Genre: Contemporary Romance / Paranormal Romance / Romantic Comedy / Fantasy Romance

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Chapter 1

I lay on the bed my naked body squirming atop the silk sheets. Over me was the dark form of my lover, a man as handsome and strong as any other. He covered me with his warm, muscled body and wrapped his arms around me. I grasped his shoulders and sighed as he kissed my neck. He raised his head and his brilliant blue eyes stared into mine.

"Danny, wake up! Wake up!"

I yelped and fell forward out of my chair. A pair of strong arms caught me, but they weren't the arms of my lover. I had been in the arms of my work chair and now was in the arms of my fellow inmate at this paid penitentiary, Johnny Miller. That meant I was in my cubbyhole cubicle at the office and again bored out of my mind so bad that I fell asleep.

As always after awakening from a wonderful dream I was my usual perky self with energy, vigor, and—hell, who am I kidding? I was a zombie low on brains and with not much prospect of getting one around that office. Well, except for Johnny. He was smarter than me which probably explained why he was the only one I could tolerate. He was also kind of cute, sort of my boss, and very tolerant of laziness. Everything worked out well except the cuteness. That only went as far as friendship would allow. I felt bad about friend-zoning him, but I just didn't feel that way about him.

"Wha? Huh? What happened?" I mumbled.
"You fell asleep, that's what happened," Johnny replied.
I shrugged off his hands, sat back in my chair, and stifled a yawn. "Oh, is that all?"
"Is that all? That's the third time this week I've had to wake you up. Some day I won't be able to save the day," he scolded me.

I sighed and ran my hand through my hair. "Yeah, I know, I'm just so bored with all this paperwork." I gestured to a pile a foot tall at the end of my desk. It was an inch tall when I arrived that morning. "These piles breed faster than rabbits, and are twice as annoying."
"Three times more annoying, but who's counting?" he laughed.
I slumped over my desk. "I am. This job is so boring my mind gets rusted just thinking about it."
He patted me on the back. "We all feel like that, but what are you going to do about it? Go choose your own adventure?"
I squared my jaw and straightened in my chair. "I could do that. I could leave right now and—"
"—and you should because it's almost five," Johnny told me.
I glanced at the clock on my computer screen, realized I'd been asleep long enough for the screensaver to come on, woke up the computer, and checked the time. There was only four minutes left. I hurriedly prepared myself for the evacuation.

"Going somewhere, Miss Lyman?" he teased me. My name was Danielle Lyman, but everyone, when they weren't being sassy, called me Danny.

I glanced at my watch. "I will be in three minutes. Did you need something that takes only three minutes? Well, besides saving me from a wild supervisor, that is," I returned.
"No, but there was something I've been meaning to ask you for a couple of months." He slid into the extra chair in my little dungeon and his hands fiddled with each other.
"I hope it's something about a raise because my two-year anniversary is coming up," I quipped.
"Not quite." He scooted his chair closer to me. His face looked so serious while also being so nervous.
"I'm fine. I was just wondering if you were, well, if you were doing anything tonight."
I stiffened and blinked. "Noo, why?"
"Well, I thought maybe you and I could—well, do something together."
My face drooped and I patted him on the shoulder. "I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I don't think I'm ready for an affair with my boss. Not when I'm about to get a raise."
He snorted and leaned back. The serious expression was gone and there was a smile on his face, but I didn't miss the pain in his eyes. "Can't blame a guy for trying."

"No, but this is the fifth time this month, and that makes it the tenth time this year," I pointed out. I'm sure you're wondering why I wouldn't take my cute boss out for a date. It's because I wasn't ready for commitment, and it was against company policy. One of us would have to quit our job, and I knew it wasn't going to be him. With that sort of ultimatum, it would be a hell of a commitment on my part. I'd be taking all the risk and he'd reap all the benefit of me. If things went south so would my bank account balance, and with student loans to repay from a college degree I still hadn't found a use for I just couldn't take that risk.

"I figure if I play the slots long enough I'm bound to win," he commented.

I stood and patted him on the shoulder. "Maybe, but I gotta go. See you tomorrow." I walked out as the clock struck five and didn't look back. If I had I probably would've stopped myself from leaving and thrown myself into his arms. If I'd known what trouble lay ahead for me I definitely would have thrown myself into his arms.

Since I wasn't a psychic and didn't have spider senses, I walked out of there and left the building and work behind me. My favorite place to relax was a nice pub five blocks off the busy part of the city. That was where the electronic billboards advertised flashy clothes and designer breast jobs. The first I didn't look good in, and the second I had covered with my curvy body.

I took a taxi to my favorite pub, stepped out of the car, and looked up at the dark night sky. The streetlights kept the stars from shining, but nothing except the buildings could keep that full moon hidden. It smiled down at me and I smiled back. It was an old friend, after all. I'd seen it a lot during my long twenty-five years of living. Soon it was about to become an intimate partner in my life.

I strolled down the sidewalk and stopped in front of the pub. The name of the place was Public Pewter, and the game of the place was to get drunk. I opened the old oak door and stepped into a different world. The establishment was done up in mid-seventeenth century coach inn-style complete with wood paneled walls and a bar made from a single slice of giant log that ran along the entire back wall. There were the modern conveniences of a dance floor, jukebox, and every type of beer in the world on display on the wall behind the bar.

I took my usual table in the far corner. It was a dark spot where I could watch everyone without being watched. I pretended I was an anthropologist studying the mating habits of the local inhabitants. Most were the customers very primitive, and some of the pickup lines were even worse. A minute after I sat down a waitress brought me my usual drink, the caffeinated soda, and left me to my studying.

