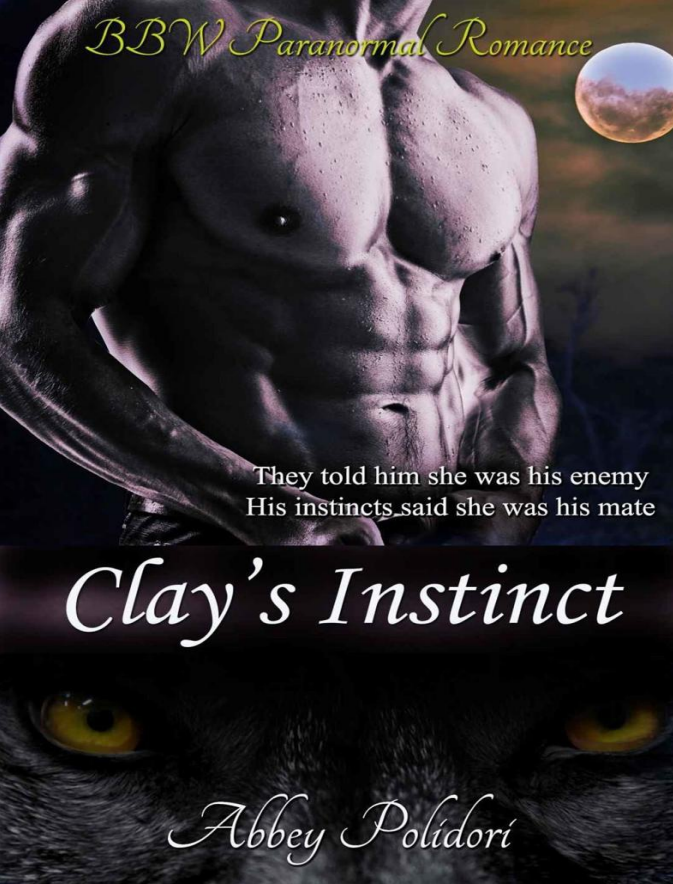




BBW Paranormal Romance

They told him she was his enemy
His instincts said she was his mate

Clay's Instinct

Abbey Polidori

CLAY'S INSTINCT
Wolf Call #2

Abbey Polidori

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For Tabi, who has always believed

CHAPTER ONE

Found

Sheriff Clay Adams came out of the woods above the small town of Faith, Montana warily, cautiously,

sniffing the air. Even in his human form he could sense trouble.

Gathering his clothes from beneath a tree stump where he had left them the previous night wrapped in a plastic waterproof bag, he eyed the road below, the road that led from Faith to the town of Promise in the East.

He dressed quickly and descended the pine covered hill to the road, sniffing the air.

Trouble had passed this way.

He wasn't sure of what had raised his hackles this way but he trusted his senses with his life so he made his way back to his house carefully. He had spent the night in the woods, one of his 'back to nature' times as he liked to call

them. Maybe he shouldn't have left the town like that. What if they needed him?

His deputy, Lassiter, could handle anything that Faith threw at him so Clay shouldn't feel so guilty. The worst things that ever happened here were nothing compared to the big cities. Putting rowdy drunks in the cells overnight was something Lassiter could handle easily.

But this sense Clay had now, this harbinger of trouble, was like nothing he had felt before.

It was five thirty in the morning, the sky a cold slate gray as Clay made his way through town and he saw no one. Everything seemed just like normal. Quiet. Sleepy.

But when he turned off the main street toward his house, the hairs on the back of his neck and arms stood on end.

A police car sat on the road at the end of his driveway, blocking in his own vehicle. The markings on the car said, 'Promise PD'.

Clay had never met Sheriff Ronson, his opposite number in the neighboring town, but it looked like the man had reason to visit now, and to Clay's own house instead of the small police station on Main Street.

How did Ronson even know where he lived and why was he here at this hour, before the town of Faith was awake?

A saying crept into Clay's mind:

evil loves the darkness.

He had no conscious reason to fear Ronson - after all, the man was a law enforcement colleague - but Clay's subconscious, the part of him that was mostly wild and intuitive, howled into his mind that this visit brought danger. He wished he had his gun with him but he had gone to the woods in his civilian clothes.

As he approached the house, a dark figure on the porch stepped down onto the driveway. The man wore a tan sheriff's uniform and he looked wiry and tough. He had a black moustache and dark eyes that watched Clay as he approached.

'Are you Clay Adams?' The

voice was gravelly, and the tobacco smell coming from the man confirmed that he was a heavy smoker.

'Sheriff Clay Adams,' Clay corrected.

The man stepped forward but didn't offer his hand. 'I'm Sheriff Ronson from Promise. I've come to ask a few questions about some strange sightings in these parts.'

'At this early hour? And at my house?'

'I wanted to be sure I found you. I asked around some and it seems you aren't always home.'

'I take walks sometimes when I'm off duty and the woods around here are as good a place as any to exercise.'

'The woods.' Ronson said it as if contemplating the meaning of the word. 'I thought it was dangerous in the woods around here. Especially for an unarmed man.' He nodded to Clay's belt, indicating the absence of a sidearm.

'You don't believe in those old legends, do you?'

'They're hardly old, Adams. There have been sightings reported recently. It seems to me your office has been keeping them quiet. A family passing through here ended up in my office in Promise and told me what they saw a week ago.'

'Really? And what did they see?'

'A wolf-like creature moving fast between the trees.'

Clay cursed inwardly. He was careful not to be seen when he shifted and went back to nature. This area was too popular with campers and hikers. He would have to go deeper into the woods from now on, further from town. 'And you believed them?'

Ronson shrugged. 'Should I? I asked around and it seems there have been other similar sightings around here.'

Now it was Clay's turn to shrug. 'Do you believe in monsters, Ronson?'

'I've seen some things.' He took a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and stuck one in his mouth. When he lit it and drew on the smoke, Clay took a reflexive step backward. Having

heightened senses had its drawbacks and the cigarette smelled like a cloud of foul-smelling poison to him.

'I've investigated the sightings but they're just people being mistaken about what they saw. There are wolves in these woods but not wolfmen.'

'Is that what you were doing in the woods this morning? Investigating?' Ronson took another pull on the smoke and his eyes watched Clay closely as he exhaled.

A coldness crept up Clay's spine and settled at the base of his neck. Ronson knew something. He didn't know how much but it might be enough to mean real trouble for Clay.

'Like I said, I was just taking a

walk.'

Ronson nodded. 'Well if you hear anything or find anything during your...investigations...be sure to let me know.' He opened the door of his police car and slid inside. Without another word, he pulled away toward Main Street.

Clay watched him go, the ghostly remnants of the cigarette smoke still hanging in the early morning air, and he felt a queasiness in his gut. He had heard tales when he was younger about how no shifter was safe in the world of men. There were people out there who hated anyone who was different to themselves and they hunted down Clay's kind. Sometimes they killed them but usually

shifters were captured and taken away. The stories about what happened to those captured were the ones that had kept Clay awake at night when he was younger. Stories of a shadowy occult group called the Temple of Thul. What they did with shifters was unknown but was rumored to be worse than what the Third Reich did with the Jews during World War 2 when humans were experimented upon.

