would show her. Her heart thumped even faster when his tongue eased between her lips, and she gasped as he twirled it around her own tongue, tasting and retreating and repeating. She raised her hands and laid them flat against his deliciously hard chest. She wanted to caress him, hear him growl in pleasure against her as she stoked him higher.

He groaned and nudged her until her back met a tree. His mouth never left her as he covered her with his hard frame and pinned her to the trunk. The low, rumbling growls coming from him sent heat straight to her belly. When he wrapped one hand under her thigh and wedged his hips between her legs, his cock strained against her, and all she could think about was him inside her, taking her, making love to her. She arched against him, and he broke the kiss, his face a scant inch from hers. His breathing was now nearly as labored as hers, giving proof that he was as affected by her touch as she was by his.

"Don't do that again, or I swear, I will take you right here against this damned tree." His eyes glowed eerily.

"What is wr-wrong with your eyes?" His eyes scared the hell out of her, but his words heated her wanton body even more.

"Nothing." He closed them for a second, and when he opened them, they were normal again.

"Oh my God." Then it dawned on her. "It's all true. What my sister and Raze told me. Werewolves exist and you are one of them."

The growling, the sniffing, the eerie eyes, Janine had told her the truth. What if he was a rogue? Terror gripped her hard in its ugly hand and squeezed until she could barely breathe.

“You know about us?”

“Are you a rogue?” Tears streamed down her cheeks now. “Are you going to hurt me because I carry the scent?”

He sucked in a deep breath and swore when she started to sob, then tenderly wiped the tears off her cheeks with his thumb.

“I’m not a rogue. I’m not going to hurt you. If I had any intention of hurting you, I could have—would have—done it by now.”

“Why won’t you let me go then?”

“I can’t.”

“Why?” Was he going to bargain with her? “Please don’t try to trade me for Anthony. I can’t bear knowing I’m responsible for someone else’s death.”

“I meant it when I said I won’t do anything that will hurt you.” He released her and held his hand out. “Come on. Let’s go back to the car. There’s a motel up the road that we are stopping at for the night.”

“Why are you doing this?” she whispered.

“I have my reasons.” A muscle in his jaw started to tick.

“Janine told me what happened the night Damon came for Raze. If your brother was one of the members of the pack that came with him, he deserved to die. He would have abused and killed my sister without a second thought.”

He clenched his teeth, snagged the front of her shirt, and yanked her to him. She squeaked when he brought his face down to hers.

“You don’t know anything about my brother.”

“No, but I know my sister, and she would not lie about something like that.”

His eyes closed and dark, thick lashes—sinfully thick for a man—fanned against his skin. When his lids opened a moment later, some of the rage that burned in them had subsided. “I don’t want to hear another word about it right now.”

“What is your name?”

“Piers Kavanagh. What is your last name?”

“Denton.” Piers. Just like in her dream. This whole ordeal was getting stranger by the minute. “Can I call my sister when we get to the motel?”

“We’ll see.” When she didn’t take his offered hand, he reached for hers anyway and began tugging her along behind him as he guided them through the dark trees.

“Can we go a bit slower, please?” It was hard for her to keep up with his long gait, and she was already exhausted from her blind run through the woods.

“Sorry.” His shoulders stiffened, and he slowed down a bit.

For some strange reason, she believed him when he said he wouldn’t hurt her, but she still didn’t want to be alone with him. When he touched her, she didn’t want him to stop. She’d have to keep her guard up around him. He wasn’t for her. He was too big, too intimidating...too everything. He might not physically hurt her, but she had a feeling he could hurt her in other ways, ways that could destroy her—ways that included breaking her heart.

She felt a strong connection to him, but lust didn’t equate to love, and he didn’t strike her as the falling in love sort. He was undoubtedly skilled in the bedroom, could probably show her pleasure like she’d never known existed, but in the end, he’d leave her. And in the end, he’d take her heart with him. She didn’t know how she was so certain that she could easily fall in love with him, but some sixth sense and the way her lips still tingled from his kiss told her it was so.

The whole thing was puzzling. She should be repulsed by him, yet when he touched her, all she could think about was his mouth on her, all over her, her mouth on him...all over him.

* * * *

He sat on the edge of the bed, every muscle tense as he listened to Sherry talk on the phone. He was impressed with the way she stayed calm for her sister’s sake.

“I’m okay, Janine. Yes. No. He hasn’t hurt me.”

He couldn’t do this. She was going to end up hating him if he forced her to stay with him. He couldn’t just let her walk away, though, yet maybe if he let her, she’d trust him. Maybe if he took her back to Sanctuary, she’d give

him a chance. He wanted to tell her she was his mate and explain to her how important she was to him. He needed to assure her that he'd never intended for them to meet like this.

The things she'd said about the confrontation at Sanctuary involving his brother was another problem. Had her sister been telling her the truth about what happened that night? If his brother had threatened Raze, Brent or Anthony's mates in any way, his death was justified. Hell, even if he hadn't threatened the women but attacked any of the men, they had also been within their rights to defend themselves.

Why hadn't he bothered to confront Anthony about the situation? Why hadn't he dug a little deeper before putting so much faith into the words of a rogue pack?

The answer was simple—misguided, but simple. He hadn't wanted to believe his brother had gone so astray. If Daniel had done what Sherry said, it would have been too late to save him. Piers would still have tried, but not at the cost of others. He'd wanted a family so badly, his narrow-mindedness had blinded him, and he'd never bothered to consider that his brother had deserved his fate.

The scenario Sherry painted made much more sense. Anthony was an ancient like he was, and Piers wouldn't kill for no reason. If he was honest with himself, he'd have to admit Anthony probably didn't either. He'd really fucked up this time, and his mate was stuck in the middle of a mess he'd created. Yet, he couldn't bring himself to be completely sorry that she'd been there because had she not, he might have killed an innocent man. Unfortunately, none of it relieved the pain of losing the family he'd yearned for for so long.

He made a decision and grabbed the phone from her.

"Hey!" She grabbed for his hand, but he gently swatted her away and put his ear to the phone.

"I'll bring her back tomorrow."

"If you've hurt her—"

"I haven't hurt her, nor will I." Sherry's sister obviously loved her, and he couldn't fault her for that. "She'll be back by sundown tomorrow." He

clicked the phone off before she could respond and tossed it onto the nightstand.

“Did you mean it?” Sherry sat with her mouth open, staring at him.

“I don’t lie.” He was already regretting the decision to return her. He needed her and would never willingly let her disappear from his life, but he cared for her enough to try to do the whole relationship routine. He wanted to do right by her.

She was young and innocent and he...wasn’t. When he claimed her, he wouldn’t do so like a gentle, unschooled boy. His instincts would win out, and he would possess her. He would never hurt her, but he doubted the restraint he’d be able to apply the first time he took her. He needed her to trust him, to know he wouldn’t harm her no matter how out of control he got.

Maybe he should just walk away from her. She was too small, too delicate. He’d never be what she needed. Anger scorched him, and he fought the urge to put his fist through the wall.

“Why are you letting me go?”

“Because I can admit when I’ve made a mistake.”

“So you believe me about what happened with your brother?”

“Let’s just say that now that I’ve gotten two sides of the story, I’m coming to some different, however difficult, conclusions.”

“I can’t imagine what it was like to lose your brother. If something happened to Janine, I’d be devastated, especially after losing our parents.”

“I didn’t even know him.” He shook his head. “I had just hoped—”

“Hoped what?”

“Nothing. Just forget it. In fact, by this time tomorrow, you can forget all of this ever happened.”

“Piers, I—”

He held his hand up to stop her words. He wasn’t ready for this conversation. He’d just realized how wrong he’d probably been about his brother, and he didn’t want to wallow in self pity or cry like a woman. He was a man, and he would suck it up and move on.

"I'm taking a shower." He wasn't afraid she'd run again. He had the keys to the Jeep and she had no idea where they were. Besides, if she did, he'd have no trouble tracking her down.

He closed the door after entering the small but clean bathroom. He pulled his clothes off, folded them, and laid them on the counter. Thankfully, the shower was decent and the water was hot. Once he stepped into the steamy stall, he realized he should have made it cold. One thought of their kiss in the forest made his cock rock hard. He could still feel her hesitation as his mouth had taken hers, and then her blissful surrender when she'd melted against him.

He circled his shaft and brought himself to quick, unsatisfying relief. He hoped to God he could make it through the night without taking her. All he could think about was thrusting into her hot, wet flesh, of how she'd close around him as he sank into her. He cursed under his breath and shut off the water. He dried and wrapped the towel around his hips before opening the bathroom door.

She gasped when he walked back into the room, and he grunted. "Sorry. I didn't exactly bring anything to sleep in as I wasn't expecting to stay overnight anywhere." It wouldn't have mattered anyway since his usual sleep attire was nothing but his skin.

He was on edge, and his dick was getting hard again as he watched her eyes roam over his body. He turned his back to her, trying to block the insanity of black need threatening to wipe out his willpower.

"Oh my! You have a tattoo."

"Mm hm." He nodded as he stared out the window. The wind had picked up and the trees that lined the back of the parking lot were swaying back and forth.

* * * *

Good Lord. The man was a tank, and his back was a breathtaking spectacle. She hadn't understood the appeal of tattoos in the past, but the black wolf splayed across his back was exquisite. Its head was ensconced

between his shoulder blades, and its body ran the entire length of his back, ending just before it dipped under the towel wrapped around his hips. Its eyes were the same golden brown color as Piers' and held the same eerie glow his had in the woods. And even though she was aware the tattoo was not alive, it watched her as if it were stalking her and waiting for the precise moment she let her guard down to pounce.

For some reason, maybe because of the way the wolf appeared to move over the play of muscle on Piers' back, she was drawn to it. Whoever inked him was one talented artist. She didn't think a wolf in the wild could look any more lifelike. Without thinking, she slid off the bed and moved closer to him. When her fingers touched his skin, he sucked in a sharp breath and she snatched her hand back, letting it hover a scant inch from the tantalizing beast. When she looked up, the intensity of Piers' gaze burned back at her from the reflection of the glass in the window. His muscles bunched, but otherwise, he remained perfectly still. Her hand trembled, but she couldn't help but continue her exploration of the wolf.

"This is one of the most amazing things I've ever seen," she whispered in awe as she stroked fur that looked so real she was sure it would tickle her fingers.