The night was the usual rambunctious antics. People danced, got drunk, tried to dance, fell down, and laughed out the door with a pretty girl, guy, or both under their arms. I sat in my corner watching humanity make a spectacle of itself, but not all of it was funny. There were tender moments of couples walking in hand in hand and kissing over a plate of salsa and chips. An old couple came in and danced slowly to a rock-n-roll song, but even with the drums and guitar playing in the background the tender magic was still there. It made me regret not saying yes to Johnny.

The old couple just left when a young guy slipped into my booth. He was a little taller than me with a thin nose and a goatee. His clothes were clean but simple, and he constantly played with an expensive-looking old coin in his left hand. I figured the shadows meant he hadn't seen me. "The booth's taken," I spoke up.

"I know, but I thought maybe you'd want some company," he replied. "Depends on the company," I quipped. I looked this man up and down, and wasn't sure I liked what I saw. He gave off a vibe that rattled me, and I wasn't usually rattled. He shrugged. "I don't think I'm that bad, and I've got a great party we can go to." The man turned to me with a crooked smile. "It's uptown and you get to rub elbows with a bunch of high-society folks."

I glanced down at my worn blouse and dress pants. "I don't think they'd want to rub elbows with
me. Mine aren't exactly clean," I pointed out. He laughed and waved off my concern. "You look great, fantastic, even. Besides, you're just the person we're looking for."

I raised an eyebrow. "Why?"
The man coughed and gave me more than a cursory glance. "You're, well, how should I say it? Very well filled out."

I frowned. "And that's supposed to make them like me how?" I asked him.

"Let's just say they like to sink their teeth into a new acquaintance who's a little more real than the rubber implanted stick people," he replied. "So what do you say? If you don't like it we can always call you a taxi. There are plenty around at all hours," he offered.

I sloshed my drink around in its glass and sighed. "Why not? What do I have to lose?"

"That's the spirit! Come on, my car's out front." He took my hand, but I pulled it back.

"Wait a second, I don't even know your name and you don't know mine," I pointed out.

"Oh, sorry. It's Stanley Grieg. And yours?" he asked me.

"Danica Lyman," I replied.

He smiled and offered me his arm. "All right, Miss Lyman, if you would be kind enough to follow me I'll take you to a night you'll never forget."
Chapter 2

I took his arm and he led me outside to a red sports car parked on the curb. Around us the city was alive with throngs of people, honking horns, and car exhaust. He opened the door, I slipped inside, and he got into the driver's seat. Once the doors were closed the interior was as quiet as a tomb. The whole world could have been in the middle of a nuclear war and we wouldn't have known. I'd never been in anything half as luxurious as this five-star hotel on wheels, and I squirmed in my chair.

"Problems?" he asked me as the car jumped forward into the busy two-lane traffic.

"I think your car's monthly insurance bill costs as much as my apartment," I commented.

He chuckled. "Probably," he agreed.

"So what do you do for a living?" I wondered.

"Oh, I'm an errand boy." I turned to him and raised an eyebrow. "I'm very good at my job," he added.

"What do you deliver? Drugs?" I joked.

"Not exactly. I'm sort of a go-to man for the people I'm taking you to. When they want fresh-um, members, they trust my judgment enough to go out into the city and bring them back somebody like you. Fresh blood, as it were," he explained.

"Well, I've got plenty of that," I replied.

He smiled. "Yes, I imagine you do."

We drove several blocks through fancy boutiques and shops that dazzled the tourists and party-goers. The Bohemian elegance of the small businesses gave way to forests of office buildings and hotels that towered over us like imperious overlords. A few of the buildings had garages beneath them and into one of these Stanley turned. The garage sat below street level and was lit with sickly fluorescent lights.

There were two dozen other cars around the main stairs into the building above us. Many of them were long, black cars with chauffeurs at the wheel reading large books to pass the long wait. There were a few other flashy vehicles, and a group of men stood at the bottom of the stairwell laughing and talking. Stanley helped me out of the low vehicle and over to the stairs.

"That's a nice one you have there," one of the men yelled to us.

Stanley glared at him. "Hold your tongue, you idiot," he snapped. He hurried us past and into the stairwell that led up into the building. "I have to apologize for my friend. He's a little drunk around this time of night," he told me.

"Is he one of the people I'm supposed to meet?" I asked him.

Stanley smiled and shook his head. "No, not at all. The people you're going to meet are near the top floor partying as we speak."

We climbed the stairs to the lobby of the building. It was a tiled-floor, echoing kind of lobby with a glass front and doors. Stanley led me to the elevators at the back and we climbed in. Just as he said there were fifty floors to the building and he pushed the button for the forty-fifth. The elevator climbed the floors and when the doors opened again we were in a different world.

Before us was a large room lit with strobe lights and flickering colors that encompassed all the colors in the rainbow. On the left side was a long table filled with food of all kinds, and in the back was a small stage with a door on the right side. On the right was a DJ playing loud, fast music, and in the center of the room were round columns spaced evenly apart that supported the tiled roof. The rest of the floor was taken up with people dressed in sleek red dresses and other less formal attire. They occupied all ages, from the old matriarchs who sat in chairs placed beside the columns to the young teenagers who danced to the music provided by the DJ. Among the dancers and those at the table were others like myself who were dressed in street clothes and other less formal attire. The room was unnaturally warm and I immediately began to perspire.

Stanley gently placed his hand on the small of my back and guided me out onto the floor. "What
do you think of this party?" he wondered. 

"It's certainly-" I stopped when my eyes caught sight of a brilliant pair of blue eyes. They belonged to a handsome young man of about thirty who was dressed in a fine suit. His beautiful eyes scrutinized me with such a strong mix of interest and fear that my heart picked up its tempo.

