



Genre: Original/Horror

Rated: R

Disclaimer: Still, no disclaimers are required. The characters and this story are mine.

Sexual Content/Violence:

Contains some fighting and the mention of violence and abuse.

Sex? Yes.

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In case you want to let me know how and if you liked my story, please write to filfil67@yahoo.de and/or visit my website at www.filfil.de

Transmutation

*Omnes angeli, boni et mali,
ex virtute naturali habent potestatem
transmutandi corpora nostra*¹

St. Thomas Aquinas

Just when she thought her torment was over for another day, Ylva felt a knee connecting with her already bruised stomach; the pain radiating through her body was becoming harder and harder to bear. She forced herself to take a few deep breaths in an effort to try and calm her stomach, which threatened to revolt. Without warning, her head was jerked up by rough hands and a fist connected with her jaw. Agony exploded in her head and she crumbled in a heap on the floor, the rusted iron taste of blood in her mouth.

Half conscious, she did a short inventory of her injuries. Her back was raw from yet another whipping, her head felt as if a dragon had stomped over it, and her stomach was filled with hot coals of pain. Her skin was slick with cold sweat. Ylva wondered if today was the day that would bring an end to her suffering. Today's interrogation had been the most painful one in a very long time. Maybe she wouldn't need to survive any longer, maybe she would be allowed to die and leave this world behind.

Ylva closed her eyes, waiting for the next blow or sting or burn on whatever part of her body, but as always, half her torturers' fun seemed to be in leaving her clueless as to what kind of torment their creative minds could create. *These bastards*. A tiny part of her admired them for their good work, knowing that she would do exactly the same if their roles were reversed, but unfortunately for her, they weren't.

¹ *All angels, good and bad, have the power of transmutating our bodies*

Ylva jerked involuntary when cool fingers lightly touched her cheek and brought her out of her musing. Agvar, her archenemy, had joined them and she hadn't even noticed his presence until he touched her. His chilly and precise voice was tinged with amusement when he whispered seductively into her ear, "Ylva, you know that I am willing to end this immediately... just tell me where I'll find the others."

How tempting... what an offer. Death would be welcome; in fact, part of her had begun to crave it some time ago though she would never admit that to anyone other than herself. The idea of ending the pain, the loneliness and the humiliation she had endured for such a long time was becoming more alluring with each passing day, with every session of the endless tortures she had to endure.

If her grandmother's beliefs were true, Ylva would meet her pack again in the afterlife, would be honored by them and spend an eternity hunting prey under an everlasting full moon. It was the perfect concept of an afterlife, at least for her and her kind. But her pride and her thirst for revenge still won against the temptation of death. She wouldn't give in... not today.

Gathering her strength, Ylva slowly moved her head to look at Agvar, the pain in her neck making the movement difficult. For a moment, she wasn't sure if she would be able to fight the wave of nausea that crashed over her. Grimly, she thought vomiting over her captor's feet wouldn't be such a bad thing and certainly no less than he deserved. It was unfortunate she knew that bit of satisfaction would be very short lived, in the end causing more pain to her already appallingly abused body. Anyway, there was simply nothing substantial left in her stomach, probably not even bile.

She stared into Agvar's black soulless eyes, glittering with triumph, and said in a steady voice that did not betray her poor condition, "What an honor to have you personally witnessing the failure of the amateurs working for you. You don't really expect me to give in when this is merely a warm up for me, right?" She was hardly able to finish the sentence before a series of tooth-jarring blows on the side of her head made her lose consciousness.

When she awoke again, Ylva found herself flat on her back, manacles on her wrists and ankles. She gazed up at the shadowed ceiling, her eyes burning. Torches illuminated the room with a soft flickering light that reminded Ylva of home, memories that were linked with feelings of joy, of warmth, security and the bone deep knowledge of belonging, but this place was as opposite from home as possible. She knew without a doubt that if she had the ability to read auras like some of her pack, she would see a pulsing mixture of black and grey surrounding her, malevolent and evil. Being in the midst of vampires felt like living with constant frostbite.

She was not alone. Ylva did not need to lift her head to know Agvar was there.

A soft shushing sound signaled the next round of torture. Unendurable agony shot through her as what felt like a thin, whippy cane cut across the vulnerable soles of her feet. Ylva jerked against the chains binding her, her body trying to curl in on itself. She gasped for air that would not come, biting her tongue to keep from crying out loud, not wanting to give her enemies any satisfaction.

Great Fenrir, how much longer? Be kind and let them kill me, she prayed.

The pain bit into her feet a second time, then after a pause, a third. Each deliberately weighted stroke was an exquisite agony. Ylva's vision went white as she lost count, knowing nothing but the cane. Her limbs were rigid as steel, her universe nothing but fiery fangs of pain that struck her tender flesh on and on without end.

At last, the torture stopped. Ylva panted as Agvar's despised voice sounded close by, the warmth of his foul breath brushing her skin and causing her insides to cramp. "We could leave you alone for a little while," he purred. "Maybe you would like to rethink your decision." He paused and went on, "Well, and if not... we have all the time in the world, you and I, don't we?" His cruel laughter made it clear that the mercy of death would not be granted to her today.

Ylva's fuzzy brain recognized the creak of the heavy oak door after a fist to her side left her wheezing, unsure if her rib was broken or merely cracked. Finally, silence fell like a heavy blanket over the room, creating a nearly peaceful illusion. She cocked her

ears and sniffed the air, using her heightened senses to make sure that she was really alone. Satisfied that everyone had left, she finally allowed herself a groan, clenching and unclenching her fists while trying to loosen her stiff and hurting muscles.