Her mouth went dry as she traced along the sculpted muscles that ran the length of Piers' back. What was it about this man that made her want to touch him? Why did she not find some of the stronger traits he possessed displeasing? In the past they had been big turn-offs in other men she'd met. The dominance that radiated off him like a second skin, his six and a half foot intimidating frame, the intense, predatory, and unashamed way he watched her, and his obvious ease with nature. For some reason, in this particular man, every one of those things sparked a flame of curiosity inside her that burned brighter with each passing minute she spent with him.

Her brain and body were locked in a silent battle. One warned her to avoid him at all cost and the other longed for him to touch her again. Her fingers traced the edge of the towel that rode low over his tight butt, while her naughty side—a side that rarely showed itself until now—urged her to

continue downward. She resisted the journey her fingers begged to take, but couldn't deny that he truly was remarkable.

The top of her head barely came to the bottom of his thick shoulder blades, but she wasn't intimidated. In fact, she felt utterly feminine around him and peculiarly safe. He'd said he wouldn't hurt her, and while, at first, she hadn't been sure if she could believe him or not, he had promised to return her to her sister tomorrow. Not to mention that she had a hard time denying the truth of the words he spoke in the woods after he'd caught her. If he was going to harm her, he'd had plenty of opportunities to do so. She realized something else. She wasn't feeling her usual anxiety from being so far away from Janine. It was as if nothing in the world could possibly harm her or her loved ones while he was near. But why?

His scent was intoxicating and drew her as honey drew bees, and she leaned closer. If she followed the urge and allowed herself to get closer to him, would she end up the innocent lamb led to slaughter? His skin radiated heat, and the longing pulsing through her that begged she kiss his back blocked out all images of lambs, slaughter, and wolves.

"Piers?"

"Sherry, if you don't stop touching me, I'm going to toss you on that bed and make love to you until we both pass out from exhaustion." His voice came low and laced with promise.

The mysterious spell he had on her lifted at his words, and she was appalled at what she'd been doing. "I-I'm so sorry." She started to back away. "I didn't mean to—"

He spun around, circled her wrists with his long fingers, and drew her to him. "I don't want you to be sorry. I just want you to understand that you keep me teetering on the edge of control. I'm trying hard not to scare you, but I won't lie. I'd like nothing better than to slide into you and ride you until you scream my name."

"I don't understand." Her cheeks heated, and she wasn't exactly sure how to respond to him, especially now that she was faced with his incredible chest. God, he was ripped like no other. No man had ever been this forward

with her. She'd dated mostly sweet, shy men, and Piers was neither sweet nor shy.

"Yes, you do." He pressed her palms to his chest and held them to him. "You can feel the pull between us just as I can. There's no use denying it. You proved you felt it in the woods when I kissed you. You responded to me in the cave as well. You wanted me even if you aren't willing to admit it out loud."

How could he possibly know about the cave? It had been a dream. What the hell was going on here? She backed away from him and when he took a step toward her, she shook her head. He stopped instantly. She needed time to think.

She turned and ran to the bathroom. After locking the door—a door he could probably knock down with little effort—she slid down in front of it until her butt hit the floor. She couldn't think of any logical reason that he would know about her dream. She stood back up on shaky legs, peeled her clothes off, and started the shower. Maybe the soothing, hot water would help her come up with an explanation—one that wouldn't freak the shit out of her.

She stood under the hot spray trying to understand his knowledge of the dream, but soon the only thing she was thinking about was that he'd been in the same shower only a few minutes ago. Flashes of his naked, wide back, the wolf, and beads of water dripping down his shoulders, over his chest and sliding over his six pack abs made her hot, achy and confused. He was right. She did want him.

Chapter Eight

She'd been standing in front of the door staring at it for at least twenty minutes now. She didn't want to go back out there with Piers. She'd taken as long as humanly possible showering, washing her underwear out, drying her hair, and putting her clothes back on. She'd contemplated washing them out too, but didn't think it was a good idea to go traipsing around in front of him with only a towel. If she had the same impact on him he'd had on her in just a towel, there would be trouble—fireworks shooting off, screaming for mercy, hot sex kind of trouble.

Just the thought of his hard body on display for her made her pulse race. She could imagine how delicious he would feel against her, skin to skin, mouth to mouth. Her cheeks turned hot. What was wrong with her? Why did he have such an effect on her?

He scared her. He intrigued her. He made her feel things she didn't understand. He unsettled her, but...she kind of liked it. His predatory swagger called to her, mocked her with the promise of the pleasure she instinctively knew he could bring her. And his hands...she closed her eyes and swallowed hard. His big hands had been gentle, had known exactly how to caress her. He made her burn.

She took a deep breath and yanked the door open with more force than she'd intended. She found him sitting on the edge of the bed eating a miniature bag of cookies. She'd thought the bed to be fairly big until now. With him on it, it looked pretty small. She was thankful he'd pulled his jeans back on, although they sat almost as low as the towel had on his hips, and he'd left the top button undone.

"There is some food on the table by the window. It's not much. Vending machine crap, but it's all I could find. Better than nothing." He tipped the bag of cookies up to his mouth and tapped the rest of the crumbs from the bottom.

"Thanks." She was hungry. She walked to the table where several bags of chips, cookies, crackers, candy bars and four cans of soda were scattered about. She opened a soda, set it back down after taking a long drink, and

opened a pack of peanut butter crackers. She was hungrier that she thought and finished one pack and part of another before drinking the rest of the soda.

She looked over at the chair in the corner and made her way toward it, but he caught her wrist as she tried to pass him.

“No.”

“I’m not sleeping in that bed with you.” She tried to pull free, but he held her firmly.

“Why not?” One dark brow quirked up.

“You know why.” She wanted to stomp her foot like a small, furious child.

He tugged her slowly toward him until she was standing between his knees. His legs closed around her thighs and imprisoned her while he skimmed the back of his fingers up her neck and cupped her cheek. She was eye level with him now that he was sitting, and his intense gaze burned through her as if he could see into her soul.

“Yes. I know why, but I’m too big to sleep on that tiny chair, and you aren’t going to.”

When she started to protest, he placed one long finger over her lips. “How about I make you a deal? Hmm? I won’t touch you unless you ask me to.”

She wasn’t sure that was a good idea either as she didn’t trust herself around him. Even now, standing this close to him, that’s exactly what she wanted him to do—touch her. Her doubt must have shown clearly on her face.

“I’ll sleep on the damn floor then.” He released her and stood.

“No.” When he reached for a pillow, she placed her hand on his shoulder. “That’s not fair. I don’t want you to sleep on the floor.” She could be an adult about this. “I’ll sleep under the covers and you can sleep on top, and stay on your side.”

His predatory smile, which flashed her a good amount of even, white teeth did little to soothe her worries. She snuggled under the covers and he lay in the bed beside her. His shoulders were so wide he was nearly touching

her. She slid a surreptitious glance his way, and the sight of him made her lungs struggle to drag in breaths. She'd made a big mistake by letting him sleep beside her.

He was stretched out on his back, his feet dangling off the end of the bed, and his fingers linked behind his head. He was massive, and the heat that radiated off his skin sank into her body invitingly. She could imagine how nice it would be to cuddle up against all that warmth.

"If you don't stop looking at me like that, I might forget my promise." He turned his head and met her stare. "Or do you want me to forget my promise?"

She gasped and rolled on her side away from him. She was furious when he chuckled, wanted to smack that grin right off his gorgeous face. Instead, she practiced some deep breathing exercises until she fell asleep.

* * * *

She ran her fingers along his side, down his ribs where she examined each and every one before continuing to his stomach where she treated each muscle there with the same thorough exploration. He knew this was a dream, but damned if he wanted to wake up from it. Her touch drove him wild, and he wanted to lick and kiss every inch of her.

Her green eyes were fixed on him as she continued traversing his body, treating it like her own personal playground. Her small teeth worked her bottom lip, and he ached to kiss her, but didn't want to do anything to discourage her perusal of him. He wanted her to touch him, to feel comfortable that he would not do anything she wasn't ready for. But, God, she was stretching his control.

When she touched him, his heart pounded, his chest ached, and everything in him demanded he claim her. She made him feel alive again, made some of the darkness he'd let engulf him over the years disappear. He'd seen so much sorrow, so many of his race needlessly killed because they'd gone rogue. Lycans were dangerously dwindling in numbers, and he feared they were fighting a losing battle trying to reign them in.

He already loved Sherry, but he wasn't sure she'd believe him. It was too soon to make such declarations of undying devotion. Nevertheless, it was true, and would remain so until the day death came for him.

Her tiny fingers traveled dangerously close to the top of his jeans and he groaned.

"Please. You're killing me. I need to touch you." He barely got the words through his clenched teeth.

She smiled up at him and shook her head. Her silky hair bounced over her shoulders. "You promised, Piers."

"Yes. I did, but I'm no saint, Sherry."

"You won't renege on your word." She hesitated for a moment before sitting up on her knees beside him.

She bent and placed her lips against his. He bunched the blanket he was lying on in his fists, praying he was able to keep his word and keep his hands to himself. Why did he have to be such a noble bastard? She nibbled at him, and he yearned to taste her. Just when he thought she'd deny him, she slipped the tip of her tongue between his lips. He greedily met her tongue with his, and when she gasped, he unashamedly took advantage of the situation and deepened the kiss.

She supported herself with a hand on each of his shoulders, but he barely noticed her weight and wished she'd press her lush breasts against his chest. Her nipples were hard, and he'd bet they were as pink as her T-shirt. He ached to cup her in his hands, but vowed to keep his promise to her even if it killed him, and it might. When she finally rubbed the turgid tips against him, his heart stuttered and the sheer ecstasy of the intimate contact sent a shudder through him.

If he didn't stop her soon, he would break his promise. The need to touch her burned through him with such urgency, he shook with the effort it took to keep his hands off her. He reluctantly broke the kiss.

"Sherry." When she ignored him and continued to caress his body, he spoke louder. "Sherry."

"Yes?" Her eyes locked on his.

"Either tell me I can touch you, or kill me now. I can't take any more." Her tinkle of laughter in response settled low in his groin, and his cock grew impossibly hard and throbbed.

She bent and touched the tip of her tongue to his nipple, and he nearly came on the spot. He almost stopped breathing when she looked up at him. Her green eyes burned with the same carnal need clawing at him. She wanted him as bad as he wanted her. He knew

she wasn't aware she was teasing him, and she wasn't playing games with him. She was innocent, and had no idea of the seductive power she held over him.