Clay had convinced himself long ago that these tales of the Temple of Thul were stories made up to ensure that shifters kept their wild side secret from the world of men but now he wondered if the stories could be true. Ronson's arrival at this hour and his questions

about sightings of a wolf-like creature were not normal.

Clay sighed and sat on the wooden porch. Should he run? That meant the life he had built for himself here - the police work, the friendship of the townsfolk, the sense that he was protecting a community - would be left behind. Gone.

No, he would not run.

He would stay.

And if they came for him, he would be ready.

*

Ronson left the Faith town limits and parked his car by the side of the

road near the woods. Taking his cell from his pocket, he punched in a number.

The voice that answered was old, gravelly. 'Ronson.'

'I found what you sent me to find,' he said into the phone.

'The shifter?'

'It's the sheriff, like you said. I don't know what spells your techs were working when they found out there was a shifter in Faith but they were right. His name is...'

'Clay Adams. We know. We needed someone on the ground to confirm it and you were our closest member to Faith.'

'Well it's him. He spent last night in the woods.'

'How vile. His filthy animal days are over. We'll handle it from here.'

'Sure thing. I...'

The phone on the other end had been hung up.

Ronson cranked his engine and pulled back onto the the deserted road, heading back to his own town. Whatever the Temple had planned for Adams was no business of his. He had done his part.

The filthy shifter was about to get what he deserved.

CHAPTER TWO

Called

Lucinda Everett's cell vibrated on the nightstand, waking her from a dream in which she had been swimming

in the Pacific Ocean with a dark-haired, muscular man. She had been wearing a black bathing suit that contained her curves and he had been naked. Waking up from her sensuous dreamworld, she sighed and reached for the phone. The screen said 'Killingsworth'. Lucinda suddenly felt much more awake as she pressed the button to answer the call.

'Hello?'

'Miss Everett, it's Nigel Killingsworth here.' His clipped British accent reminded her of when she first spoke to him in his New York office over ten years ago.

'Yes, what is it? Do you have a lead?'

'Possibly, possibly. We're

sending out a team to your neck of the woods, so to speak. One of our members has made a positive identification of a shifter.'

'Here in Montana?' Her heart hammered in her chest.

'Yes, in a small town called Faith.'

'I know that town. It's twenty miles from here.' She had driven through Faith a couple of times and even visited the woods in the area after a reported wolfman sighting. If she had known for sure that a shifter lived there among the decent people, she would have taken her gun.

'Would you like to be on the team, Miss Everett?'

'You know I would.'

'Yes, I do. I also know why you are desperate to come face to face with this shifter and I must warn you that we are taking it alive. No harm is to come to it. You may attend in your capacity as a reporter but you may not harm the target. Is that clear?'

She nodded, then realized he couldn't see her, and said, 'Yes, that's clear. Do I get the story?'

'You get the story. Our media department will contact you with the details you must include and the details you must not.'

'If I can't write my own story and I can't kill the monster, what the hell is the point of my being there?'

'The point, Miss Everett, is that you will know you are not crazy. After a decade of telling people what killed your parents and what you saw in the woods when you were young, you will get peace of mind. You will know they are real.'

'But I need to tell the world. This is huge.'

'You will tell the world what we instruct you to tell the world. Otherwise you will not be part of this team and you will never know for sure if the monster you have been chasing for ten years actually exists. All those news stories you've written over a decade, all those investigations of wolfman sightings across America will be just

that...stories.'

'Okay, okay, I want in.'

'Very well. The rest of the team will be there to pick you up at seven. Be ready.'

Before he hung up, she said, 'Killingsworth?'

'Yes?'

'Do you think it's the one that killed my parents?'

'I have no idea. Does it matter? They're all killers of someone's parents.' He hung up.

Lucinda checked the clock. Half an hour to go before they got here. She had to take a shower and call work and tell them she was working on a story and wouldn't be in the office today. She

wouldn't mention werewolves or wolfmen because every time she tried to get a reported sighting into the Montana Bugle, her editor rolled his eyes and shook his head as if Lucinda was crazy.

She padded across the bedroom and opened her closet. What did one wear to a werewolf hunt? Black was usually the best option for her, as ninety per cent of the clothes on the hangers attested to. All black. Slimming black. Hide those curves from the world.

She chose a pair of black jeans and a turtle neck sweater and fished a bra and panties from her underwear drawer before heading to the bathroom to turn on the shower. She avoided looking at herself in the mirror as she

slipped out of her nightie and into the shower.

By the time she was showered and dressed, her long auburn hair tied up in a sensible pony tail, she heard a vehicle outside and saw the glare of headlights on the curtains. She grabbed her notebook and handheld video camera and stuffed them into a small duffel bag before leaving the house and heading down the driveway.

The vehicle was a black Range Rover with dark windows. The rear door opened and she saw men inside. They all wore black the same as her but their choice of color was more to do with stealth than hiding bulges.

She got in and they closed the

door behind her. The vehicle pulled away immediately and they drove for the outskirts of town. There were two of them plus the driver. Lucinda knew better than to ask names of members of the Temple of Thul but the first man, a lean hard man with short black hair offered his. 'I'm Keats and this is Shelley. The driver is Coleridge.'

So it looked like they had opened a book of twentieth century poets to get their false names.

'We know who you are and why you're here,' Keats continued, 'so let me lay down the ground rules. Number one: no photos. Number two: let us do our job and don't get in our way. Number three: you can write the story about the

werewolf sightings in the area and you can name the target but you can not mention the Temple's involvement in any way. We are a secret organization and we want to stay that way. Your story will simply say that the target left town.'

'How can I name the target if I don't even know his name?'

'It's Clay Adams. He's the local sheriff.'

'Wow, a town with a werewolf as a sheriff. That'll make a great story.'

Keats nodded. He pulled a gun from his belt and ejected the clip to check the load. The bullets shone silver in the interior of the vehicle.

'I thought you weren't going to kill him,' Lucinda said.

'This is just a precaution.'

Shelley, a fair-haired man who looked like he had made a living as a bare-knuckle brawler at some point in his life, held up a tazer and grinned.

Keats patted the tazer in his own belt. 'We're going to take him alive, Miss Everett.'

She sat back and looked out of the window at the woods and the distant mountains. "I'm doing this for you, Mom and Dad," she said inwardly, "The world will know these monsters exist and are living among us."

*

Clay stood in his back yard,

sniffing the early morning air. He had felt uneasy since Ronson's visit and now he wondered if the sense of foreboding that sat in his gut like a coiled snake was an actual portent of bad things to come or just a lingering reaction to Ronson. In the distance, storm clouds rolled across the sky. The air felt charged with electricity.

He should change out of his t-shirt and lumberjack shirt and jeans and put on his uniform and get to the station like he did every morning but this morning everything felt different, like he had fallen down a rabbit hole into a different world. But it wasn't Wonderland he stood in now; it felt like hunting season had just started and he

was the prey.

Were they coming for him? Had Ronson's visit been a reconnaissance mission before they sent the troops? What did he even know about the Temple of Thul and how did they know anything about him? They were rumored to have access to old ways of sorcery. Once, Clay would have laughed at such a notion but now he was willing to believe anything. After all, he had been bitten by a lycan and become a werewolf. If the ancient legends of werewolves were true, then why not the ancient legends of sorcery?

So they could have tracked him down using supernatural methods.