Stanley shook my shoulders. "Is something wrong?" he wondered.

I shook myself and turned away. "N-nothing. I just thought I saw somebody I knew, but I was wrong."

"Good." Stanley glanced at his watch and frowned. "I just remembered there was a call I needed to make. Would you excuse me for a few minutes?"

I glanced at the time. A few minutes short of midnight. "Sure, we've got time to kill," I agreed.

Stanley smiled, bowed his head and left for the elevator. I noticed a burly man stood on one side, and Stanley showed the man his coin. The man nodded and jerked his thumb at the open elevator doors. Stanley stepped into the machine with a few others and the doors closed behind them. I was alone and feeling slightly nervous about being around so many strangers. My eyes inadvertently returned to the young man. He still watched me, and I noticed an older woman stood beside him. She stood regally at his side in a blue dress with frills on the modest collar. Her white hair was short and permed, and she glanced from the man to me and back against to the stranger. Her lips moved, but I couldn't hear any sound over the noise of the music and laughter. The man pursed his lips and turned his head away, but his eyes stared at me out of their corners.

I wandered over to the refreshments and a woman of about forty in a smart business suit came up to me. "You must be one of the new people," she commented.

"Um, yeah, I guess I am," I replied.

She smiled and looped her arm through one of mine. "The real party's about to start. Why don't I show you to the stage with the others?"

"Others?" I looked around the room and saw that the other people in the normal attire were being led to the stage.

"Yes. Now let's get you up there so we don't miss you," she encouraged me.

She guided me to the stage and up the short flight to the top. The others and myself were lined up at the back of the stage, and our handlers stepped down to join the crowd congregating at the base. The DJ stopped the music and joined the partiers as they pressed against the front of the stage. The people were packed in a tight group that stretched from one side of the floor to the other. I saw the man there with his older escort. He had a tense stance as though about to jump onto the stage, but the woman held his arm to keep him from giving in to the impulse.

The room quieted when the door beside the stage opened. Two men stepped out. One was a bespectacled older gentleman who wore a black suit and led his companion up the stairs. His friend was a young man of about thirty-five with long black hair tied back in a low tail that cascaded down his back. He had dark eyes and pale lips that smiled at each of us as they passed by to a podium at the front-center of the stage.

The bespectacled man took the podium first and cleared his throat. "We are all gathered here at the bi-yearly Meeting of the Wolf to welcome our guests for the sacrifice of their time, and their lives," he announced. The mention of our lives caused a ripple of nervousness to pass through our little line.

One of the men in our group stepped forward. "What the hell is this about our lives?" he asked the bespectacled fellow.

"You have been chosen for a very important task," the younger man spoke up. He strode back down our line to the man who stood out. "We are a very select order of people who reside in this city. Our common bond is a gift and a curse. The gift is a long life, but the curse is that every two years we must satisfy the beast within ourselves. That night is now upon us, and we have chosen you to satisfy our hunger," he explained.

"Fuck this, I'm out of here," the irate man replied.
He tried to push past the dark pony-tailed fellow, but the man grabbed him. The dark stranger pulled back the other man's arms and sank his teeth into his throat. The man's body twitched and convulsed as blood poured from the wound. The other people in my line, me included, understandably screamed our heads off and raced for the front of the stage to jump off.

The first person to fly into the crowd, a woman my age, landed into a mess of clawing hands that pulled her down to the floor. The partiers dove on top of her and we heard her screams as they tore her apart. The others on the stage panicked and tried to force their way through the crowd, but my terror and lack of athleticism kept me on the stage and with a great, and terrible, view of the whole gory scene.

The partiers transformed from the Wolves of Wall Street to just plain wolves. Their faces elongated and their hands lengthened into long, sharp claws. They tilted their heads back and let loose a horrible chorus of howls as their clothing tore from their bodies, replaced by thick coats of fur. They dove at those not transformed and pulled them to the ground. I couldn't see what was done to the others, but by the screams I didn't want to know.

I stumbled back and saw the dark man toss the limp body of the man into the crowd. They caught him and pulled him into their midst, and I could hear the smacking of their lips and clacking of their jaws as they consumed his dead body. My back hit the rear wall and the dark man's eyes turned to me. They were no longer dark but yellow, and in their depths was a terrible hunger that could only be satisfied with my blood.

I decided now was a good time to leave, and the perfect exit was their entrance. I raced down the stairs and heard a noise behind me. I turned in time to see the dark man lunge at me. With my eyes on him they weren't on the steps, and I missed the first one. It was a doozy that sent both of us flying forward. The dark man flew over my head, grazing my hair by a fraction of an inch. He landed on all fours five yards ahead of me. The door stood in the middle between us. I glared at him and he smirked back at me. His face stretched outward and his clothes ripped as he, too, became a wolf monster. I jumped for the door knob and he jumped for me.

Then the lights went out. I heard a yelp from in front of me and the collision with the dark man never came. Howls and growls of confusion and terror came from the partiers. The few of those who remained alive of the line of normal people cried out for help, but I couldn't even help myself. Hell, I couldn't even see a foot in front of my face. I screamed when someone grabbed my arms. Their sharp teeth bit down hard on my neck. I expected them to drain me of my blood, but instead I was flung forward. My gut caught the knob and I fumbled for it.

The door opened and showed it led into a long, brightly lit hallway. The light from the hall streamed into the dark party room, and I saw the dark man picking himself up off the floor. He was no longer a man, but a beast with a long snout full of sharp teeth. His pointed ears sat atop his head and his long, thin hands flexed his clawed fingers. Nothing remained of his clothing other than a bit of shirt and pants.