She dipped her mouth back to him, and nipped him. "Sherry!"

She ignored his plea, and continued to torture him with her sweet mouth. She traced a wet path from his nipple down to his navel, leaving a trail of fire behind. He was clutching the blanket so hard, his knuckles were white. The wolf inside him howled, and the predator demanded its freedom to claim what was his. He wanted to scream in frustration at the unfulfilled need throbbing in his cock. He wanted to cry in joy and beg her to never stop touching him. He wanted to love her like she deserved.

"Please, Sherry. Tell me I can touch you, damn it."

He groaned when her lips left his overheated skin. She sat up and stared at him for what seemed eternity. "I'm scared." She eyed him from head to toe and back. "You're so big."

He sat up beside her and cupped her cheek in his palm. "I won't lie to you. You drive me wild, and the last thing on my mind at this very moment is a gentle loving. I ache to feel you close around me as I sink into your hot, tight wetness. I want nothing more than to drive into you until we are both out of our minds with pleasure—until you have no doubt that you belong to me. But I swear to you that I won't hurt you. I care for you, and I'll take it slow." Even if it kills me.

He yearned to give her the slow, thorough loving she deserved. No matter how they made love—quick and frenzied, slow and gentle—her pleasure would be his number one priority. However, he feared the blinding need clawing his insides would rip all rational thought from his brain and the wolf would take over. The wolf would never hurt his mate, but his main mission was to claim her, mark her as his own so that any other lycan would understand that she was taken. The wolf wanted to make it known that if another dared touch her, the consequence would be death.

The wolf wasn't interested in slow and gentle. The wolf was interested in an animalistic, frenzied staking of property. Piers the man would never view her as property, but the predatory instinct was as old as time itself, and it was a part of him he could not deny. She was precious, and he would give anything for her happiness, including his life. He would always treat her like the queen she was to him and put her safety above all else for, if she died, his soul would be lost. If she died, he'd die, maybe not in the physical sense, but his essence would simply cease to exist. Now that he'd found her, he knew he hadn't really

ever existed without her. He'd only been a part of a bigger puzzle, or a two piece puzzle of which he'd found the other long lost piece.

"Damn it, Sherry. Please tell me I can touch you."

"Kiss me, Piers."

He captured her lips before she had time to change her mind. If pureness had a taste, it was Sherry. He scooted closer until their upper bodies were nearly touching and urged her back against the arm he'd just slipped behind her. She was at the perfect angle for him to devour her mouth and for the luscious peaks of her nipples to brush against his chest. She moaned and he thrust his tongue inside the heaven of her mouth.

The lycan in him let loose a primitive growl, and she surrendered to his urgently coaxing lips. He cupped her nape and tangled his fingers in her hair, holding while he devoured her. Within moments, her hesitation turned to driving lust that matched his own. She strained against him, giving him everything he asked of her, taking everything he offered. When she reached between them and dragged her fingers over his stomach, the last vestiges of his control snapped.

Her startled cry when he pushed her back onto the bed and covered her with his body should have warned him that he needed to slow down, but so lost was he in the maelstrom of need, he barely heard the strangled sob. He shoved his hand roughly under her shirt, cupped her full breast and rolled the pebbled nipple between his fingers until she arched against him, her body begging for more.

He bunched her shirt up, covered the peaked, pink nipple with his mouth, and sucked it deep before nipping it with his teeth then soothing it with his tongue. Her fingers tangled in his hair and pulled him closer. Her scent tore through him, imbedding itself in every cell of his body forever. He buried his face between her breasts and breathed her in with one long, deep breath before taking her other nipple into his mouth and paying it the homage he'd bestowed up the other one.

He slid his hand along her ribs over the smooth, baby soft skin of her flat belly, and pushed his fingers under the edge of her pants. He froze when his fingers hit soft curls unhindered by panties, and groaned in protest when she suddenly sat up.

Chapter Nine

Sherry sat upright in the bed to the gray light of dawn filtering through the window. She was panting and her heart was pounding. The dream had been so real. Her nipples were hard and aching, her mouth felt swollen from Piers kisses, and she was so wet with need. She jumped when she turned to face him, expecting him to still be asleep. He was propped up on one elbow, staring at her. She couldn't help but notice the huge erection straining against his jeans, and her body pulsed with need.

"I'm sorry I didn't keep my promise." His voice was low, seductive.

"Wh-what?" His voice rushed through her like wildfire, heating every nerve and cell in its wake.

"Don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about. It's happened before."

He was looking at her as if she was a five-star buffet, and he was a starving man about to quench his hunger. He took her breath away and she wanted him, but did she want to sleep with him knowing that she'd probably never see him again after he took her back to Sanctuary? She wanted to save herself for the man she'd spend the rest of her life with, and he didn't strike her as the settling down type.

But damn. She couldn't ignore the way her body came to life when he touched her. He scared her with his intensity, but at the same time, that same intensity, that raw passion he exuded, excited her like nothing ever had. For the first time in her life, she'd met a man who made her want to throw all caution to the wind. She wanted to make love to Piers. She wanted his mouth and hands on her body. She wanted him inside her. She wanted to please him, pleasure him, drive him crazy. She wanted to make this wild, huge, dominant man lose control.

The only thing that stopped her from doing so was the knowledge that once he did lose control, there would be no turning back. And she feared once that happened, her heart would suffer the consequences when he left her.

"You can't be in my dreams, Piers. It's not possible." Yet, she knew it was. He had been there, and he'd been there the last time as well. There was no other explanation for him knowing about the first dream and, now, this one. He'd been there.

"It is possible, at least in our situation," he mumbled under his breath.

"And just what is our situation?"

"I think you know."

"Are you trying to say that I'm your mate?"

"I'm not *trying* to say anything. I'm saying it." His golden brown eyes watched her as if he could read her thoughts.

"No. I'm not ready for this. It's too much too soon. I just found out about this werewolf stuff, and now this."

"I prefer the term lycan." He frowned and his brows slanted down, then he got up off the bed, reached for his T-shirt and tugged it over his head.

Had she hurt him? She hadn't meant to. Everything was just happening so fast.

"I'm sorry, I just—"

"I get it. You don't want to be tied to an animal like me. I don't need apologies. But you can't deny there is a connection between us. When I touch you, I feel it. I know you do too." He clenched his jaw. "Get ready, and we'll go."

The flash of pain in his eyes was unmistakable. She hadn't meant to hurt him, and she certainly hadn't meant to give him cause to think that she thought of him as an animal. Yes, he'd kidnapped her. Yes, he'd kissed her and touched her, but he'd done nothing to harm her, and she enjoyed the kissing and caressing part, thoroughly enjoyed it. And now he was taking her back to her sister. She'd felt the effort it had taken him to keep his word when things had gotten heated between them, yet he'd refrained from touching her as he'd promised until she'd given him permission. He cared about her feelings. He hadn't tried to coerce or push her into anything she hadn't wanted.

In fact, he'd stopped almost instantly every time she'd backed off. He was a man of his word and hadn't lied to her. He was a dying breed. Most

men would have gotten angry, called her a tease, but he understood that she was not playing games with him. She was pretty sure he knew she was innocent where lovemaking was concerned. She was insecure and unsure, but those reasons didn't lessen the fact that she wanted him. And truth be told, when he touched her, she didn't feel insecure and shy. She felt like a siren, like a woman luring her man to a promise of pleasure so intense it would blow both their minds.

By the time she'd donned her clean underwear, finger combed her hair, and rinsed her mouth out since she didn't have a toothbrush, she felt a bit more human. They had a long ride back to her sister, and she would explain to him that she'd never had such strong feelings for a man. They were confusing to her, but she'd decided she wanted to see where they would lead. She cared enough for him to give him a chance—they a chance—if he was willing to take it.

She gasped when she saw him standing in front of the window. He'd opened the curtains, and snow fell heavy and fast outside.

"It's snowing."

"A lot." He grunted.

"It's too early for it."

"Obviously Mother Nature didn't get the memo." He turned around and eyed her from head to toe. "It's not that uncommon to have early snowfall in these parts."

When he looked at her like that, she wanted to throw caution to the wind and jump him. His black T-shirt and jeans hugged him like a second skin, and she could see the outline of every mouth-watering muscle on his lean, hard body. He was so perfect that he could have been carved out of stone by the hands of a professional sculptor. His tanned skin and dark features showcased those golden brown eyes flawlessly.

"It's coming down hard." She eased closer to the window and him. When she stood only a few inches from him, she could feel the heat emanating from him.

"We need to get going. It's looking bad. If you want to make it back to your sister tonight, we're going to have to make some good time." She didn't

miss the way a frown marred his full lips when he eyed the snow from the window again.

“Will we be okay?”

“I’ll make sure you get back safely, Sherry. I won’t let anything happen to you.” He shrugged and looked back to the bed behind them. “Or we could stay here and wait it out.”

“Let’s go then.” A huge part of her wanted to say hell with it and stay with him, but she couldn’t let her sister worry.

He looked disappointed by her decision, but didn’t say a word as he opened the door and waved her outside. She climbed into the Jeep and shivered. It was freezing. He got in the driver’s side, started the engine, and backed out of the parking spot. Within twenty minutes, they were on the highway heading back the way they’d came. The heat had kicked in and she turned the radio on only to turn it off after hearing more static than music. A few hours later, she was becoming alarmed.

The snow had increased, visibility had decreased, the wind had picked up, and a white blanket was quickly thickening over the landscape. They were in a remote part of Michigan, and she’d only seen one other car the whole time they’d been driving. The way Piers gripped the steering wheel only increased her anxiety.

“Piers?”

“It’ll be okay. See if you can find a local news station on the radio.”

She finally found one after several tries, but it was hard to hear through the thick interference. Only bits and pieces could be heard, but “blizzard,” “whiteout conditions,” “winter storm advisory” and “hazardous travel” were a few words that came through loud and clear.

“I can’t see anything.” She could barely see a foot in front of them, and dread slid down her spine.

“I can.”

“But how?”

“Because I can see a whole hell of a lot better than you.”

“Oh.” She was trying hard not to flip out, but her nerves were winning the battle.

“We will be all right.” Piers reached over and squeezed her hand. “I will keep you safe.”

An hour later, she wasn’t sure even he believed that they would be okay.