He looked back at the house

where his sheriff's uniform hung in his closet waiting. If he went and put on that uniform and went to work like any other day and these people really were hunting him, they would know where to find him.

He looked at the mountains sitting beneath the dark storm clouds. Up there, in the trees and among the streams, was a habitat where he felt in control. His inner wolf knew how to survive in that environment.

He fished his cell out of his pocket and called Lassiter. His deputy answered on the second ring.

'Sheriff.'

'John, I need you to look after the town for a few days.'

'Okay, sheriff, no problem. You

okay?'

'Yeah, I just need to take a leave of absence for a few days. If anyone comes asking about me, just tell them you don't know where I am. That will be the truth because I'm not telling you where I'm going.'

'Are you in some kind of trouble, Sheriff? I want to help. Hell, the whole town will help if you let us. You're a good sheriff.'

'If you want to help me, John, just take care of my town while I'm gone.' He hung up and went inside the house, turning off the phone and placing on the kitchen table. If they were using more conventional methods to track him, like following his cell signal, the trail ended

here.

After locking up the house, he went back outside and prepared himself to leave. As a lone wolf, he had adopted the entire town of Faith as his pack, nurturing it and protecting its citizens. As sheriff, he held the alpha role and it was his responsibility to lead the town and ensure its survival. The best thing he could do now to ensure that survival was leave. If the Temple of Thul really were after him, they were trouble and Faith could do without that kind of problem. His final act as pack leader would be to sacrifice his position as alpha and lead the trouble away from town.

He hit the sidewalk and hurried

toward Main Street. Once he reached the woods there he would be gone, vanished before anyone could find him. There were places he knew in the mountains that would afford him shelter. The old hunter's cabin hidden deep in the pines halfway up the mountain would serve all his needs. A stream ran close to the abandoned cabin and he would have no problem finding food. The wildness within him longed for such an environment.

But as he reached Main Street, he realized reaching his sanctuary would not be so easy. A black Range Rover with tinted windows turned into the street and the engine growled as it sped toward him. His senses kicked into

overdrive, telling him to run for the trees. But the vehicle was between him and freedom and it was approaching fast.

Controlling the panic that threatened to rise within him, Clay took two determined strides toward the road then sprinted toward the Range Rover. It would be the last thing they were expecting and he hoped to use the element of surprise to aid his escape.

The vehicle skidded to a stop, rubber squealing on asphalt, smoke rising from the wheels.

Clay leapt onto the hood of the Range Rover, then onto the roof and over the other side, landing on the road behind his enemies. They had no chance

of turning around in time to stop him and the only choice left to them was to exit the vehicle. He hoped to be in the woods and running by the time they got the doors opened.

He ran along the road, arms pumping to give himself more forward momentum. Just a few yards before he got to the trees. A screeching sound ahead made him jerk his head up as a second Range Rover, identical to the first, skidded into the street. The doors opened and three men and a woman got out. The men had tazers in their hands, the woman seemed unarmed. All wore black.

Clay halted, adrenaline surging through his body. He felt confused and

trapped and the crazy part was that the confusion was caused by the sight of the woman. As soon as he saw her, a part of him deep inside cried out in recognition. Did he know her? No, he had never seen her before in his life. But as he looked at her attractive face, long auburn hair tied up on her head, and womanly curves, he felt as if his inner wolf was howling with longing. He had read about this emotion and knew it was called the Call but he had never experienced it before now. Of course he wouldn't have experienced it before because the Call only happened once in a lycan's life, the moment a mate was recognized.

So this could not be the Call because the woman standing before him

was one of them, a member of the Temple of Thul. She was here to capture him.

Shaking off the feeling and concentrating on his escape, he ran toward the three men. The fair-haired one had his tazer out and trained on Clay. He pulled the trigger and the electrode darts shot out, trailing wires behind them like spider webs.

Clay dropped to the road and rolled. The electrodes passed above him and the man cursed. The dark-haired man was pulling his own tazer from his belt but before he had a chance to use it, Clay had reached him and sent a fist into his face. The man went down clutching his nose, the tazer dropping harmlessly

to the asphalt.

Clay whirled and sent an elbow into the gut of the fair-haired man, dropping him to the road alongside his colleague.

The woman's green eyes were wide with shock, her mouth open slightly as she watched her companions fall.

The driver pulled a pistol from his belt, shouting at Clay to freeze.

The doors of the first vehicle opened and four men spilled out, all brandishing pistols. They had obviously decided Clay was too dangerous to try and take down using tazers and were utilizing more deadly force.

Clay grabbed the woman by the throat and positioned himself behind her.

'Let me go or she dies,' he said. There was no way he would hurt her but he hoped that their preconceived ideas about him, about what he was, would make them take him seriously. Being so close to the woman set off savage sparks in his body. She was beautiful and plush and her curves seemed to form a secret geometry that awakened his inner wild lust. He could smell her fear but also arousal. No, this can't be happening. She is the enemy.

Yet his instincts told him otherwise.

The driver aimed his gun at Clay. 'You think we care if she dies?' He pulled the trigger and the gunshot sounded like a crack of thunder in the

early morning.

Clay barely had time to react. He pulled her to one side and twisted his body to shield her. Every action was made instinctively, without thinking.

He felt a sudden stabbing heat in his side as the bullet hit him. The woman screamed. The searing pain almost made him black out but Clay's protective instinct kept him moving. He dragged the woman to the trees. She came willingly.

Another shot rang out and the bark of a pine tree exploded in showers of wooden shards.

'We need to get to cover,' Clay told the woman.

She nodded and followed him into the trees.

If he was alone, he could have shifted and moved much more quickly through the woods. But now he had the woman to think of. He just hoped she wouldn't hold him back enough to get them both killed.

What the hell was he thinking protecting one of the enemy? He should just leave her here and go. That was the only option that assured his safety but he couldn't bring himself to leave her.

She seemed placid enough as she followed him. How had she become involved with the Temple of Thul? He had plenty of questions but for now they had to wait. There were armed men coming through the trees behind them.

A sharp stab of pain in his left

side slowed him for a moment and he grimaced against the agony of moving forward. He leaned against a tree, breathing hard, resting his forehead on his arm.

'Are you okay?' the woman asked.

'Do you really care? You came here to kill me.'

'No, that isn't true...'

'Or capture me, which is the same thing.'

She fell silent.

'What's your name?' he asked to distract himself from the pain.

'Lucinda. Lucinda Everett.'

'I guess you already know I'm Clay Adams, sheriff of the town you just

invaded.'

She cast her green eyes back along the path they had travelled. 'I think they're close, we need to move.'

'What do you care? They're your friends.'

'They shot at me.' She seemed confused as if she didn't know that getting into bed with snakes would get you bitten.

'With friends like that, who needs enemies?'

'They aren't my friends,' she protested.

He managed to stand up straight, the pain subsiding. He would heal from the wound and his lycan abilities meant he would heal faster than a human but it

still felt like a fire had been lit in his side.

'It's a couple of miles to where we're headed,' he said, 'but there's a place ahead we can lose those men.'

'You can just leave me here if you want,' she offered.

That would suit him just fine but he had to protect her. There were still feelings swirling around inside his head and heart that he had no explanation for.

'You're coming with me.'