I ducked inside just as he jumped at me and I slammed the door behind myself. His claws scratched at the area of the handle and I didn't stick around to see if this new dog could learn new tricks. I dashed down the lit corridor, at the end of which was a pair of elevator doors. The door behind me opened and the clickity-clack of claws on linoleum echoed behind me. I pumped my pudgy arms and slammed into the button panel. The doors opened wish a swoosh and I raced inside.

I swirled around and saw the werewolf pounding down the hall. Fifteen feet. Ten feet. I slammed my hand on the lowest floor available which was the farthest one from here. The doors shut just as the creature reached me, and his clawed hands dragged along the front of the doors. The elevator sped downward with the speed of a freight elevator. It soon hit bottom and the doors opened to reveal the parking garage. I stumbled out and saw the entrance to my right and around the elevator shaft. I rushed toward the noise and sights of the normal city, but the abnormal wasn't done with me.

I was nearly at the opening to the garage when I heard a loud scratching noise from the stairwell.
I glanced over my shoulder and saw a half dozen wolf things burst from the stairwell entrance. They sniffed the ground and one of their pair of yellow eyes turned toward me. My eyes widened and I looked ahead. Just a few more feet to freedom, but the feet behind me were so fast. My lungs ached and blood from my wound poured down my throat.

I flew out into the busy street and nearly played in traffic. My luck changed when one of the cars that nearly hit me was an empty taxi. I threw myself over the hood. "Please help me!" I screamed.

"Get off my car!" he yelled back.

I stumbled around the side of the taxi and let myself in the front passenger side. "Drive!" I growled at him.

His eyes widened, but he pressed down on the accelerator and away we flew. I glanced back at the parking garage and saw a half dozen disappointed shadows lingering at the edges. They weren't chasing me. I was safe.
Chapter 3

I clutched my chest and slumped down in my seat. The driver, a man of about forty with clear
eyes and thinning hair, glanced between the road and his rear view mirror. His angry expression
changed to worry. "What the hell happened to you?" he asked me.
"Bad date," I replied.
He nodded at my wound. "You need me to call the cops? Looks like your date tried to take a bite
out of you," he commented.
I shook my head and straightened. "No, I just want you to get me home. I don't have much
money, but it should get me there," I told him.
"I'll be glad to drive you to the hospital if you want. No charge," he offered. A free ride from a
cabbie was like receiving free tuition from a university. Money was at stake, and they didn't usually
part with it unless they were feeling generous.
"No, I'll be fine. It's only a flesh wound," I assured him. At least, I hoped it was a flesh wound.
The damn thing ached and burned, but when I moved I didn't feel any deep lacerations.
"All right," he reluctantly agreed.

I'm sure you're wondering why I didn't have him take me to the hospital. My fuzzy mind hadn't
forgotten all those rich faces, and I suspected that if I went to any of the hospitals announcing my
wound they'd be sure to find me. Right now they only had my name that I gave to Stanley. No
address, no phone number, no place of work. I'd have to provide that at a hospital. Then it'd all be
over for me. They'd use their rich connections to get a hold of me and it wouldn't matter how fine a job
the hospital did on my shoulder. I'd be too dead to appreciate it.

The cabbie drove me to my apartment, but put the car into park and shut off the engine. "You
need me to help you up?" he offered.
"No, I only live on the second floor," I replied. I stumbled from the car and over to the railing
that led up the stoop to the door. My head ached, my shoulder ached, and I was feeling just plain
shitty.

I heard the cabbie step out of the vehicle and hurry over to me. His strong, kind hands wrapped
around my shoulders. "Come on, miss, let's get you upstairs," he insisted.

I was no longer in the mood to argue, so I had him help me to my apartment. Fortunately in the
excitement I hadn't lost my key or any of my belongings in my pockets. He helped me inside and over
to my couch where I gladly plopped myself down with a sigh.
"Thanks," I murmured to him.
"I'd rather you be thanking me at the hospital," he replied.

I smiled. "Maybe next time." I pulled out a wad of cash for the trip, but he shook his head.
"This one's on me." He pulled out a card and handed it to me. It had his name, his cab number,
and a phone number. Roger Donavon was the name. "And if you need that ride to the hospital call me.
I'll come get you."
He smiled, bowed his head, and left. I sat on the couch for a few minutes until the uncomfortable
feel of cold, dried blood in my clothes and on my skin forced me to the bathroom. I flicked on the light
and cringed when I saw how ghastly was the damage. My shirt was torn and blood was splattered from
my neck to my lower arm. Two sharp teeth marks showed where the monster had bitten me, and for a
moment I wondered if I had allowed myself to be led into a den of vampires.

No, vampires didn't look like wolves. At least, not always. Those people, those things, were
completely woffy, no showing off large fangs and blood-red eyes. I hated to admit it to myself, but if I
was a believer in the supernatural I'd say those things had been werewolves. Werewolves who had a
wonderful sense of fashion.

Yeah, um, no. There was no such thing as a werewolf. What I saw was a figment of my
imagination brought on by the strain of seeing people tear each other apart. Maybe those murderers donned masks and clawed gloves when I wasn't looking. Maybe they were some sort of a cult who worshiped the wolf and go mad every two years, binging on the blood of strangers.

Or maybe I was in complete denial because no human I knew could make that deep of teeth marks without leaving more than two imprints. I clutched my head in one hand and groaned. This was a hell of a Wednesday night, and I still had two more days of work to get through. Right then I felt shitty enough to excuse myself from the living, but I promised myself that if there wasn't any improvement I'd call in sick.