* * * *

Piers kicked the tire on the Jeep. The fucking thing had blown, and now they were in a steep ditch, pitching hard on the passenger side. At least they hadn’t ended up in a ravine somewhere. He snorted. Sherry was scared to death. Her skin was pale, and tears had been swimming in her eyes for the past hour. He was surprised she hadn’t let them loose since they’d landed in the ditch.

He tried his cell phone, but there was no signal, which was not surprising. He walked up the road a ways and back in the other direction, trying it several more times, but nothing.

He’d have no problem surviving a storm like this. His lycan blood would keep him warm, and he could hunt for food if it came to it. He could keep Sherry warm as well, but he wasn’t sure any of that would comfort her at the moment. They were getting close to Sanctuary, and he could go there and get them help, assuming he wasn’t killed on sight. Sherry would be okay in the Jeep for a couple hours, and he had no intention of leaving her alone for longer than that.

He took a deep breath, not wanting to tell her of his decision. She wasn’t going to like it, but it was their best option. He wanted to get her to safety. He opened the driver’s door and slid into the seat.

“Can you get us out?” Her green eyes were wide.

“Even if I get the tire changed, we’re too far in the ditch.”

“But it’s a four-wheel drive, for God’s sake.”

“Yes, but it still has its limitations.” He smiled because he couldn’t help it. She was adorable. “We are leaning quite a bit toward your side. I’m worried if I try to get us out we might slide further down and flip over. And, unfortunately, there is no signal on the cell either.”

“What are we going to do?” Her lip quivered.

"I'm going to go get help from Sanctuary." He wanted to hug her to him, and comfort her, but he knew if he did, he'd never leave.

"You can't do that! Yo-you'll freeze to death or get lost."

"I'll be fine." He smiled. She was worried about him, and that was a good sign. Maybe she cared about him more than he thought. "I will not freeze to death. In case you haven't noticed, I run several degrees hotter than you, and I can have warm fur in an instant if I need it. I won't get lost because I'm very familiar with the woods, not to mention I have a sensational sense of smell."

"I don't want to stay here by myself." The tears she'd been holding back spilled down her cheeks.

"I know, but I want to get you out of this storm and some place safe and warm." He reached for her hands, and took them in his. "It should only take me two hours tops. There is more than enough fuel for you to keep warm for that amount of time. Can you be strong and do this?"

She stared at him for several minutes before finally nodding. "Yes. I'll try."

"Stay in the car, Sherry. I promise I will be back. I won't let anything happen to you. You are safe here." He leaned in and kissed her gently, refusing the instant roar of desire that came rushing in again, demanding that he take her. "There are still snacks left from last night in the back seat, and a can of soda."

"Okay."

Her whispered word went straight to his heart. She was scared, but she was being exceptionally brave. He gave her one last smile and turned to get out of the car, but before he could open the door, she grabbed him by the arm and pulled him back to her for a hug. This time, she kissed him.

"Be careful."

"I will. I'll be back before you know it."

* * * *

Something had gone wrong. It had been over three hours since Piers had left to get help, and he still hadn't returned. The snow hadn't let up, and Sherry's anxiety was almost unbearable. She had done everything from breathing exercises, to singing, to trying to sleep, but nothing had worked for long to keep her occupied.

Terror clawed at her. The fuel was getting low in the Jeep, and it was getting dark out. She glanced at the clock on the radio. If he wasn't back in a half hour, she'd go look for him. She'd found a blanket in the back of the Jeep. If she wrapped it around her, it would keep her warm for awhile outside. She'd just have to make sure not to stray far.

When another half hour went by and he was still not back, she turned the engine off, wrapped the wool blanket around her, and stepped outside. The snow had let up a bit, but visibility was still poor. She wouldn't be able to go far, but she prayed she wouldn't have to. She took a deep, calming breath and started in the direction he'd gone in.

"Piers!" The snow acted as a barrier to her voice, and she knew it wouldn't carry far. "Piers!" All she heard was deafening silence in return.

An hour later, she was in trouble. The storm had picked back up, and she was trying to make it back to the Jeep, but she was having trouble walking through the near knee deep snow. She was freezing cold and shivered uncontrollably. Ice coated her eyelashes, and she had to hold the blanket over her nose and mouth so the frigid air didn't burn her lungs.

The wind blew so hard against her that she was having trouble standing upright, but she fought against it with all the strength she had. The cold was taking its toll on her, and her brain was turning foggy. All she wanted to do was lay down and sleep, even though she knew it would be the death of her. No. She had to keep going, but minutes later, she was starting to doubt her ability to make it back to the car, which was now in sight but might as well have been a hundred miles away.

She pushed herself forward, but staggered and fell hard to her knees. She tried to get to her feet, struggled with all her might, but she was too weak. She couldn't believe she was going to die this way, from sheer stupidity. She honestly hadn't realized how much the temperature had dropped. She'd

never thought for a moment that a quick look around for Piers could result in her death. The last thing she remembered was the white ground rushing toward her face.

Chapter Ten

Sanctuary had been further away than Piers thought. He was close now, but an hour and a half had already passed since he'd left Sherry. If he kept going, he'd make it there within another hour, but then it would take at least that long to get back to her even by vehicle. There had been enough gas in the Jeep for at least two hours, but he wasn't willing to gamble how long it would last after that. The cold would kill her fast, and he could keep her warm.

She'd be worried and scared that he hadn't returned when he said he would. The storm had let up for awhile, but it wasn't long before it had picked back up. He couldn't risk her safety. He had to turn around and go back. He had to make sure she was safe and warm. If something happened to her—he closed his eyes and refused to go down that path. She'd be okay. But instincts urged him faster, and when he was almost back to the car, he saw a sight that made his heart stutter hard and threaten to stop altogether.

Lying on the ground only a couple hundred feet from the Jeep was what would have looked like an old blanket to anyone else. However, he could see stray strands of red hair blowing above the plaid pattern. *Sherry*. Fear engulfed him, and he ran to her. She was face down, and when he turned her over, he held his breath, praying that she was still alive. Her skin was pale, and her lips had a sickly, blue tinge to them.

"No! Sherry, wake up!" He picked her up and cradled her against him. She was so cold. Her heart beat weak and faint, but it still beat. Her breathing was shallow and slow, but she was alive. Pressure built in his chest until he shook inside.

Why was she outside of the car? Had she been looking for him? This was his fault. He'd put his mate in danger and he'd never forgive himself for doing so. One thing he was determined of. He would not let her die. No force on heaven or earth or hell could take her from him now. He'd save her. He carried her back to the Jeep, started it, put her on the back seat, stripped her clothes off, then took his off as well. He reached in and pulled the latch to unlock the back of the seat and folded it down.

He climbed in, shut the door, lay down, pulled her against his chest, and spooned her. After pulling the blanket over them, he wrapped himself around her. His body nearly covered her entire tiny frame. She was so cold, so still. He kissed the top of her head and rested his cheek on the silky, red locks.

"Please, Sherry. Take my heat. Get warm, baby." He whispered the words, willing her to do as he said.

An hour later he had no choice but to turn the engine off to preserve what little fuel was left, and she started shaking. He held her tight against him while her teeth chattered and she clutched at him. He rubbed her back, trying to soothe her and coax the warmth back into her body.

"It's okay. I'm here now. I'm so sorry I wasn't back when I said I'd be. Please wake up." For the first time in more years than he could remember, he wanted to cry. He wanted to cry, scream, and beat on something until he was exhausted. How could he have let this happen to her?

"Piers?" His name whispered from her lips.

"Sherry?" He choked back a sob.

He leaned back, looked down at her, and framed her face with his hands. She blinked her eyes several times before opening them. She smiled up at him, and a rush of relief swept through him like a tsunami. She still shivered, but it was slight compared to the earlier body-wracking shakes. She buried her face against his chest and wiggled closer to his warmth.

"You are so warm. I swear you are like a heater," she said through clattering teeth.

"You scared the hell out of me. What were you doing outside of the car?"

"When you didn't come back, I got worried. I didn't mean to get so far away from the car. I-I didn't realize I would get so cold so fast. It all happened so quickly. I didn't understand what was happening until it was too late. I'm so sorry."

"I'm sorry. This is my fault. I should have been back when I said."

"It's not your fault, Piers. I made the choice to get out of the car." She looked up at him, and placed a delicate palm against his cheek.

“No. It’s my job to protect you, and you almost died because of me. I shouldn’t have left you.”

* * * *

Sherry couldn’t believe Piers was blaming himself for what had happened. It was no one’s fault but her own. She was an adult and had made a bad choice. She vaguely remembered bits and pieces of when he found her. Although she’d been in and out—more in than out—of consciousness, his distress had been palpable. And the thought that she’d made him feel responsible for her predicament tore at her heart.

He’d held on to her like a drowning man would hang on to a raft, as if his life depended on her survival. And the only thing she had been able to think about was that she had never made love with him, had never told him that she cared for him, that she...loved him. It was too soon for love, but even so, she knew it to be the truth. He proved time and again that her feelings, her safety, were important to him. He did care for her, and she didn’t want to wait to be with him any longer.

“Piers?” She stroked her fingers over his stubbly cheek, enjoying the texture of his growing beard.

“Yeah.” His voice heated her nearly as effectively as his body.

“Did you take my clothes off?”

“I took mine off too. It was the fastest way to warm you up.”

“Mm hmm. I appreciate you warming me up, by the way. As long as we are already naked”—she smiled up at him—“make love to me.”

“Sherry, you almost froze to de—”

“Shh.” She covered his lips with her fingers. “I’m fine now, thanks to you. Stop blaming yourself for what happened. It’s over now and you saved me.”

“When I saw you lying in the snow...” He closed his eyes.

“Stop. I’m okay.” She caressed his cheek tenderly. “You aren’t going to make me ask again, are you?”

“If I was an honorable man, I’d keep my hands to myself and leave you after this whole ordeal is over. I’m no good for you. But hell if I’m man enough to resist an invitation like that.”

He took her mouth with a demanding kiss laced with desperation. He wanted her as badly as she wanted him, and she could feel the fast thump of his heart against her, the excited beat matching her own. His tongue delved into her mouth and she groaned at his erotic, spicy taste. He deepened the kiss, and she cried out when he cupped her breast.