She nodded and they started up the side of the mountain again.

Clay watched her as they fled their pursuers. She was a big woman and something about that appealed to him. She was also pretty and despite the

circumstances seemed to have an air of innocence about her. But the biggest draw was the fact that his wolf instincts told him he had just met his mate.

CHAPTER THREE

Run

Lucinda felt breathless as they scrambled up the side of the mountain and not all of that was because of the

physical exertion. The man leading her though the woods, Clay Adams, was nothing like she had expected.

He had an air of confidence and control despite the fact he had been shot and his calmness seemed to infect her because despite the armed men following them, she felt an inner sense of peace.

The air around Clay seemed to crackle with his powerful aura as he moved his lean, muscular frame. He had collar-length dark hair and his face was ruggedly handsome in a way that made her heart pound when he spoke to her. She had to remind herself that despite the fact he had rescued her from a bullet, he was a shifter. His kind were killers.

He could be leading her into the wilderness to murder her.

He stopped and pointed to an outcropping of rock. 'There.'

She followed him to the rocks and he pulled at branches and bushes, revealing a tunnel that led into darkness. This was no cave; it was literally a small tunnel and she worried she wouldn't be able to fit inside.

'In there?' she asked, praying he'd say no.

He nodded. 'We can hide inside. They'll think they lost us.' He gestured to the opening in the rock. 'You first.'

'I...I don't think I'll fit inside there.'

'You're not claustrophobic are

you?'

She shook her head. 'If you'd seen some of the apartments I've lived in, you wouldn't need to ask that question.'

'So get in. Quickly.'

'In case you hadn't noticed, I'm plus-sized.'

He nodded. 'I noticed.'

'That hole isn't plus-sized.'

'It's larger inside. You'll fit. Now move.'

'Isn't there another way?'

He strode over to her and grabbed her arm, leading her forcefully to the tunnel. 'If you don't get in there now, they'll find us. They already took a shot at you, do you want to risk that

again?'

She shook her head. His grip on her arm was strong and even though it hurt a little, when he released her she missed his touch. Steeling herself, she got on all fours and crawled into the hole. When she was halfway inside, she was sure she could feel Clay's eyes on her ass but discarded the notion as ridiculous. The cave was much larger inside than it looked from outside, just as Clay had said, but beyond the dim light trickling in through the small opening, the place was in blackness. She got all the way in and sat against the cool rock wall, now feeling exhausted from the scramble up the mountain. And they had barely left town. Just how far

was Clay going to take her?

That thought made her feel suddenly hot and she moved her face into the shadow so he couldn't see her as he crawled into the confined space.

He put a finger to his lips and sat facing her. The cave might have been larger than it looked but it was still small enough that they were very close to each other. Lucinda felt a tightness in her throat as she felt Clay's eyes on her.

He smelled manly, a mixture of musk and nature, and she breathed him in as deep as she dared without being obvious. She guessed that since he was a shifter, his own sense of smell was heightened and wondered if he could smell the mix of fear and arousal she felt

at this moment.

Stop thinking like that. He's a monster. A killer.

Yet so far he had done nothing but protect her from killers.

From outside the mouth of the cave came sounds of men talking and moving through the undergrowth. Lucinda froze and closed her eyes, silently praying they wouldn't be found. She could feel Clay's body heat against her skin and hear her own heart tripping in her chest.

The sounds came closer and she tensed, ready to flee. But she was trapped in here. Trapped with a werewolf shifter like the one that had killed her parents. She wondered if she

was on the menu to be Clay's next meal. That thought sent her mind down different roads and the shiver she felt in her body was nothing to do with the cold.

Get a hold of yourself. This is crazy.

Clay leaned forward and whispered in her ear. 'They're gone.'

She had been so preoccupied she hadn't even noticed the sounds outside receding into the distance.

'What now?' she whispered.

'Now we hole up for a few days.'

'In here?'

'No, there's a place I know. A cabin.'

'Well that all sounds wonderful

but I need to get home.'

He shook his head. 'You're coming with me. I don't trust you enough to let you go.'

She felt heat on her cheeks. 'You don't trust me? What the hell...'

'You came to Faith to help them capture me. Why should I trust you to keep your mouth shut about where I'm going?'

'But I don't know where you're going!'

'I just told you I'm going to hide on the mountain in a cabin. They might think I've left the area, run away to another state. I can't risk you telling them otherwise.'

'Then why the hell did you tell

me where you're going? You could have just gone and left me to go home.'

He shrugged. 'They took a shot at you, Lucinda. Do you really think you'll be safe if you go home?'

He had a point. But she didn't want to spend the rest of her life running from men with guns. She didn't want to spend a few days holed up in a cabin with a shifter either, no matter how good-looking and alluring he may be.

'You don't have a choice,' he said, as if reading her mind. 'You either come with me willingly or I'll take you there by force. There's no other option.'

'Because you don't trust me,' she said.

'That's right.'

He had a point there too. She had come here to be part of his capture. But knowing he didn't trust her made her feel worse than being on the run.

Finally she weighed up her possible courses of action. Go willingly with Clay and spend a couple of days hidden away in a cabin or try to run only to have him forcibly take her there. The thought of the second option made her feel hot inside.

'Okay, let's go,' she said, crawling for the tunnel mouth. If she got out first and he was still inside when she started to run...

There was no way she could outrun him was there? And if she did, he was probably right; she wouldn't be safe

at home. The Temple had contacts and agents everywhere.

Still, she could go on the run and spend her time in hotels. Much better than a cabin in the middle of nowhere, even if she would be alone.

Wriggling through the opening, she made up her mind. She was going to make a run for freedom. He could chase her down if he wanted to but she would at least be able to tell herself that she tried to escape.

The moment she got out of the small cave, she scrambled to her feet and started down the slope toward town. The descent made her run faster and she started pumping her legs and arms, letting gravity do most of the work as

she flew along the leaf-covered trail. The ground was uneven and she had to mind her step as she ran but she didn't falter and she didn't fall.

She didn't slow at all until a pair of strong arms slid around her waist. She screamed with surprise. She hadn't heard him coming up behind her at all. He had been silent and fast.

Clay picked her up and hoisted her over his shoulder. Despite her weight, he handled her as if she were as light as a bag of feathers.

'And you wonder why I can't trust you,' he said, carrying her back up along the trail.

She knew he was a lycan and had an inner wolf but the way he had caught

her so quickly and silently, the strength with which he carried her, was more superhuman that she had thought possible.

'I won't run,' she said, 'just put me down.' Being carried was something she had never experienced before and she was sure no ordinary man would be able to handle her the way Clay handled her. She felt uneasy in this position, totally under his control and exposed.

Yet something about Clay's manhandling of her, the way he could so easily master her, made her body tingle excitedly.

She relaxed in his grip and let him take her wherever he wanted.

CHAPTER FOUR

Haven

After a half hour, Clay set Lucinda down and let her walk. They were so deep in the woods now, so far

up the mountain, that she had nowhere to run to. As soon as her feet touched the ground and she stepped away, trying to get her legs to work properly after being carried for so long, Clay already missed the feel of her against him. During the walk here, he had let his heightened senses drink in the scent of her. The subtle tones of the pheromones on her skin sent a signal to his brain that Lucinda was aroused. In response, his body tightened and hardened, yearning for her.