I cleaned up the blood, patched the wounds as best I could with a box of assortment band-aids, and tossed my clothes into the trash. All of them. I didn't want to remember this night for as long as I lived, if I lived that long. I dragged my aching, exhausted body into my bed and before I knew what happened I was asleep.

The next day came all too early. My alarm rang the time as seven and my eyes creaked open. I was still alive, or as alive as I ever felt at this hour in the morning. My fingers fumbled for the alarm and when I found it I slammed my hand down on the off button. The little machine crunched beneath my fist. I raised my head and blinked at the ruined alarm. It looked like I'd used a sledgehammer on it. Its round shape was now pancake.

I sat up and glanced between my palm and the clock. My dainty little fingers waved back at me, innocent of the destruction they just caused. I shrugged and stood. A sudden lightheadedness swept over me and I steadied myself against the wall beside my bed. I felt like I'd lost a gallon of blood. That brought on a flurry of memories from last night that rushed into my frazzled brain.

Stanley, the party, the wolf people, my wound, and my escape. They all mixed into a terrible cocktail of horror that forced me to sit back down on my bed. I clutched my head and shut my eyes hard to block out the images. I wanted it all to be a dream, some terrible nightmare of my stupidity for going with a stranger. My mind, and the patchwork of band-aids on my neck, told me otherwise.

There was one definitive way to prove it hadn't been a dream. I stumbled to my bathroom and looked at the myself in the mirror. My face was pale and there were dark circles under my eyes. I tilted my head to one side and my eyes glanced over all those band-aids. I raised one trembling finger and yanked the whole thing off in one go. A few hairs went with the pull, but I didn't pay them any mind. What I was focused on was my skin. My perfectly healed skin.

Gone were the two torn holes with their ragged edges. In their places was a pair of scars that looked like they'd been there for years. I reached up and touched the scars. They were as smooth as the rest of my skin, though there was a slight ache in my shoulder. I tapped my fingers against my shoulder not believing what I was seeing, but the scars remained. My mind couldn't grasp what had happened. First wounds, then the next day scars. This shouldn't be happening.

I stumbled out of the bathroom and leaned against the door frame. From my vantage point I could see the large kitchen trash. Bloody clothes stared back at me. God damn it, it hadn't been a dream, but what the hell was with the wounds-turned-scars? How the hell did that happen?

I needed to get to work. I needed to get away from my bathroom mirror, those bloody clothes, and anything else that reminded me of last night. Work would numb my brain and keep me from thinking about all this stuff that didn't make any sense.

I hurried into my work clothes and was out the door in record time. The time was twenty minutes before I needed to leave, but I didn't care. I rushed outside, caught the first bus I could find, and breathed a sigh of relief when my apartment building disappeared from view around the first corner. I arrived at the office just as early and snuck into my cubicle.

Not sneaky or early enough because Johnny stepped into my doorway a minute later. He looked me over and raised an eyebrow. "You look like something the cat dragged in," he complimented.
"More like wolf," I muttered.
"What was that?" he asked me.
"I said I had a late night," I rephrased.
"So late that you decided to come into work early?" he returned.
I shrugged and slouched in my chair. "Didn't want to stay in my apartment alone," I told him.
"So you heard about what happened last night?" he guessed.
My heart skipped a beat. I whipped my head up and frowned at him. "No, what happened last night?"
"It's on all the news stations, and in all the papers," he replied.
I straightened and my frown turned to a glare. My voice was harsher than I meant it to sound, and more impatience. "I don't watch or read news, so just tell me what happened," I insisted.
"It seems like some cult or something killed a bunch of people and were tossing them into the incinerator at the city trash facility. They were only found out because they were still tossing the bodies in when the security shifts changed and one of the new guys spotted the people on the cameras. He couldn't see their faces because they were all wearing wolf masks and they ran away when he told them to freeze. Ran real fast, too, like beasts, or so he's claiming," Johnny explained. "The cult guys left behind a few bodies, so police were called. They questioned the previous security shift, but nobody could tell how those people got in with as many bodies as they must have been tossing into the incinerator. They found a half dozen all chewed up and torn apart. Another few minutes and they would have gotten away with destroying the other ones. Must have been bad luck for them having the shifts change like that."
It wasn't bad luck, it was me, or at least my escape. They'd probably been searching for me all night throughout the city and didn't have much time to dispose of the bodies. Maybe they were searching for me now so they could incinerator me, or worse.
I shuddered. Suddenly I wasn't feeling so well. "Hey, you okay?" Johnny asked me. He grasped my shoulders, but I flinched and pushed him away.
My instincts told me to run, to hide. That meant my apartment. I'd hide out there until I could figure out what to do. "I-I'm fine, I'm just not feeling well. I think I'll go home," I told him.
Chapter 4

I pushed past him and hurried to the elevators. In a few minutes I was in a taxi and on my way home. The buildings passed by in blurs as my mind reeled with Johnny's news. The dead bodies, all those people. I wondered if anybody else had survived, if anybody else could corroborate my terrifying story.

My mind took a break from panicking and glanced out the window. A police station was coming up. I straightened and a smile slid onto my lips. They could protect me! They could make sure my story got out and everybody knew what monsters lurked on Wall Street. They weren't vampires, but werewolves!

"Pull over here," I ordered the cabbie.

I hurried out and up the stairs that led to the precinct. Through the doors was a madhouse of suspect processing, witness testimony-taking, and general paperwork pushing. A waiting room of sorts was at the front with wooden benches on either side against the walls. The benches were crowded, and a long desk separated the general population from the work of the police. Behind the desk were a few officers seated on stools who were speaking with two women of middle-aged who wore frowns as deep as the scars on my neck. The officers alternated between writing notes on a paper and glancing lazily up at the two women.