His touch inspired a boldness in her that she never knew existed. Even though she was inexperienced, he made her feel sexy, beautiful. His every caress felt as though he were worshipping her. She ran the heel of her foot up his calf and his other hand reached around to cup her ass, bringing her tight against his groin. His heavy shaft pressed between them and lay against her belly. The sheer size of him gave her a moment’s pause, but he wouldn’t hurt her. She knew he wouldn’t.

He rotated his hips against her and groaned. His need sparked a need in her that nearly stole her breath. She ached for him and her body wept for him. She almost cried out when he broke their kiss and rested his forehead against hers.

“God, Sherry. I want to take this slow, but I’m not sure I can the first time. I want you so bad, I can barely breathe.”

“I feel the same.” His raspy words made her shiver. “I want you to take me however you want, Piers. I just want to be with you.”

“Touch me. Please.” He wrapped his fingers around her hand and guided it toward his cock.

He released her and held his breath as she trailed along his abdomen and finally encircled him. He covered her hand with his own and showed her how to stroke him, then growled when she mimicked the moves he’d taught her only seconds before. He felt like velvet over steel, and her fingers barely touched around him. The moisture beading at the thick head was slick and made her strokes glide over him effortlessly. The whole act seemed more erotic in the dark with the gentle light of the moon popping out here and there through the dissipating clouds and snow.

“Sweet mercy.” He gently tugged her hand from him. “If you continue that, I’ll shame us both.”

He guided her hand to rest on his hip and slipped his fingers between them. She gasped when one long finger slid along her slick, wet folds before diving inside her, and she dug her nails in him as waves of pleasure rolled through her. His thumb landed on her clit and drew circles around her sensitive flesh. Pressure built low in her belly as he continued to stroke her, and she desperately strained against him, knowing he was the only one that could relieve the ache throbbing between her legs.

He took her mouth again and plunged his tongue inside when she gasped. His kiss excited her, calmed her. She felt safe in his arms, cherished...loved. Did he love her? He cared for her, but she wanted more from him. She wanted all of him. He had her heart and she wanted his, but would he be willing to give it to her?

He took his lips from hers, his breathing ragged. His finger pushed deep inside her again, and they groaned in unison as her muscles clenched around him.

“You are so hot, so wet, so tight.” He pulled back and pushed deep again.

“Piers, please!”

She was surprised when he urged her on her side, her back to him. He cupped her breast in one hand, toying with her nipple, driving her mad while he pushed her knee forward until she was open and vulnerable to him. He nudged against her from behind while he held her still with one hand around her upper thigh and the other still cupped over her breast. He kissed her shoulder, and nipped at her skin.

“Have you ever made love with anyone?” he murmured against her in between licks and kisses.

“No.”

“You know it will be uncomfortable for a moment?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry.”

Before she could tell him he had nothing to be sorry for, he thrust his hips, slipped inside her, and tore through her virginity. She gasped at the sharp pain and pressure of him filling her and instinctively struggled to get away, but he held her firmly against him.

“Piers!”

“Relax, baby. Just give it a minute.” He stroked her nipple, kissed her neck, and held perfectly still inside her.

He gradually let go of her knee, but she didn’t move. His finger covered her clit and her body began to adjust to his thick invasion. The brief pain was all but forgotten, and the feeling of him inside her, stretching her, no longer hurt. He continued to kiss her, stoking her fire higher, but remained still inside her. After a few more seconds, she pushed back against him and when he growled, she moved again.

He muttered a curse under his breath, pulled out of her until only the tip of him remained and plunged deep. She cried out in pleasure and the shock of being completely possessed by a man for the first time. He groaned against her neck and thrust up inside her again and again. She gasped as the pleasure built to an ache that made her sob. She met him stroke for stroke. His cock dragged over every nerve in her sheath, making her muscles clench around him as if trying to hold him inside when he pulled back before burying himself once again.

Suddenly, pleasure exploded through her, and she sobbed out his name over and over as the waves of her orgasm rocked through every muscle in her body. Within seconds, he slammed up in her deep and hard and stilled. He bit down on her shoulder and growled as his cock throbbed with each pulse of his hot seed.

“You have no idea what you do to me.” He kissed her shoulder, soothing the tenderness from his bite, then trailed his lips up the side of her neck to her ear.

“I think I have a bit of an idea.” If she made him feel half as good as he made her feel, she had more than an idea.

She reached up and ran her fingers over the place he’d nipped her, and he covered her hand with his own.

“Don’t worry. I didn’t break the skin. I would never do that until you were ready.”

“What do you mean until I’m ready?” She frowned. She’d thought he’d been talking about not breaking her skin because he’d hurt her, but why would she ever be ready for that?

“I guess your sister didn’t tell you everything about lycans, huh?” He smoothed his fingers along her hip, and she nestled back into the cradle of his warm body.

When his words finally sank in, she stiffened and half turned so she could see his face in the soft glow of the moon.

“My God. Are you saying if you bit me, really bit me, I’d become what you are?”

“Yes.”

Chapter Eleven

Why had he brought up changing her? She'd just acknowledged that she had strong feelings for him by making love with him. The last thing she'd needed to learn was how easy it would be for him to turn her. He wanted to change her more than anything in the world, for that would bind them together, but stranded in a car where she'd nearly frozen to death was not the time or place for such a discussion. Her face showed the repulsion she felt at the idea, and his heart broke.

"Sherry, I—"

"Are you saying you want to make me like you?" She struggled to get away from him, but he held her against him with little effort.

"Let's not do this right now, okay?"

"No. Let's do do this right now. I am not a nature girl. I don't like the woods. I don't like creepy, crawly things, and I don't like to camp or hike or swim in a pond or anything else that has to do with the great outdoors. I cannot become a werewolf." She wiggled, trying to get away from him again, and when he refused to let her go, she cursed.

"I'm not asking you to make that kind of decision right now. I'm sorry it came up."

"You aren't asking me to make that kind of decision right now? But you are going to ask?" Her creamy skin shined in the moonlight.

"Sherry, I might ask things of you, might even ask you to consider things that may go against your nature, but I will never force you to do anything that will upset or hurt you. You have to know that by now."

"It's just...I don't know. The past few days have been strange and wonderful. They have been confusing, but yeah, I'm sure of the fact that you don't want any harm to come to me."

"I don't want to ruin what we just shared with talking about things that don't concern us right now." He hugged her and was relieved when after a few minutes, she relaxed against him.

"Tell me more about being a, um, lycan."

"I can't imagine how hard it might be for someone who doesn't like nature to understand, but being a lycan isn't a bad thing. Nature is beautiful. It's a part of all of us whether you feel it or not." He kissed her on the top of the head and sighed. "When I shift, I feel free of the constraints of humanity, free of all the rules of society."

"I guess that wouldn't be a bad feeling at all."

"My sense of smell, sight, and hearing are enhanced. I am faster and stronger than a human." He smiled against her shoulder.

"How much stronger?" She looked back at him.

"Much."

"You're so big, and you're that much stronger, yet you've never once hurt me. You've been gentle with me."

"I don't know about gentle, but I try to be careful with you." He traced a finger over the faint mark on her shoulder where he'd bitten her. "My strength is something I'm aware of at all times around you. I could hurt you with ease."

"Is that why you want to change me?"

"No, but I won't lie to you. It would put my mind to rest knowing you were stronger, more resistant to being hurt. I could make love to you without worrying, but that's not the reason, not the only reason." Not the reason that mattered most.

"You held back when we were together?" She frowned and worried her lip with her small teeth. "Was it okay for you?"

"It was more than okay for me," he chuckled. "You know that."

"I don't want you to hold back with me." She turned to face him and reached out to cup his cheek.

He sucked in a sharp breath. "Baby, you have no idea how much you draw the predator out in me. I've never met anyone who could do it with such ease, but I would be too rough with you if I unleashed it. I can't risk it."

She placed her lips against his and kissed him lazily before tracing the tip of her tongue along the seam of his mouth. Every muscle in his body tensed, primed for taking her once again.

"You won't hurt me, Piers. I know you won't."

"I'll hurt you. I can't." He gritted his teeth. The lycan in him demanded he do what she asked, but the human knew he couldn't.

"Okay," she sighed, "but you don't have to handle me like fragile glass either. I know there were things you wanted to do that wouldn't hurt me, but you held that back as well. I could feel it, Piers. Now, take me. Take me how you need to."

When her lips touched his again, all reason was replaced by sheer need. His mouth slammed down on hers, and his tongue demanded entrance, which she willingly gave without hesitation. He rolled her to her back and covered her. Her fingers tangled in his hair and each tug urged him to take more. The lycan wanted his female to submit to him, give herself over solely to the pleasure he could give her.

He nipped and licked his way down her throat and when he found her breast, he bit at the peak hard enough to make her squeak and wriggle before soothing the pain with long strokes of his tongue. Her nails dug into his back, and fire shot straight to his cock. He looped his arms under her knees and splayed her wide, exposing every inch of her. His eyes fixed on the nest of tight, coppery curls and glistening pink folds that wept for him.

"Piers!"

"You are so damned beautiful." He shook his head when she blushed. "There is no reason to be embarrassed." He licked his lips and bent to taste her. Her breath hissed when his tongue touched the tiny bundle of nerves at her core. He growled at her sweet, honeyed flavor, and dipped his tongue between the wet folds, suckling the pink labia gently before slipping in for another taste. He inhaled her soft, womanly scent mixed with sex and groaned. He could stay here like this forever. He would never get enough of her.

She tugged harder at his hair, and he slipped his hands up her thighs and held her hips still under his mouth. He slid his tongue around her clit again, and she gasped. When he looked up at her, his breath nearly stopped. Her back was arched, pushing her full breasts toward him, the inviting pink nipples begging to be laved next. Her head thrashed back and forth as coppery hair tangled around her angelic face. Her lips, swollen from his

kisses, were parted, and emitted gasps of pleasure. She was a siren. She was beautiful, and she was his.

He loved her, and the loneliness that had constantly hovered inside him for so long was gone. She healed him. She made him want things he'd been too afraid to wish for. The image of a little girl with coppery curls and face as beautiful as her mother's jumping in his arms and calling him Daddy sent a pang of want slicing through him. He wanted everything with her—a home, loving arms to fall into when he had a bad day, and most of all, he wanted to watch her grow large with his baby.

He wanted to spend his days worshipping her and making her happy. Hell, he'd do just about anything to have her amazing smile aimed at him. His chest tightened, and his heart nearly burst with the strength of the emotions blooming inside him.