Fighting the need to throw her to the ground and mount her, he had gritted his teeth and tried to ignore the soft warm feeling of the back of her thigh beneath his hand. Even through the

denim of her black jeans, he could feel her warmth. If he just slid his hand a few inches up, he would encounter the swell of her backside.

Now she was walking ahead of him, striding on through the trees wordlessly. Clay watched the sway of her hips and the seductive movement of her thighs and ass through her clothing. The attraction he felt was purely animal lust but he knew there was something deeper at work, something more primal that aroused his wolf nature. The desires of his wolf nature were not something he could ignore for long. Eventually, they consumed him because the wolf part of him could be much stronger than the human part.

'Just over the next ridge,' he told her as they ascended a rocky slope.

Pretending to ignore him, she strode ahead. For a girl with curves, she was certainly fit.

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Lucinda reached the crest of the ridge, looked down at the view below, and gasped. A small clear lake sat nestled among the trees and next to the lake squatted a log cabin. Lucinda had to admit that the scene was idyllic. From her vantage point on the ridge, she could see the vista of mountains stretching away into the distance. She was always in awe when she saw rugged beauty like

this.

Clay came to a stop beside her and she felt herself falling for another kind of rugged beauty.

Stop that, she told herself, he's one of them. They killed your parents.

Ignoring Clay, she set off down the ridge toward the cabin.

She could sense him behind her and had that feeling again that his eyes were on her, roaming over her curves and seeing through her clothing.

Probably sizing up his next meal, she thought. But Clay's eyes on her didn't worry her at all. As she scrambled down the pine-covered rocks toward the lake, she felt appreciated in a way that she had never felt in her entire life.

Get a grip, Lucinda, she chided herself, then realized she needed to literally get a grip as her hand slipped from the rock she had been holding onto and she felt gravity pulling her downward to the rocks below. She barely had time to scream before she saw the world flicker and tumble in her vision. She was falling. Down a very steep rocky ridge. This was going to hurt.

The air was suddenly knocked out of her lungs as she landed on the dirt and she made a 'whoofing sound. Pain shot through her back. All she could see was rocks and pine needles and sky, tumbling and revolving before her eyes. She thought she heard Clay shout,

'Lucinda!' but she could have imagined that and it might be her own inner voice shouting at her. She wasn't sure of anything anymore. Everything was tumbling and spinning and she felt pain shoot along her back. Then she felt her head hit something solid and blackness crept into her vision and mind until it engulfed everything.

Awareness came back to her slowly. The first thing that came to her through the blackness was sound. Someone moving around close to her. She heard birds in the distance, singing happily while she lay here in total darkness. Her sense of smell came alive next and she recognized the bitter odour of coffee brewing. That was a happy

smell which she associated with meeting friends at Starbucks. But she was outdoors, not at Starbucks, so how could she smell coffee? She remembered being on the ridge and falling.

The sounds became recognizable as liquid being poured into mugs and a spoon stirring, ringing out a metallic song as it hit the edge of the mug. It sounded better to Lucinda than the bird song because she associated that stirring sound with hot drinks, and hot drinks were comforting when you were hurt, when you had just fallen and banged your head.

She tried to move and groaned as pain lanced through her skull.

'Try not to move,' came Clay

Adams' voice through the blackness.

She opened her eyes slowly and realized she was in the log cabin. The smell of coffee was joined by the smell of age and an underlying scent of pine. She was lying on a bed, still fully clothed, with a bandage wrapped around her head and a cold wet compress applied to the back of her skull. As her senses returned, she felt a dull throbbing in the place the compress had been applied.

The only other furnishing in the small room was a nightstand. Beyond the doorway, in the main part of the cabin, Clay stood by a stove and kettle. He was looking at her with concern.

'How are you feeling?' he asked.

'Not too bad considering I fell off a mountain.'

He brought her a mug of steaming black coffee and handed it to her. 'Don't drink it yet, it's too hot.'

She accepted it gratefully and sat up against the carved pine headboard. 'I guess you rescued me,' she observed. 'Thanks.'

He shrugged. 'I got to you before you went too far but you hit your head pretty bad.'

She knew he had only managed to get to her in time because of his powers, because he was one of them. A shifter. A killer.

'So what now?' she asked. 'You have me where you want me. I'm

helpless and we're in the middle of nowhere. What happens now?"

'Now you rest,' he said, reaching behind her head to check the compress. 'You have a bump back there. You haven't vomited so I assume you don't have a concussion.' He looked at her eyes. 'No black eye. I think you'll recover quickly.'

'And what about you?' she nodded at his side. 'You took a bullet.' She almost added, 'for me' but stopped herself.

'I heal quickly,' he said. 'Now drink some coffee.'

She took a sip of the hot bitter liquid and felt it warm her inside. 'God that tastes good!' She looked around the

room. 'What is this place?'

'It's an old hunter's cabin. I used to come up here all the time when I was a kid.'

'So it belongs to your parents?' Her reporter's curiosity was returning full force.

Clay looked at the walls as if recalling old memories. 'My adopted parents, yes.'

'You're adopted?'

He nodded. 'My parents found me out here by the cabin one day. I was four years old. The authorities reckoned I'd been wandering in the woods for days. Somehow I'd survived. Apart from scratches and cuts, the only other mark on me was a bite. Of unknown origin,

was the official description of that bite.'

'If you were four, your real parents must have been missing you.'

'The police put out appeals on TV and in the local newspapers to find my parents but nobody came forward to claim me as their child.' He looked at the window and the trees beyond. 'I think the thing that bit me killed my parents. Their bodies are out there somewhere in the woods.'

'That's horrible!' she said.

'I had a good life with my adopted parents. They raised me well. And when they found out about my secret, they kept it hidden from the rest of the community. They researched lycanthropy and helped me control it.

That's why I wear this.' He reached beneath his shirt and pulled out a leather cord with a small silver amulet in the shape of a wolf's claw. 'Wearing this keeps me from turning uncontrollably during a full moon.' He let the amulet drop back against his skin. 'My parents' research also turned up some information on the Temple of Thul.' He looked at Lucinda accusingly. 'I assume that's who you work for.'

She took another sip of coffee, gathering her thoughts. 'I don't work for them. Ten years ago, I was in a bad place. My parents had been killed by a monster. We were out in the woods having a family picnic and this thing came out of the trees, snarling and

growling.' She felt a fear rising within her, the same fear she had felt on that day ten years ago as a young girl. 'I watched it kill my parents and waited for my turn. But my turn never came. It turned tail and went back into the trees, leaving me unharmed. I was found four miles away, wandering along the road in a state of shock. No one believed my story. I was just fourteen and they thought I was making the whole thing up. The official line was that my parents had been murdered and I had run away. I was sent to psychologists and psychiatrists and doctors and they all thought my mind had concocted the monster story as a kind of protective device. The police asked me to identify the killer but all I could tell

them was that it was a monster. Half man, half...'

'Wolf,' Clay finished for her.

She nodded. 'I was put into foster care but it never really worked out. Then one day I was contacted by an Englishman named Nigel Killingsworth. He had seen my story in the newspapers and he told me that he believed me. He explained that werewolves are real and so are vampires. The organisation he worked for, called The Temple of Thul, hunted all these monsters and made the world safe for humans. He kept in contact as I was growing up and when I became a journalist, he asked me to run a story about a werewolf sighting in Oklahoma. He gave me leads and sent

me information. His only stipulation was that I could never mention his organisation in my stories.'