I hurried up to the desk and leaned over the counter. "I have to speak to someone," I told one of the officers.

He pointed to one of the benches and a ticket taker. "Wait in line until your number is called," he commanded.

"Officer, what are you going to do about our missing dog?" one of the women asked the policeman.

"As I told you before we don't handle missing pets. Ask the humane society," the officer told her.

"Please let me speak to an officer! They might be coming after me at this very minute!" I insisted.

The women sneered at me. "Nothing you have to say can be as important as our Fluffy-kins," one of them argued.

I snarled back at her, curling lips and all. The nearest woman's eyes widened and she slid away from me, taking her friend with her. With the desk clear I slid to the center position, but the officer resumed his paper writing. "Please let me see somebody. It's about what happened to those people last night. The people who were killed by that cult," I told him.

The officer paused in his writing and glanced up from his paper. "Are you serious?" he asked me. "Would I be here if I wasn't serious?" I asked him. His eyes wandered past me and I turned to see a clown walk in with handcuffs on his wrists. I looked back to the officer. "I'm not clowning around here, this is serious. I have some important info on the people who murdered those other guys. I know what some of them looked like."

"All right, let me get you the lieutenant in charge of the case," he offered.

The officer slid off his stool and hurried to one of the office doors that lined the left side of the precinct. In a moment he was back with another man, a burly fellow with a bright, cheerful smile. The new man held out his hand to me. "Good morning, my name's Lieutenant Goodman. Officer Peabody here tells me you have some information for me," he commented.

I shook his hand and glanced around. "Yeah, but could we speak someplace else?" I requested.

"Certainly. Just follow me." He led me around the counter and through the jungle of desks to the rear of the building.

At the rear were two hallways, and he gently guided me ahead of him down the left-hand one. At the end of the hallway stood an Exit door. One either side of the hallway were doors labeled with plates, and on those plates were names like Interrogation and Lab.
As we strolled down the hall Lieutenant Goodman pulled out a pad and paper. "What's your name?" he asked me.

"Danica Lyman," I replied.
He wrote down the info. "Address?"
"I'd rather say that in the room if you don't mind," I told him.
"That's fine. Where do you work?" he wondered.
I gave him the info, but felt there was something wrong with this. I expected him to stop us at one of the Interrogation rooms, but he guided us toward the Exit door. Something didn't feel right about this. "Um, where are we going?" I asked him.
"To the rear of the building. There's a private spot back there where no one will bother us," he promised me.

I decided that was too private, and stopped and turned to him. "How about we talk about this-" My suggestion caught in my throat when I noticed his eyes. They were yellow.

"How about you keep going and not make a noise, or I'll rip your throat out," he ordered me.

The lieutenant pushed me ahead of him and I stumbled forward toward the Exit door. This man wasn't a man, he was a monster like the rest, and I had to escape him. I glanced around the hall, but there were only doorways into closed rooms. Not a good place to go with a dangerous werewolf at my back. We walked outside and into a narrow alley behind the precinct. It was quiet back there. The tall buildings blocked off much of the morning sunlight. Water sat in pools made from the potholes and cracks in the pavement. The rush from the street hardly reached my ears, but the smells of the trash reached my nose.

The werewolf grabbed my arm and turned me to face him. "You're the girl that made it out of there, aren't you?" he growled.

Under such circumstances I did what anyone would do if they were faced with an angry male werewolf. I kicked him in the balls. His eyes bulged out and he clutched at the family jewels as he fell to his knees onto the ground. I rushed past him down the alley to the light at the end of the tunnel, or street, in this case. The werewolf grunted, and in a few moments his feet splashed through the puddles just behind me. I stumbled and huffed my way through the alley and out into the bright light of the street. This was getting to be a thing with me running from werewolves out into the street.

"Stop! Stop!" the policeman yelled at me. Oh, hell no.

I hurried to the front of the precinct and rushed into the street, and to hell with a jaywalking citation. Car horns honked and people shouted various curses, most involving my parents. I hurled myself into the back of the first taxi that came my way. The driver turned in his seat and his eyes widened.

"You again!" he cried out. It was the same guy from last night, Roger the Cabbie.

"Step on it!" I yelled at him. I glanced toward the precinct and saw the lieutenant sniffing my way. Literally. His nose was in the air and I could see his nostrils flaring. He looked in my direction and snarled.

Traffic moved forward and so did we. The cabbie went with the flow and took me away from the wolf lieutenant and his murderous intentions. I slumped in the seat and wiped sweat from my brow. The cabbie glanced at me through his rear view mirror.

"Mind telling me what trouble you got into this time?" he wondered.
"You wouldn't believe me even if I told you," I replied.
"I've heard a lot of strange things drift from that back seat, so try me," he insisted.

I sighed and sat up. "A werewolf police lieutenant just tried to kill me because I'm the only witness and survivor to a werewolf cult massacre that took place at one of the glitzy buildings up town. The one I ran out of when I found you."

I waited for his reply. It was a long wait, but it came. "That's a new one," he commented.
I snorted. "You're telling me. Even I don't believe it, and I'm the one living this nightmare," I
"So you haven't told anybody about knowing about this cult except the lieutenant and me?" he wondered.

"Yep, and he wants to kill me," I reminded him. I leaned over the seat and looked at my cabbie. His lips were pursed and he stared straight ahead. "You think I'm crazy, don't you?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "It's kind of a crazy story, but I believe that you believe it's true," he replied.

I sighed and fell back onto my seat. "Well, it's true, every word of it, and I obviously can't go to the authorities."

"Do these cultist werewolf guys know who you are?" he inquired.