"Let go and come for me, baby." God, how he wanted to give her such pleasure she'd scream his name.

He buried his tongue inside her, retreated, and flicked at the tiny, tight nub before she screamed out his name—the sound of it on her lips just as magical as he'd imagined—as her body shook in release.

* * * *

The orgasm she had just had ripped her to shreds. She'd never be the same. No other man would ever be able to affect her as Piers did. He reared up over her, and the sight of his wide, muscular chest stole her breath. His eyes glowed, but this time, the eerie shine stirred something in her other than fear. She realized that his eyes only did that when he was out of control, and the fact that she was the one causing those feelings in him fired her body back to full throttle even on the cooling heels of her orgasm.

She loved him, but could they get past the huge differences between them? They'd have to somehow because she didn't want to be without him. Instinctively, she had known he was her soul mate, and now she was ready to embrace the fact wholeheartedly.

He ran his fingers along her ribs, around to her spine and lower until he cupped her ass in his hand. He nudged between her thighs and locked eyes with her. His shaft slid along her folds, the tip nudged at her entrance, and with one hard thrust, he was seated fully inside her. She cried out at the sudden, delicious way he stretched and filled her tender flesh. He was so big inside her, so overwhelming...so perfect. She wrapped her legs around his waist and when he slid even deeper inside her, she welcomed his possession.

“I love you, Sherry.”

Her heart nearly burst with joy but before she could say anything, he took her mouth, pulled back, and plunged hard into her. He rode her hot and hard. The knowledge that he wasn't holding back thrilled and encouraged her. She met each of his downward thrusts with an upward twist of her hips, and he grunted each time their bodies slammed together. The world seemed to tilt on its axis and throw them into a realm where only they existed.

It was as if she could feel every cell of her body melding with his. They became one, and she could no longer tell where she ended and he began. The force of his possession sent her sliding back across the seat with each thrust, and she clung to him. She dug her heels into his tight butt, her fingernails slipped in the light sheen of sweat on his shoulders before finding purchase in his skin, and something primal in her she never knew existed screamed for his domination. Her muscles tightened around him, and he growled as his cock swelled and pulsed inside her.

The next slam of his hips started a delicious quaking low in her abdomen. The next sent her careening into an abyss of pleasure that gripped her so hard tears stung the backs of her eyes. She held him as he thrust, each slide of his shaft inside her sending another wave washing through her until she thought she might black out from the overload of ecstasy.

Just when she thought she could take no more, he tensed. He tossed his head back, his black hair shining in the moonlight, and cried out as his body jerked and he came inside her. The hot jets of his seed shot in her and caused her muscles to spasm around him, as if greedy for every last drop.

He collapsed over her, careful not to put his full weight on her, and his breaths came in hot pants against her neck, matching her own ragged

breathing. His hand covered her breast and kneaded it gently as the last vestiges of their releases glided through them.

The soft light of dawn filtered through the windows, and she smiled. What a way to greet morning, in the arms of the man she loved.

“You’re beautiful, and as much as I want to stay right here inside you, I need to see if I can get us out of the ditch somehow.” He sat up on his elbow and brushed the stray tendrils of hair from her face.

“My sister must be going out of her mind with worry.” She smiled at him and trailed her fingers over his stubbly cheek.

She didn’t want to go, wanted to stay here with him forever, but she had to let Janine know she was all right. Maybe if he could get the tire changed and the car out of the ditch, she could get a signal on his phone up the road a bit and call her to let her know what had happened.

When he sat up, the cold blast of air that hit her once his body heat was gone made her shiver. He rummaged around and handed her her clothes. She pulled hers on quickly while he casually dressed as if the cold didn’t affect him in the least. He tugged her to him for a hug before he helped her into the front seat, started the car, and turned the heat on.

“Stay here. I’ll see if I can figure something out now that the snow has stopped and it’s light outside.”

“Piers.” She placed her hand on his arm to stop him. “I never got to tell you that I am sorry about your brother.”

“If what you tell me is truly what happened, I can’t fault Anthony for his death. At least some good came of it.” His jaw clenched. “It brought you to me.”

“I’m still sorry. I understand what it’s like to lose a loved one.”

“I didn’t love him, barely knew him. It was more of a wishful yearning for family. I was hoping that he hadn’t gone so far over the edge that I couldn’t save him. Apparently, I was mistaken. I lashed out without discovering all of the facts first. Anthony is an ancient like me. There aren’t many of us left. If I had killed him, my actions would have resulted in my death as well, and I would have been responsible for taking two ancients out that are willing to fight for the survival of our race.”

"I don't think anyone will blame you for what you did once they learn your side of it."

"Don't be so sure," he muttered under his breath. "Thank you for caring, though. It means a lot to me." He gave her a quick kiss on the forehead and was out the door.

She wanted to tell him she loved him, but the moment had passed. She'd wait until they got back and cleared this whole misunderstanding up before telling him. She wished she could see him, but the heat had done little to melt the snow covering the windows.

Two minutes later, her door swung open with such force she screamed.

"Are you okay?" Raze stood beside the car.

"Y-yes." She stepped out, but when she tried to look around him, he blocked her view with his body.

"Did he hurt you?" Raze's fists were clenched at his sides.

"No. We had a blowout and ended up in the ditch on our way home. Piers attempted to hike to Sanctuary, but it was too far and the cell didn't have a signal." She tried to push around Raze, but he wouldn't budge from her path.

"Where is Piers?" She called to him. "Piers? Piers!" Raze ushered her backwards, and when she struggled to get by him, he picked her up and sat her in the passenger seat of a truck that sat behind the Jeep. "What have you done?"

Her heart beat like thunder. Something had happened. It was the only logical reason why Raze was acting like he was.

"Get in and buckle up. I'm taking you back to Sanctuary."

"Not until I see him." She clenched her teeth in anger.

"Don't argue with me. You can see him later."

She swung her legs inside and acted like she was buckling her seatbelt. When Raze shut the door and started walking toward the front of the truck, she slung the door open and jumped out. She ran past the truck and skidded to a stop when she reached the front of the Jeep. Piers lay on the ground, facedown, and crimson pooled on the white snow around his head. Anthony and Brent squatted beside his motionless body.

She cried out and ran to him. Anthony and Brent stood and before she could reach Piers, Raze grabbed her from behind.

“Get her the hell out of here!” Brent yelled at Raze.

“What the fuck do you think I was trying to do?” Raze answered.

“What did you do to him?” she screamed. “He didn’t do anything wrong. He didn’t hurt me.”

Tears streamed down her cheeks, and she fought against Raze with all her might while he dragged her to the truck. He put her in the driver side and pushed her toward the middle of the seat until he could climb in beside her. The entire time, he held her wrist in an iron grip that she could not break no matter how hard she tried. She kicked and slapped at him until her body went limp with exhaustion.

“You killed him.” Sobs wracked her body.

“He’s not dead.”

“But all of the blood. He has to be.” She choked out the words as the horrible images played through her mind. “You have to take him to a hospital! He could die.”

“He won’t die from his injuries. When he wakes up, he’ll be able to change and, once he does, he’ll be healed.”

“Yeah, but are they going to kill him after he wakes up? It was all a mistake. He didn’t know all the facts about what happened to his brother.”

“It’s out of my hands.”

“Don’t be an ass, Raze. It isn’t out of your hands. You are involved in this since his brother came looking for you to begin with. I swear, if you let them hurt him, I’ll hate you for the rest of my life. And while that on its own may not bother you that much, I guarantee that it will bother my sister.”

“Of course I care about your feelings. I love you like a sister, Sherry. I would protect you with my life just like I would Janine.”

“Then don’t let them hurt him.”

Those were the last words spoken until they made it back to Sanctuary.

Chapter Twelve

Sherry felt much better after she showered and changed her clothes. She sat in the cabin at Sanctuary that had marked the beginning of her journey with Piers. Janine sat across from her. Both had a steaming cup of cocoa nestled between their hands.

"I want to see him." Sherry didn't like the way her sister didn't meet her gaze. That always meant she was hiding something from her.

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"He left."

"What?" Her heart sank. Piers wouldn't leave her. He loved her. *But you never told him you loved him.*

"I'm sorry."

"Is he coming back?"

"I don't think so. He told Raze he was sorry for all the trouble he caused. He said to tell you goodbye."

"No. I don't believe you."

"When have I ever lied to you?" Janine's eyes snapped up to her face.

"Never. Until now." She gritted her teeth, but knew without a doubt that it was the truth.

"He's no good for you." Janine sighed and sipped at her cocoa.

"You can't make that decision for me. It's my choice whether he's right for me or not."

"You can't stand the woods or nature. He's all about everything you despise."

"After what you and Raze went through, you are seriously trying to convince me that Piers and I can't compromise and be happy?"

"It's different with Raze and me."

"How?"

"I like nature. He didn't kidnap me. He didn't take me from my family."

"Neither did Piers. Well, he did at first, but he brought me back."

"No. He didn't."

"We had a flat and got caught in a snowstorm. It was beyond our control, Janine." Sherry was becoming angry. Her sister had never acted like this with her. She wasn't ten years old. She was a grown woman and didn't need Janine to act like her mother. "I've had enough. This isn't your, or Raze's, or anyone else's decision. It's mine, and whatever I decide, I expect you to stand by my side."

"But—"

"Don't drive a wedge between us where there is no need for one. I love you more than anything. You know that." She reached and took her sister's hand in hers. "But I love Piers too. I want to be with him, and no one will stand in my way."

"You really do love him, don't you?"

Sherry nodded.

"I'm sorry. The men told him you didn't want to have anything to do with him. He left."

"He's okay though?" Sherry breathed a sigh of relief.

"Yes."

"Why would they do that?"

"He's too rough around the edges for you."

"He loves me, and somehow, I doubt that Raze is a kitten."

"No, he isn't, but it's different. I'm not as delicate as you are." Janine sighed.

"Why, because of my anxiety? Do you know, I didn't have one anxiety attack the whole time I was with him? That should tell you something."

"Yes. It does."

"I'm his mate."

"Raze thought so too the first day he took you."

"So now that he thinks I don't want him any more, how do I get him back?" Sherry's heart ached. She couldn't believe that he'd actually think she didn't want to see him again after what they'd shared in the Jeep.

"I think I can help you, if you really love him, and you are really sure this is what you want." Janine squeezed Sherry's hand. "I'm sorry. I just couldn't stand the thought of you getting hurt."