'So he fed you the stories he wanted to be published.'

'He helped me. He promised to find the monster that killed my parents.'

'And has he delivered on that promise?'

She fell silent, recalling Killingsworth's promise to her all those years ago and the lack of results since. 'No.'

'What else do you know about the Temple of Thul?'

'Nothing. I did a lot of digging but all I came up with was a cult that was started in Medieval England and

thought to have died out a thousand years ago. They're a secret society and they do a good job of maintaining the secret part.'

Clay nodded slowly. 'You need to get some rest.'

'I've rested enough. I need to get out of this bed.'

'Rest,' he said, taking the half-empty coffee mug from her. 'I'll get us some food.' He left the room.

Despite her desire to get out of bed, Lucinda felt weariness overtake her. She settled back down on the pillow and started to close her eyes. On the wall of the room beyond the bedroom, she could make out Clay's shadow. He was taking off his shirt. Through half-

closed eyes, she saw the shadow shift suddenly and become that of a large wolf.

As she let sleep take her, she realized with some surprise that she wasn't afraid.

CHAPTER FIVE

Curves

She woke up to find the bedroom filled with dark shadows. Sitting up quickly, she reached around the back of

her head and removed the compress, feeling the bump beneath and wincing at the tenderness she found there. Still, she felt a lot better than she had earlier. Swinging her legs over the edge of the bed, she listened. There was no sound from the room beyond the doorway. The stove and kettle and wall were illuminated with silver moonlight. Had she slept the day away?

Standing up, she supported herself by leaning against the log wall and stretched her stiff limbs. Clay had removed her boots and placed them neatly next to the bed. She slipped them on and went out of the room to the main part of the cabin.

The living area consisted of a

large room furnished with an old sofa and armchair and a pine coffee table. The kitchen area was simple but seemed to be stocked with cans of beans and vegetables in a cupboard which had no door. A door in the opposite wall led to what she assumed was the bathroom and she realized she needed to use the facilities. The room was small and contained a toilet, bath and sink. There was a mirrored cabinet above the sink and when Lucinda had finished what she came in here to do, she checked herself out in the mirror.

Considering she had fallen down a rocky slope, she didn't look too bad. Her hair was mussed up and her make up needed fixing but all things taken into

account, she looked pretty good. Why was she bothered? There was no one to see her out here in the middle of nowhere except Clay Adams.

Maybe that's why she was bothered.

Ridiculous.

Although she had to admit that the shifter sheriff affected her in ways she didn't think any man could affect her. She spent a lot of her evenings watching romance movies and she longed for a relationship like those she saw on the screen but inside she knew it was all fantasy. Her dealings with men in real life had made her cynical. She could allow herself to dream while watching movies but those dreams were shattered

by reality. Something about Clay Adams made the dreamer inside her dare to dream again. And finding that he had the same loss in his past as she had made her feel close to him.

She went back into the main room and wondered where he had gone to. He left hours ago, when there was still daylight outside. She looked out of the window at the lake and woods. The silver moonlight gave everything a ghostly glow. The scene looked unreal, like an illusion. Beautiful yet forbidding.

She opened the door and went out onto the porch. The night air smelled of pine and earth and felt warm on Lucinda's face. The lake shimmered silver and reflected the surrounding trees

and mountains. Lucinda walked to the water's edge and stooped down to trail her hand in the cool water. It felt so good after being cooped up in the cabin all day. She looked around. No sign of Clay. If he had gone roaming in the woods, she guessed he could be miles away.

While she was in the bathroom, she had considered taking a bath but now she was out in the warm night, the lake looked so inviting. Wanting to feel the night breeze on more of her skin, she removed her turtle necked sweater and stood in the moonlight in her pink bra and black jeans and boots. She took off the boots and jeans and folded them neatly, placing them on a rock near the water's edge. She bit her lip and looked

around at the dark shadows between the trees. There was no one around to see her. She quickly removed her panties and bra and waded into the water naked.

As the cool lake reached her waist, she felt her skin rise in little goose bumps. Her nipples stiffened and tightened and she shivered. Steeling herself, she dived under the water came up gasping. It felt cold but so refreshing. Treading water, she swept her wet hair back away from her face and enjoyed the sensation of cool water against her skin. Every nerve ending seemed to come alive in her body. She swam into deeper water and the reflection of the moonlight on the surface made it seem like she was swimming through liquid silver.

Floating on her back, she looked up at the stars in the clear sky and the three-quarter full moon. It looked so clear out here in the wilderness where there were no streetlights causing light pollution. The only artificial light around was the light coming through the cabin window. It illuminated a patch of grass but nothing more.

Lucinda enjoyed the lake until she felt too cold to stand it any longer and swam toward the shore. As she got closer to the rocks where her clothes waited, she froze.

Clay stood on the grass near her clothes. He was as naked as she was. He looked like he had been hunting. Scratches and cuts criss-crossed on his

torso and legs as if he had been moving fast through the undergrowth. The moonlight lit his hard chiselled physique in a way that made his muscles stand out. The broad powerful shoulders, the strong biceps, the defined pectoral muscles and the symmetrical six pack visible on his flat stomach. His cock hung thick and long between his strong thighs. Lucinda gasped at the sight of him.

He said nothing but stood watching her intently. He knew she was naked, knew her clothes were on the rock next to him. He was waiting for her to come out of the lake. He wanted to see her. She sensed it. His intentions seemed to radiate from him like a strong

aura of lust.

Lucinda felt a desire for this man who had saved her life, who had suffered a loss the same as hers, and who was the embodiment of the perfect alpha male. She found the soft bottom of the lake with her feet and waded toward him. The water surrounding her and hiding her body from him fell away as she stepped closer to shore. When her breasts were revealed, full and aching for him and topped with hard excited nipples, his cock twitched and hardened. She had never felt so wanted in all her life. Her curves had made her modest in the past, as if her body were a hidden secret she kept to herself. But now she wanted to share herself with him, curves

and all. She wanted to show him the thing she had kept from the sight of all men.

As the water dropped to below her waist and her womanhood was displayed to Clay in the moonlight, he came forward to her, fully hard. With his arms around her back, he pulled her to him and kissed her fiercely. Lucinda whimpered and returned the kiss, their mouths moving together and tongues exploring each other.

Her hands went to his strong hips, the muscles there feeling hard and strong beneath her fingers. She wanted to touch the hard length that pressed against the soft flesh of her thigh but she resisted for now, wanting to take this slow for as

long as she could bear it. She wanted to enjoy him for as long as possible.

His kisses moved to her cheek then down her neck and she groaned with pleasure and let her hand drop to his cock. Her fingers encircled the thick shaft and Clay grunted, nipping and sucking at her neck. His own hands slid down her back to the soft swell of her buttocks and he stroked the soft wet flesh, making Lucinda shiver.

'You're cold,' he said, moving his mouth from her neck and looking into her eyes.

'It doesn't matter. I need you.'

Scooping her up on his arms, he took her into the cabin and straight to the bedroom, laying her on the bed and

letting his eyes prowl over her naked body. 'It's warmer in here,' he said huskily, his excitement evident in his voice as well as in the stiff cock that rose proudly from his groin.