"I don't know. I told my name to the guy who picked me up and to the cop, but the guy last night just seemed to be a go-between for them. You know, somebody who picks people up and sends them off to be sacrificed," I replied.

"Well, if they ever find you and you need a ride, just give me a call and I'll come," he promised.

I smiled. "Where would I be without you, Roger?" I mused.

"Probably still hailing a taxi at that precinct. It's the lunch hour and a bad time to be hitching a ride in one," he commented. He glanced at me through the mirror. "By the way, how's that wound of yours?"

"It's fine. I woke up this morning and it was gone," I told him.

His eyebrows raised. "Completely gone?" he wondered.

"Well, not completely. I have a couple of scars from two teeth marks," I explained.

"Now that's just weird," he commented.

"Yeah, it goes with the rest of the weirdness," I agreed.

Roger drove me to my apartment and parked on the curb. I dug through my pockets, but he shook his head. "It's on the house again, just don't jump into my cab every day," he told me.

I smiled. "Thanks again. You're a life saver, and I mean that."

He smiled. "No problem. See you later."


Roger winked at me. "You never know."

I walked up the steps and paused atop the stoop to turn back. Roger sat in his taxi and I noticed he was talking on a cellphone. Probably his bosses asking why he was driving so many miles without fare. I stepped inside and walked up to my apartment. My couch called to me, and I heeded its delightful voice by falling head-first into the cushions. Today had been a long day and it was only one o'clock in the afternoon.

Little did I know the day was about to get even longer, and all because of a knock on the door.
Chapter 5

I raised my head and glanced over my shoulder at the door. How dare it knock when I was trying to rest! There was another knock. The door was mocking me.
"Hello?" a pleasant male voice called through the door.
"Go away!" I called out.
"I'd like to speak to you about something very important, Miss Lyman," the voice replied.
"I don't want any catalogs or vacuums," I argued. There was still a volume on the coffee table that came in the mail yesterday.
I swore I heard a chuckle. "Not quite on that subject. It's about your visit to the precinct this morning."
My heart stopped and my blood ran cold. The first word through my head was 'shit.' The second one was much less polite, and did nothing to calm me. I sat up and frowned at the door. "What about it?" I asked him.
"I'm not an officer, nor am I affiliated with the lieutenant," he assured me.
"Uh-huh, and I'm supposed to believe that why?" I wondered. I stood, tiptoed over to the door, and peered through the peephole. A man with short dark hair stood on the other side, but he was turned away from the door and wore a long, thick dark trench coat.
"Do I pass inspection?" the man asked me without turning around.
"How are you supposed to pass if I can't see who you are?" I returned.
The man sighed and turned toward me. I gasped and stumbled back. It was the same man from the party, the one who had stared at me. "Will you let me in now?" he called through the door.
"Y-you don't pass inspection," I replied.
The door flew open with a bang that told me the lock was now broken, and the man stepped inside. "Sorry about the door, but you must come with me," he ordered.
I raced around the other side of the couch and glared at him. "Put that door back and get the hell out of here!" I yelled, hoping one of my neighbors would come to my rescue. No such luck. They were all at work, and the apartment manager was never around when you needed him.
"I'm not leaving without you," he argued. He took a step toward me, and I glanced around the room for something with which to fend him off. My eyes fell on the Christmas catalog close at hand.
I lunged for the tome and he lunged for me. He was much faster, but had to cover more ground. I grabbed the catalog and swung the Tolstoy-sized paperback into his face. The pages flapped his nose and disoriented him for a split-second. I shoved him to the couch and raced past him and through the open door. My feet pounded against the thin commercial carpet and down the stairs to the lobby. I pushed open the door and flew down the steps before I realized Roger was still parked at the curb.
I jumped inside and clutched the back of the seat between us. The heater blasted me with warm air. "Step on it, Roger!" I yelled at the cabbie. I expected us to roar out into the street narrowly missing pedestrians and cars alike. Instead we just sat there with him staring at the door to my apartment building. "What are you waiting for? One of those werewolf guys is after me!" I yelled at him.
"I'm waiting for my fare," he replied.
The door to the apartment building opened and out stepped the young man. He strode down the steps toward the taxi. For the first time Roger had failed to save me, so I would have to save myself. I slid over to the far door and grabbed at the handle, but at that moment the door locked. Only the driver could lock it. "Roger, let me out!" I cried to the cabbie.
"I can't do that, Miss Lyman. The boss wants to take you with us," Roger told me.
The 'boss' slid into the taxi beside me and shut the door. Roger pulled out into the street and we sped down the road. I pressed myself against the door and whipped my head between Roger and the stranger. "What the hell is going on here?" I yelled.
"Please remain calm. We're not going to harm you," the stranger assured me. I was so assured I drew back my arm to slam my elbow into the glass of the door. If I was going to die I'd rather do it beneath a car than in the jaws of a monster.

The stranger grabbed me and we grappled for a whole two seconds before he folded my arms across my front and pinned them to my chest with his own. He pressed my back against his chest and I whipped my head up and glared at him.

"Fine, eat me and get it over with!" I growled.

He only smiled. "I have no intention of becoming a cannibal," he replied.

"Why not, the others ate those humans, why not you?" I countered.

"Humans and werewolves are two different species," he corrected me.

I couldn't follow his logic, and didn't care. "Then get it over with! Eat me and share me with Roger, unless he's a human minion of yours," I snapped, sending spittle toward my former friend in the front seat.

Roger cringed and the stranger frowned. "He is human, yes, but loyal to me and your savior twice," he argued.

"Uh-huh, just so he could save me as a snack for you?" I quipped.

"I believe this relationship is off on the wrong foot," the stranger commented.