"I'll forget all of it if you help me." Sherry grinned.

"Deal." Janine stood. "I've got everything ready. Let's start for home."

"But Piers doesn't know where we live." Sherry was confused.

"He doesn't need to. Trust me."

* * * *

"Raze, if you ever lie to me again, I swear I'll kick your ass."

"I did not lie to you, Janine."

"Technically, no, I guess you didn't. But you let me believe that Piers had left. You lied by omission. Sherry loves him, and while I too thought it best at first to keep them apart, she quickly made me see that it wasn't my decision."

"I'm sorry. I wasn't sure what Anthony and Brent would choose to do with him, and I didn't want you involved. I was feeling guilty. This all came about because of me."

"Well, if it's your fault, then it's mine too because I was with you when you ran away from the pack."

"How do you figure it was your fault? You were kidnapped, and I helped you escape. If I hadn't run, they wouldn't have tracked me to Sanctuary and Daniel would have never been killed."

"I figure it was my fault too because you and I are a team now. Remember? We have to be honest with one another, Raze. You can't protect me from everything. I love you, and I love that you want to keep me sheltered and safe, but you can't keep me in a glass cage."

"I know. I just hate to see you upset about anything, and you were already so stressed about the whole ordeal with Sherry. I didn't want to put any more on you to deal with."

Janine sighed and walked into Raze's arms when he held them out to her. She knew he loved her and would never do anything to intentionally hurt her. He hadn't really outright lied to her about what had happened with Piers, and he was obviously regretting the decision to keep it from her. She couldn't find it in her heart to be mad at him.

“I know, but don’t do it again.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

He bent his head and captured her lips, and she surrendered to him.

* * * *

After Piers woke up from being clubbed in the head, he had been furious. Anthony and Brent had him imprisoned in an iron cell. Iron was a lycan’s only weakness. When he’d been informed that Sherry never wanted to see him again, a murderous rage had built deep in his chest. He hadn’t believed it at first. He was the only man she’d ever let make love to her. If she didn’t care for him, she wouldn’t have given herself to him.

When he was told Raze would be taking her someplace he would never find her, Piers had laughed at that and informed them there wasn’t anyplace on earth that he couldn’t find her. He’d explained to them over and over that he’d made a mistake by trying to attack Anthony, tried to convince them that he’d realized only after the fact that the information he’d gotten about his brother’s murder wasn’t all the truth.

To make matters worse, Anthony and Brent relayed information they’d received from Raze about how depraved the pack was that Daniel belonged to. Daniel had participated in rapes, murders, tortures, and had also been present when Janine had been dragged into the den. His own brother had put his mate’s sister in danger. Piers would have killed him himself for doing that alone.

In the end, none of it had mattered. He’d been kept in the cell until the next morning before they’d finally let him out. By then, Sherry was gone and any chance of him tracking her scent had vanished. If she did want him, wouldn’t she have gotten word to him somehow? Left him some kind of clue? She was just gone, as if she’d never been there at all. Maybe she didn’t want him. Maybe they had been telling him the truth.

Maybe they had kept him in the cell because they knew he’d come after her, and when she refused him, he’d try to take her again, an act which would

have probably led to his or someone else's demise when they tried to stop him.

Two days later, he sat in a hotel room. He'd already sucked down half a bottle of Jack and was working on the other half. He wasn't drunk—his high metabolism burned the alcohol out of his system about as quick as he downed it—but he was trying like hell to get sloshed out of his mind so he could forget about her if only for a moment.

He'd been searching for her since they'd let him out of the cell. He was exhausted, his chest ached at the emptiness left behind from her absence, and he wanted to beat the shit out of something. He hadn't slept or eaten, and anger boiled inside him. Claws shot through his fingers, and he could feel the long slide of canines from his gums. Only ancients could partially change, and the complete helplessness and rage was calling to the predator in him.

He growled and let out a sound that was a mix between a cry and howl. He needed her. He was lost without her. Despair settled in his soul. He didn't want to be alone anymore. He wanted a family, someone to love, someone who would love him. He wanted to hold someone at night when he slept. That wasn't the whole truth. He didn't want to do all of those things with someone. He wanted to do them with Sherry.

Why would fate let him find his mate only to rip her from him? Exhaustion sank deep into his bones and he sagged back on the bed. Within minutes, he'd drifted into a deep sleep.

"Piers."

He groaned. No. She really wasn't there. She was just a figment of his wishful imagination.

"Piers." Her soft voice soothed him.

"Is that really you, Sherry?" He knew he shouldn't believe she was here, for any moment, she'd disappear and he'd be left alone with only his dead heart to keep him company.

"Look at me, baby." She knelt beside him on the bed and cupped his face.

His eyes fluttered open and his breath nearly stopped as his heart stuttered. He sat up on his elbows, a lump in his throat.

"Is it really you?"

"Yes. I've tried to come to you for the past couple days, but I couldn't find you. Are you okay?" She frowned when she trailed a finger under his eye. The black tinge underneath no doubt betrayed his exhaustion.

He reached a shaky hand toward her, thinking she'd vanish when he tried to touch her, but when his fingers came into contact with the soft skin of her cheek, he sighed.

"It is really you." He sat up and hugged her to him. She squeaked when he held her a bit too tight, and he immediately eased his hold. "I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry for." She kissed his face.

"Why did you leave me, Sherry?" He pulled back, a frown tugging at his mouth.

"I didn't." Tears glistened in her green eyes. "They only told you that. I could never walk away from you."

"Why? I really have nothing to offer you."

"You have everything to offer me. You are all I need. I never got to tell you, but I love you. I love you so much." She framed his face with her hands and kissed him.

"Mmm. I missed you so much. I need you." He slipped his tongue inside her mouth and groaned when her sweet taste hit him.

"I need you too, but not here. I want you for real. That's why I've been trying to find you to tell you where I am." She whispered in his ear. "Come to me, Piers."

He sat up in the bed, wide awake now. She wanted him, and he wasn't going to disappoint her.

Chapter Thirteen

Her apartment over the garage of Janine's house was small but comfortable. She had wanted her own space when she'd moved in, but had also wanted to stay close to her sister. This had been a great compromise. Instead of taking the money Janine paid her for working at her cupcake business and blowing it on rent, she had had the space renovated.

She lit candles around her room and dimmed the lights. She cast a worried look at the bed. It was queen-sized, but Piers was big. They were going to have to get a king-sized bed. She wondered if he'd want to live here with her or if he'd want to live at his place, assuming he had a place. She would be willing to bet he did, and would also bet that it was in the middle of the woods somewhere.

She was a bit nervous as she'd thought about him changing her, but wasn't ready to take that step just yet. She didn't know if she'd ever be ready, but Janine and Raze had waited, so she hoped Piers would be just as understanding about her decision. If he loved her as he said he did, he would. She was willing to commit to learning his way of life, to learning about nature, and to giving it an earnest shot. Only for him would she do this.

She nervously smoothed her fingers down the black satin teddy she'd picked out just for him. She'd been so worried when she hadn't been able to reach him through her dreams. It had been Janine's idea to let him know where she was that way, and a brilliant one at that, but after awhile, she had become afraid that something terrible had happened to him. When she'd finally found him, relief had ripped through her.

She backed up to admire the flickering candlelight in the dimmed bedroom and bumped into a solid wall of man. She squeaked and spun around. Her man.

"You scared me."

His golden eyes glowed down at her, and her breath hitched in her throat when he reached out and sifted his fingers through her hair. He leaned down, brought the strands to his nose, and sniffed.

“You smell so damn good.” He stepped back, ran his gaze from her head to her toes and back again. “Look at you. I’ve never seen such a beautiful sight. It’s enough to bring a man to his knees.”

“How about if I’m brought to my knees instead?” She smiled when he quirked a brow at her.

She led him to the bed and pushed him down to sit on the edge before kneeling between his legs. She tugged his boots off and reached for the button at the top of his jeans. He covered her hand and she looked up at him in confusion.

“Kiss me first, baby. It seems an eternity since our lips last met.”

She framed his face, pulled his mouth to hers and kissed him without hesitation. She kissed him with all the pent up worry she’d had when she couldn’t find him, with all the stress she’d endured over the thought of losing him, with all the love she felt for him. His spicy, male taste hit her tongue and swept through her like a thunderstorm. He growled, cupped her nape, and held her to him as he slanted his mouth over hers and deepened the kiss. Their tongues danced, dueled, and sampled until their breaths came in pants, and she squirmed against his hard body, aching for his possession.

She placed a hand on his chest and gently pushed. When he frowned, she giggled and reached for the button on his jeans again. This time, he didn’t stop her, and watched from under half closed lids as she released him and he sprang free, thick and hard. She knew he was big, but he still stole her breath. She circled him in her hand and stroked once before touching her tongue to the tip. He groaned and she licked him from top to base and back before closing her lips over the thick head and sucking him down the back of her throat.

“You’re going to kill me, Sherry.”

When she mumbled without releasing him from her mouth, he groaned again. Realizing the vibrations had enhanced the sensation, she hummed around him as she circled her tongue along the thick vein that ran the length of him. He tangled his fingers in her hair, arched his hips as he encouraged her down over him, and she swallowed him again and again. She felt such

power at being able to pleasure him this way. She wanted to lick and suck on him until he came, but he gently pulled her away before she could finish.

She began to protest, but his mouth swooped down on hers as he picked her up and tossed her on the bed. She stared up at him as he pulled his T-shirt over his head, and her mouth went dry at the expanse of muscular chest exposed. He was a work of art, and she wanted to learn every line of him with her fingers, mouth and tongue. His erection stood proud and lay against his stomach, stopping just under his navel.

His eyes glowed brighter when he saw where she was staring. “Baby, if you keep looking at me like that, there won’t be any more foreplay, and I’m dying to taste you again.”

When his eyes swept down and rested between her legs, her cheeks flamed. She remembered what his mouth felt like on her, what his tongue felt like slipping between her folds and circling her clit. She grew wet just thinking about it. He sniffed the air, groaned, and closed his eyes as if reaching for some modicum of control.

He opened his eyes and pushed the denim the rest of the way down his legs. She was glad he didn’t wear underwear because it would only take longer to get him completely naked. He kneeled at the end of the bed, circled an ankle in each hand, and pulled her toward him until her knees were draped over his shoulders.