She nodded. She needed him. Now. The sensations radiating from her pussy made her squirm. Her flesh might be cold from the lake but her core was hot and wet.

He climbed onto the bed above her and looked down at her. The lust seemed to smolder in his eyes. Lucinda lay beneath him panting with desire.

Clay lowered his mouth to her breast and took her hard nipples between his lips, flicking at it with his hot tongue and sucking it gently. Lucinda

arched her back and put one hand on the back of his head, pulling him against her sensitive puckered flesh. Her other hand stroked his hard chest and stomach until she found the shaft of his penis again and fondled it lovingly. He let out a groan as she stroked him and he sucked her nipples with more force as his desire grew. This rough treatment of her sensitive nipples made Lucinda moan and wriggle beneath him.

Clay directed his kisses down over the swell of her soft belly to the juncture between her thighs. She panted with need and parted her legs for him. He put his face to her womanhood and she cried out as she felt his tongue touch her lips, sliding past them in search of

her pleasure center. He licked up along her slit, tasting her, until he found the hard bud of her clit and teased it with the tip of his tongue. Lucinda felt like she was going to explode with bliss. Closing her eyes and writhing against Clay's expert tongue, she moaned and whispered, 'Yes!' over and over as he pleased her to the point where she thought she might die of joy. Biting her lip, she came strong and hard, her hips spasming and her thighs locking around Clay's head, holding him against her sex.

He lapped at her more gently as she let the orgasm take her in its ecstatic grip. She lost all sense of time and space and reality and her entire being became a single organ of pleasure.

When it subsided, it left her a gasping mess of a woman who still needed a man inside her. She lay helpless on the bed, her breasts rising and falling rapidly with her ragged breathing, drained and sated and wanting more all at the same time.

Clay turned her over and pulled up her hips, exposing her sex. She waited for him to mount her, needing it more than anything else in the world. She had never wanted a man as much as she wanted Clay Adams right now.

When he finally mounted her, he slid into her heat in one deep thrust. Lucinda cried out and gripped the bed sheets tightly, closing her eyes and concentrating on the feeling of having

that big thick cock inside her tight pussy. Clay's hands were on her hips, pulling her back and forth while he impaled her on his manhood, sliding himself in and out of her.

Her self-consciousness, her natural timidity and fear of what her lovers would think of her curves were all gone. She felt no fear with Clay and simply enjoyed the pleasure he was giving her. She had never felt so full of a man on all her life. Clay fitted her perfectly. Oh God, it felt so good!

As the speed of his thrusts increased and his muscular abdomen slapped against her curvy buttocks, he growled with pleasure. She knew he was close. Looking over her shoulder at

him, she whispered, 'Give it to me, Clay. You feel so good in there!'

He looked like he was enjoying himself so much, his eyes locked on her ass, his breaths coming in excited pants. Every muscle in his body seemed tight and hard. And with every thrust forward of his muscular hips, Lucinda felt his thick manhood delve deep inside her body.

Suddenly he shouted, 'I'm going to come!' and he roared out loudly and slammed himself deep inside Lucinda. She felt him twitch in there and a delicious warmth spread inside her sex.

Clay gasped and grunted and groaned and emptied himself into her, holding her hips tight and burying

himself as deep as he could inside her pussy.

When he finally pulled out of her, she was filled with his seed. She rolled over to face him and he collapsed next to her, one arm across her belly as he lay beside her breathing hard.

Lucinda stroked his hair and closed her eyes, enjoying the moment.

What they had just done had felt like more than just sex.

It had felt like a mating.

CHAPTER SIX

Intrusion

Lucinda woke up before Clay the following morning. While he lay sleeping, she slipped out of bed and

went naked to the kitchen area to make coffee. She got two mugs out of the cupboard and went to set them next to the kettle when she felt a cold chill in the base of her spine. She froze, the mugs dangling by their handles for her fingers, unable to move.

The chill crept up her spine like an icy spider. When it reached the spot between her shoulder blades, Lucinda felt a grip of panic. What was going to happen when it reached her brain? She struggled to move but something had paralyzed her. She tried to call out to Clay but her lips wouldn't form the words.

The icy touch slid up the back of her neck. When it reached her head, her

mind was filled with a vision of a dimly lit stone room. There were men there, dressed in dark purple robes, and they were kneeling in a circle. Inscribed on the stone floor was an intricate set of symbols and words in languages Lucinda didn't recognize. Then a voice filled her head. A whisper so loud she was sure it would wake Clay before she understood that it was only in her own mind and not being spoken aloud.

'Lucinda, where are you?' The voice was male but it sounded like a number of different men all speaking the same words at the same time.

'Lucinda.'

She tried to block it out but her mind was just as paralyzed as her body.

The only thing she could see in her inner vision was that terrible stone room and the men within.

'Lucinda, look around.'

She realized what they were trying to do. Just as she could see them, so could they see through her eyes. They wanted her to look around so they would see where she was. They knew she was with Clay and they wanted him for their dark purposes. She tried not to move but felt her head turning as if it was on a string being pulled by someone else. They made her look at Clay, still in bed asleep, at the cabin interior and out of the window at the mountains.

A sudden crash broke the connection and Lucinda felt a jolt of pain

then the icy feeling and the vision were gone. One of the coffee mugs lay shattered on the floor. It had slipped from her finger.

Clay was awake and out of the bedroom immediately. 'What's wrong?'

'They know where we are,' she said, feeling weak. She leaned against the wall. 'They...there was a connection...they could see us.'

'Clairvoyance,' he stated matter-of-factly. 'We need to leave here. Now.'

She nodded, feeling fear rise within her. Were they ever going to be free? Couldn't they just be left alone? 'Where will we go?'

'I don't know yet but we can't stay here.'

They got dressed hurriedly and left the cabin, moving into the cover of the trees as quickly as they could. When they were a mile away, they heard the distant buzz of helicopters approaching. Lucinda gasped but Clay put his hand on her arm and the touch seemed to comfort her instantly.

'They aren't going to find us,' he said, 'they're going to go to the cabin before they realize we're gone. By then we'll be safe.'

The sound of the choppers got louder and Clay said, 'We're going to need to move faster.' He began to take off his clothes.

Lucinda knew what he was about to do and she was afraid that when she

saw him in his shifted form, it would bring back a flood of memories of her parents' murder. Clay handed her his clothes and shifted instantly. Lucinda stood rigid but the fear she expected never came. Clay was a huge wolf but when he looked at her, there was a gentleness in his green eyes. She climbed onto his back and gripped his fur tightly as he set off through the trees.

By the time the choppers came into view, Clay was running.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Logan

Two Weeks Later

The Tired Driver's Diner was a

small dingy establishment located just outside Helena, North Dakota. Lucinda and Clay sat in a booth eating a breakfast of eggs bacon and toast. Their life on the run was stressful and Lucinda wasn't sure how long she could go on constantly looking over her shoulder and suspecting everyone they met was a member of the Temple of Thul. Being with Clay felt so right, like it was where she was meant to be, but this life wasn't good for anyone.

She looked over at Clay. He had stopped eating, his fork suspended midway between his plate and his mouth. His brows furrowed slightly and he looked as if he was sniffing the air intently.