I looked up at him and narrowed my eyes. "If you're going to eat me at least start with the head so I don't suffer."

Rather than munching on me from one end or the other, the stranger opened his hands and arms. I was free from his grasp, so I shoved myself off him and against the locked door. "That was an action of good faith. Have I earned any?" he wondered.

I frowned, but didn't attempt to break the window and make my escape. "If you're not going to eat me then what do you want me for?" I questioned him.

"To take you home with me," he replied.

I snorted. "Like I'm some sort of a lost puppy?" I returned.

He chuckled. "Not exactly, but the comparison is very appropriate for what we are," he mused.

"And what exactly are we?" I wondered.

"We are werewolves," he informed me.

I glanced between him and the back of Roger's head. "You said Roger was human," I reminded him.

"I did, and he is. I was referring to you and myself," he replied.

My eyes widened and I slowly shook my head. "Oh hell no. I am not one of those monsters," I argued.

"I'm afraid it's true," he insisted.

My hands balled into fists. "I am not a werewolf! There is no way-"

"What about the scar on your shoulder? Roger tells me it's healed," the stranger commented. I paused and my hand flew to my shoulder. The scar, the wound, the teeth in my shoulder. None of my fellow terrified humans bit me. A werewolf did. He sighed and leaned back in the seat. "Yes, the bite from a werewolf changes another into a werewolf. You can imagine how difficult it is for our children to play with humans," he added.

"This...this can't be," I murmured.

"I'm afraid it is. You're a werewolf now, and I'm the one who bit you," he revealed.

That put him as Enemy Number One on my short list of people to kill. I roared and lunged at him with my hands curled like claws. My anger fueled my attack and I got off a couple of scratches with my fingernails before he had me pinned as before. I squirmed and thrashed, but he held me tight.

"It was the only way to save your life!" he told me.

"Save my life? You've ruined my life! You've made me into a monster!" I argued.

"It's better to live as a werewolf than die by the hands of those insane people!" he insisted.
"You're one of them! You were there!" I reminded him.
"Only because attendance is mandatory. Participation is voluntary," he countered.
"Like I'm going to believe you! You're the one who bit me!" I growled and pulled against his arms, but only ended up exhausting myself. I slumped in his lap and ground my teeth together.
"Are you finished?" he wondered.
"Let me go and we'll find out," I dared him.
"I would rather not risk it. You seem to have an inexhaustible energy when you're focused on killing someone," he complimented.
"And you're a monster," I returned.
"Perhaps, but I intend to keep you alive. If you believe I'm a monster than you don't want to meet any more from the Foundation like the lieutenant," he warned me.
I blinked. "Foundation? Is this a trust fund for werewolves?" I asked him.
"The Foundation is what we call ourselves, those of us who were gathered in that building the night we met."
"Fancy name for a bunch of bloodthirsty monsters."
"We aren't all like that," he argued.
I turned away and glowered at the floor. It needed vacuuming badly. "Like I'm going to believe a bloodthirsty monster."
"Then you've put me in quite a conundrum. I can't disprove I'm a bloodthirsty monster because you believe I am."
"Life sucks, doesn't it?" I quipped.
"Often, but I'll make sure you live a life long enough that there will be fewer sucky moments than good ones," he promised.
I glanced back at him. "What do you care how I feel?"
"Because I've chosen you as my mate, and even if you don't feel the same for me I can't stop my feelings for you," he told me.
He smiled. "All of the above, and I am very much looking forward to the last one," he replied.
"Maybe I'm not," I countered. "Maybe I'm not going to accept you as my mate."
"Then I will still protect you from the Foundation," he insisted.
"What do they want with me, anyway? I'm one of you now," I pointed out.
"But you are not an official member, and a werewolf who isn't a member is more dangerous than a human who knows of their existence," he explained. "A human can be disbelieved and even silenced, but a werewolf can wreak havoc on the human populace and bring attention to our existence."
"So let me get this straight. I was going to be fodder for them at the Foundation banquet and you bit me to save me because you what? Fell in love with me at first sight?" I guessed.
"At first scent, but continue," he corrected me.
"Uh-huh, at first scent. So I escape and they know I'm a werewolf somehow-"
"The trail you left told them you had been attacked by one of us, but they haven't isolated the scent. There were too many of us in the room to get a definite smell," he told me.
"And now they want me to become a member in their murderous organization or what?"
He frowned. "Or be killed."
I rolled my eyes. "So it's either membership in a death cult or death? Being a werewolf is worse than being in a sorority," I quipped.
"I will help you make the transition as smooth as possible. That's why I'm taking you to your new home," he told me.
"My new home?" I glanced out the window and saw we were in an older part of the city. The tall skyscrapers were far behind us, and all around us stood ancient homes with lawns larger than football
stadiums. The lawns were surrounded by tall brick walls and accessed via iron-barred gates. Treetops could be seen over the walls, and I glimpsed the pointed roofs of Victorian mansions and copies of medieval castles.

Roger turned into the driveway of one of the grounds and stopped in front of a black wrought-iron gate. He pressed a button on the dash and the gate opened to allow admittance. We pulled through the gate and I glimpsed a large green lawn filled with fruit and shade trees. The gravel driveway wound its way through the lawn to a large Tudor-style mansion complete with stone and wood exterior. Vines supported by lattice covered many of the walls, and bushes surrounded the base of the home.

Roger stopped the vehicle in front of the large double doors. The stranger gently took my hand and opened the door. We stepped out and he stood behind me with his hands on my shoulders. "Welcome to your new home," he whispered.

I looked over the extreme signs of wealth and a goofy grin slid onto my lips. It looked like things weren't going to be completely awful as a werewolf.
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