He pushed the black silk up over her hips and gasped when he saw the matching thong. He ran a finger along her slit over the fabric, creating a delicious friction that made her hips buck in response. He bent and licked her through her panties, and she cried out as sensation pulsed through her. When he reached up and cupped her breasts, her nipples pebbled in response. He rolled them gently between his fingers, and invisible strings of pleasure shot to her core each time he pinched them, and her body caught fire.

He kissed the insides of her legs and ran his hands over her thighs before pushing the silk scrap of panties to the side, exposing her to his now probing tongue. He ate at her until her orgasm neared and then he retreated, as if he knew she was teetering on the edge of release. He stood, yanked the panties

off, and tossed her to her stomach before covering her with his big body. He pulled her hips back, placed one arm under her belly, his other hand flat in the middle of her back, and pushed her against the mattress, keeping her ass high in the air and pressed against him.

His cock teased at her opening and her moisture coated him until he slipped easily back and forth along her delicate folds. She pushed back against him as he slid inside her, stilling after he went as deep as he could while he groaned and she cried out his name.

He held perfectly still for what seemed like an eternity before rotating his hips against her. She pulled forward until only the head of his thick cock remained inside, then arched to meet his thrust as he slammed back home. She stretched around him, and her muscles gripped him so tightly he growled.

“My God. You are so wet and tight for me.” He stilled again, as if savoring the way their bodies fit together, and she groaned in protest.

“Piers!”

“Impatient, baby?” He chuckled.

She turned her head to gaze up at him, gave him the wickedest smile she could muster, and flexed her hips back and up at the same time until he slid even further in her. His eyes glowed, and he growled right before he started pumping into her at a frenzied pace.

She bucked back as he slammed into her. He jerked her to him each time he thrust in her, their bodies slapping together with each grind of his hips. Within moments, her orgasm shot through her, her muscles clamped around him, and she cried out as she rocked against him, riding out the waves crashing over her as he yelled out her name while his release pulsed in hot jets inside her.

Afterward, he lay on his back, and she sprawled across his chest while he toyed with her hair. Once her body calmed a bit, she propped herself up on him.

“What?” He smiled at her.

“I meant what I said in the dream. I love you, Piers.”

He stilled, and stared at her for long moments.

“What?” She was worried she’d said something wrong.

“I just didn’t think you’d ever say it. I love you so much, Sherry. Say it again.”

“I love you.” She kissed his chin. “I love you.” She bent, licked his nipple, and his breath caught. “I love you.” She ran her hands along the muscles in his chest and up and over his shoulders. “You are a gorgeous man.”

“And you are a beautiful woman.” She frowned, and he ran a finger over her lips. “What’s wrong?”

“I want to be with you, but I-I’m not ready to-to—”

He placed one long finger over her lips. “I won’t ever try to force you into anything you aren’t ready for. If your sister told you everything, you are aware that lycans’ life expectancy is much, much longer than humans. That’s the main reason we change our mates. I honestly can’t see living without you now that I’ve found you.”

“Oh. I see.”

“I’ve lived a long time. If you decide you’d rather not ever be changed and grow old and die a human, I’ll go when you do.”

“What? You can’t do that. Wait, would you still look like this when I’m old?”

“Probably.”

“I’m not ruling anything out, I just need some time. I want you to show me how it would be, and I need to get accustomed to the outdoors.”

“I’m not worried about it and neither should you be. The most important thing is that I found you. Let’s be happy with what we have now instead of worrying about what might or might not happen later.”

“Deal.” She kissed him.

Chapter Fifteen

Two years later . . .

A cool breeze blew over them as they sat on the hill overlooking a pond reflecting a full moon hanging lazily in the sky. They were naked and Sherry sat between Piers legs, her back to his chest. His arms were around her, and he held her snugly against him. He'd taken her to his favorite campsite tonight so they could be alone on this momentous occasion.

Over the last two years, he'd shown her the beauty of nature. She couldn't believe how much she'd missed out on. She still didn't care for bugs all that much, but she loved watching the deer, rabbits and other animals in their natural habitat. She'd asked Piers to change for her several times, but he'd always refused, saying he'd wait until she decided to be turned. She'd grown to love him even more, if that were possible, and had realized that she couldn't bear to grow old and make him watch her die.

She would have been a very stupid woman if she didn't embrace every single moment she could spend with Piers, and if becoming a lycan would give her extra time with him, she'd do it. Once she'd gotten used to the idea, it really didn't seem all that bad. He'd told her that she never had to change after the first time if she didn't want to, but she had a feeling running with him in lycan form would be an experience all of its own.

Two nights ago, they'd made love and he'd bitten her to start the change. He told her it wouldn't hurt, that the only time it was painful was if another lycan besides her mate turned her. She'd still been scared, but fear had quickly turned to blinding ecstasy that she'd never imagined could exist when his teeth had punctured her flesh. When he'd taken her body and finally claimed her, she'd had an orgasm so intense she'd nearly passed out.

"Are you scared?"

"A little, but I know it will be okay as long as you are here."

"I promise it won't hurt too much. The first time is the worst, but after that, it's nothing."

She nodded, but as she went to reassure him again that she'd be fine, her muscles clenched.

“Oh!”

She looked down at her hands and claws sprang from her fingertips while tiny coppery hairs popped through her skin by the hundreds, growing until they were about an inch long. He held her tight as she gasped for air while spasms wracked her body. It wasn't unbearable, but it was a bit more than uncomfortable, to say the least.

Her nerves burned, and she itched from the inside out. His hands on her comforted her through it all. Suddenly, she was standing on all fours looking out at the pond. The transformation was complete, and she turned around to find a splendid coal black wolf standing behind her watching her with golden brown eyes. She trotted over and stood beside him, and just like in human form, he was double her size.

“You are beautiful.”

“You aren't so bad yourself, big boy.”

His laughter floated through her mind.

He turned and ran to the edge of the tree line where he disappeared. She ran after him, and was soon running beside him. They ran for several minutes, the breeze ruffled her fur, and Piers yipped and nipped at her playfully. He stopped at an outcropping, walked to it, and stood on a big boulder. She followed him and was amazed at the awe-inspiring, picturesque landscape that greeted her.

They were at the edge of a steep cliff, and the moon glistened off the tree tops below them. Millions of stars blinked and winked in a clear midnight blue sky.

“Wow.” She couldn't believe she'd never given nature a chance.

“Yeah.”

“Can we go back to the tent now? I have this sudden urge to make love to you.”

Piers shifted and stood before her, his naked body glorious in the moonlight. She changed back to human form, as well, and he reached out and tugged her to him by the waist.

“We don't have to wait until we get all the way back to the tent.”

He caught her lips with his mouth and she welcomed his tongue into her mouth. She loved him, loved the way he caressed her and kissed her, even

loved his over protectiveness. She felt safe with him, like nothing could ever hurt her. He'd sacrificed so much for her the past two years.

He'd moved in to her tiny apartment and had patiently shown her his world. They'd stayed at his house several times, and she knew he was happier at his place, which sat on hundreds of acres of land. She also knew he'd never ask her to move there with him unless he was sure she could be completely happy.

She sighed when he bent and took one nipple into his mouth after tonguing it to a pebbled peak. They sank to the ground, and he covered her. She loved the feel of him wrapped around her, and opened her thighs to cradle his hips between them. He was hot and hard and nudged at her already wet opening. She was always ready for him, any time, any place, and he was always up for any occasion...literally. He was a fierce but gentle lover who always put her pleasure above his, although she made sure he was as satisfied as she was each time they made love.

The look on his face when she made him come turned her on like nothing else could. The knowledge that she could please her man was a mighty aphrodisiac. The way he gave himself over to her, let her explore him as she pleased, submitted to her if she asked even though it went against his dominant nature, proved his love for her.

She tilted her hips, and he slid in with ease. She'd never get used to the way he stretched and filled her. No matter how many times they were together, it was amazing.

She kissed his chest and circled one flat nipple with her tongue. He growled and thrust into her harder, faster until she had to lock her legs around his hips to hang on. She met him thrust for thrust, their bodies slamming together over and over until they both slipped over the edge at the same moment. She screamed his name, he yelled out hers, and her muscles contracted around him until he'd spent every last drop of his seed inside her.

"I love you, Piers, and I want to move to your house."

"Are you sure you want to be that far away from your sister?" He hugged her tighter.

"I'll be happy as long as I'm with you. You are my home now." She kissed his cheek.

"I have a better idea."

"Oh yeah?" She sat up and waited, curious for his answer.

"Yeah. I know your sister and Raze spend every weekend at Sanctuary. There is a place not far from there for sale. It has nearly as much acreage as I have now, and it would be closer to your family."

"Oh, Piers!" She smiled and flung herself at him.

"I take it that is acceptable to you?" He chuckled.

"Oh yes!" She rained kisses over his face and chest.

"Would you mind if we helped out at Sanctuary as well?"

"Are you sure? I mean after everything that happened with the others?"

"Yes." He nodded. "We've worked everything out now, and if I can save others before they get as bad as my brother, I want to try."

"Then yes, I would love to do that." She kissed his lips, but when she started to pull back, he tangled his fingers in her hair and deepened the kiss. By the time his mouth left hers, she was panting with need.

"It's settled then." He rolled on his back and pulled her over him until she was straddling his hips. His erection lay hard and ready again against her belly.

"You are a wicked, wicked man."

"And you are a wicked woman. Now show me just how wicked you can be."

"As you wish." She made love to him with a light heart and a contented soul that had found its other half.

The End

About the Author

S. K. Yule's love for reading started in high school, and finally inspired her to try her hand at writing. Once an outlet was discovered for an over-active, and at times overwhelming imagination, a passion for creating stories for others to enjoy was born.

You will most often find S. K. Yule tapping away on her laptop in her farmhouse located in a tiny Midwestern town with a population of 150. She lives with her real-life hero, her husband and plans to have the happily ever ending with him that she so often writes about.

Their children consist of three yorkies, three miniature schnauzers, and a rottweiler, all of which are spoiled rotten.

S. K. Yule's previously published, bestselling romance works include:

Darkest Hours, Darkest Book I

Darkest Desires, Darkest Book II

Darkest Intentions, Darkest book III

Lycan Lover

Lycan Lust

Lycan It

Demon Scorned

Jericho's Revenge

Breaking the Cowboy

Three Lovers for Lucy

S. K. Yule loves to hear from readers and other authors/writers. You can find more information about S. K. Yule and contact information at:

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