'Is everything okay?' she asked.

He placed the fork back onto his plate and held up a hand to silence her while he continued to breath in the various scents in the diner. Lucinda had no idea what fragrance he had detected in the air. All she could smell was fried eggs and bacon but she knew Clay's sense of smell was a million times better than her own.

'There are two shifters in here,' he whispered. 'A male and a female.'

Her eyes widened. 'Really?'

He nodded then looked around the place. His eyes came to rest on a couple sitting in a booth in the corner. Lucinda cast a glance in that direction. The woman was pretty with short blonde hair and pale blue eyes. But it was the

man who demanded Lucinda's attention because a scar ran down the entire left side of his face and seemed to disappear beneath his sweatshirt. He looked fit and muscular and now that Lucinda knew he was a shifter, she recognized something in the man that she also saw in Clay; a wildness that seemed to lurk just below the surface. The inner wolf. She could sense something similar from the woman but it was not so evident. The man was obviously an alpha like Clay.

The two came over and slid into the booth with Clay and Lucinda. The man sat next to Lucinda and she could feel the same sense of power radiating from him that she felt from Clay.

It was the woman who spoke.

Her accent was Canadian. 'My name is Sarah Cooper and this is my partner Logan James. It seems we have something in common.'

'A common enemy,' Clay observed.

Logan nodded. 'We wouldn't be in this place otherwise.'

'On the run?' Clay asked.

Logan nodded.

'So are we,' Clay said.

Sarah lowered her voice to a whisper and leaned in over the table. 'The Temple has agents everywhere.'

Clay nodded. 'We've been on the run for two weeks and I can't see any future for us except more running.'

Logan said in a low voice,

'That's what we thought too but now we've found you. There may be others.'

'Possibly. Those who have escaped like us or are living in fear of the Temple. But how does that change things for us?'

'Strength in numbers,' Logan whispered.

'Are you suggesting we form a pack?'

Logan nodded. 'If we want to strike back at the Temple, it's the only way. Otherwise, we'll be on the run for the rest of our lives. And they will capture us eventually.'

'A pack of wolves,' Clay said, sitting back against the red vinyl upholstery and thinking.

'Not just wolves,' Logan said, 'vampires too.'

Clay raised an eyebrow. 'Have you ever met one?'

'No, not yet. But we know they exist. And they are enemies of the Temple just as much as we are.'

Lucinda shivered. She had no desire to meet a vampire. 'But how could we ask them to join us' she asked, 'if we don't know where they are?'

'We have to track them down,' Sarah said. 'I'm a private detective. I can find anyone with the right resources.'

'Resources we don't have,' Logan reminded her.

Clay seemed to be thinking. After a pause, he said to Logan, 'If she's a

private detective, what's your skill set?'

'I was a Ranger.'

Clay nodded. 'So we have a private detective, a soldier, a cop and a reporter. Three shifters and one human. I'm sure that between us we can find a way to contact the others who are out there living in fear of the Temple. We can't go on running. We need to strike back. We can only do that if we have a pack.'

'I have a sister, Amy,' Sarah said, 'and she's in contact with our dad. He's a detective too. He can help.'

Clay leaned in over the table. 'It's not much but it's a start. At least we'll be doing something other than running.'

Amy looked out of the window at the morning sun. Just a couple of weeks ago she had hated shifters and blamed them all for the murder of her parents. Now she was helping them raise an army of werewolves and vampires to take down a secret society. She had spent a decade searching for a story on shifters and now here she was living the story of the century. She was a part of it.

An idea came to her. Of course, that was it. Her stories.

'I know how we can reach the others,' she said.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Message

Dave Weber, editor of the Montana Bugle, fell heavily into his desk chair and rubbed his eyes. It was too

goddamn early to be at work. But he couldn't sleep as usual so there was no point lying in bed wide awake, his wife snoring away next to him, when he had a newspaper to get out. So here he was at the office feeling like shit and probably looking like it too.

He sighed and looked at his 'In' tray. Despite the fact that this was the age of email, people still wrote to him with stories they thought the paper should cover. They were kooks mostly. People who lived sad little lives and wanted to believe that aliens had landed in their back yard or that they had discovered a government conspiracy.

Dave leaned forward and picked up a padded envelope. At least this

looked like it had some content inside and wasn't just some crackpot's theory.

The envelope contained a CD packed into a plastic wallet and a single piece of paper. Dave recognized the handwriting. Lucinda Everett. The werewolf lady. What the fuck was she up to now? 'You disappear off the face of the planet and now you send me a CD,' he muttered. Lucinda had called the office almost three weeks ago saying she wouldn't be in that day because she was working on a story. After that, nobody heard from her again and she didn't show up for work.

'So what the hell is this?' Dave asked himself, inspecting the DVD in his hand. The handwritten note didn't

explain anything either. It just said, 'Dave, you need to see this. Lucinda.' Great. She was almost as kooky as the members of the public who wrote the letters.

He slid his chair across to the TV and slid the DVD into the player.

When he saw what was on the screen, he rolled his chair back across to the desk and picked up the phone, calling his assistant.

'Joanne, you need to come in to the office. Now. I don't give a fuck what time it is, get in here now!'

He looked back at the TV. Who would have thought that Lucinda Everett had been right all along?

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The news report showed three huge wolves padding through a forest while the camera followed them. The animals changed course and came directly to the camera, one of them suddenly changing into Clay while the other two remained in wolf form. The camera panned up to Clay's face and he looked at the viewers. 'The stories you heard about werewolves and vampires are true,' he said, 'but we aren't monsters. There are some who hunt is as if we were but that is going to change. We won't run any longer.'

Lucinda's voice, off camera, said, 'Do you have a message for others

who are like you?'

He nodded. 'Don't be afraid. You've probably lived most of your lives in hiding. But we have a common enemy and we need to fight that enemy together. You are not alone. We will find you.'

The picture on the TV switched back to the studio and the anchor man smiled. 'Well there you have it folks. Werewolves. Many sources are saying that this footage is an example of the computer CGI effects that are available to just about anyone these days while others are saying it's real and werewolves do exist. Only you can decide for yourself.' He smiled again and went on to the next story.

Lucinda turned off the TV in the

hotel room and shook her head. 'No one believes it.' She went out of the room to the balcony, staring at the night sky and the bright lights of the city.

Clay came out to join her and placed a hand on her shoulder. 'It doesn't matter if it's treated as a hoax by most people. The people who are like us will know it's real. That's all that matters.'

She looked at him and sighed. 'But they don't know how to contact us so what's the point?'

'The point is, they know they don't have to live in fear. They know they aren't alone. Maybe they'll make themselves easier for us to find now.'

She watched the people on the street below, the cars on the road. 'Can

we really do this, Clay?'

'Yes, we can. There are people out there who need our help. And we need their help. This is a fight for freedom. I believe that good will triumph over evil. I know it in my gut.'

'In my experience, reporting on tragic stories for most of my life, evil gets away with a lot of things. Your belief could be wrong, you know.'

He shook his head. 'It's not just a belief, it's an instinct. And my instinct is never wrong. Now come to bed.'

She followed him into the hotel room. Tomorrow they would begin the search for the creatures who hid themselves from the world of men.

Tonight she would forget all that

and enjoy her mate.

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