Twenty years of pain and isolation, of being held like the animal she felt she had become. The sole survivor of her pack, forced to see all the others slaughtered one after another until she was the only one left... Ylva would never be able to forget the moment she had seen the first of her pack go down howling, fighting to survive to the last. Never before had she been so angry and felt so helpless.

Bellowing with renewed rage, she flexed her hurting muscles, trying to calm down while at the same time conserve her energy and let her injuries heal, her flesh knitting together with the speed due to her werewolf heritage.

The full range of passion was something her kind had a hard time controlling at the best of times; the wolf's wild willfulness ran too close beneath their skins. Literally painful experience had taught her to cage her emotions and master them, a concept alien to her kind and something she found very hard to achieve. But, she thought, life has a way of teaching things in its own way... especially in circumstances like this.

Ylva wondered if she would ever be able to use her newly learned ability outside these walls, if she would be able to use composure, self-discipline and strategy in a situation when it really counted. If the vampires had found a way to successfully terminate the werewolf packs, there must also be a way of ending *their* existence in a painful way. Coming up with new ideas in her head about what she would do to the vampires had been what helped her endure captivity. She lived for the day when she would be able to see the same pain and agony in their females' eyes that had been there the day all of the pack's remaining males had been killed in front of their mates. That moment would be the day Ylva would feel whole again.

She was brought out of her thoughts when she heard footsteps advancing. Guessing that her break was over, she steeled herself for the torture to be continued. The door creaked again and two heavily armed guards entered. *Wimps*, she thought while one

leaned closer and said, “That must be your lucky day, doggy. The master decided that it is feeding time for you.”

She felt the familiar sting of the needle in her arm, and peered hard at the blurry face while the drug begun its journey through her bloodstream, scorching her from the inside out, leaving her defenseless even without the manacles holding her down. Once the guards were satisfied that she wasn’t able to harm them in her drugged condition, they released her from the heavy restraints.

Did he say ‘feeding time’? Ylva thought fuzzily. She felt herself dragged away, her still-raw feet hurting like hell when they connected with the cold stone floor. She sensed that the amount of drug administered to her was lower than usual, which meant that she would regain her control back rather soon. The guards stopped and she heard the heavy door to her cell opening.

Even drugged half out of her mind, she immediately smelled the delicious smell of human prey. *Living prey*, she thought before crashing hard with her face on the floor, unable to bring up her arms in time to catch her fall. *Living prey...* her stomach awoke with a loud grumble, demanding to be fed

She felt rough hands touching her arms, trying to get her up on her feet. *A male human... nice*. His scent filled her nose. *Delicious*.

“Hey, at least they found something for me to kill my time with,” the human said. She was able to smell his arousal, his anger and his strength, and smiled when she felt herself turned around. He was a handsome guy if you liked the rough bad cowboy look, she thought. A shaved head and cold eyes were testament to the fact that this guy didn’t earn his money selling flowers to old ladies. He was one of the bad guys... good, she liked bad guys. They were so much more fun to play with; she enjoyed the way they reeked of fear when they realized *she* wasn’t the victim in their game.

This guy obviously didn’t like to waste his time. He began to rip open her tattered shirt and loosen her trouser buttons. Ylva felt the drug leave her system and her strength returning at the same time. She opened her mouth and begun to transform,

showing her extended canines. His feral smile faded. He let go of her and backed away, his face pallid. The sweet odor of fear streamed out of him when he realized that she was something other than an easy victim. His breathing became shallow and his pupils dilated. Fully transformed, Ylva darted towards him and ripped his arm out of the socket with such shocking swiftness, she held the limb in her hand before he was even able to scream.

“Feeding time,” she said with a cruel smile before taking her first bite, relishing the taste of fresh meat and the energy it brought with it. Her prey tried to get away from her, scrabbling on the floor screaming with streams of dark blood jetting from the place his arm used to be, but she was in no hurry.

Her mother had taught her to savor her meals.

* * *

Maisie McCloud kicked the empty cola can further down the pavement, listening to its clattering echo. The can was a poor substitute for whom she really wanted to kick. She was so angry about her colleagues, her boss, life and herself... in particular about the way her boss had tried to push her into doing a stupid Halloween thing for children. Another kick sent the can further down the pavement, causing a lingering cat to cry and jump away. “Sorry,” Maisie murmured, before kicking the can a third time and wrapping her jacket tighter around her body to ward off the autumn chill.

She had been so upset that she had left work without showering, still wearing her dirty clothes which had earned her quite a few stares from the other Tube passengers. Wolf drool and pie wasn't perfume to other people's noses and the blood stains, leftovers from a small operation earlier in the day, weren't enhancing the overall impression she had made. Maisie had finally left the Tube two stops before her usual station, sick of the stares she was receiving and angry about herself for not thinking before leaving work like this. It was all her boss' fault. Why couldn't he just leave her alone? Another kick sent the can spiraling away.

Maisie didn't want to leave her job or the city. She adored the animals she had to care for. She had been happy to accept the job offer as veterinarian two years ago and all had went rather well until the new zoo director decided that event marketing and customer skills were as important as caring for the animals. "Halloween with bats and wolves" was his newest idea. Hilarious. She would have become a pediatrician if she had wanted to have contact with yelling, drooling, snotting, obnoxious kids.

Giving the can another angry kick, she brushed a tear from her cheek. Damn, she hated to be so thin-skinned. Emotions had never served her well. As a child she had been forced to learn to hide them at an early age, her foster parents sending her to one anger management class after another because she had beaten up other children for a good reason. They had been making fun of her, seeing her as an easy target because she was as short and strange as she had always been.

Her teenage years were a real pain in the ass. She had often been forced to move on after yet another outburst towards a teacher or a principal. And now it had happened again, damn it... if she had more self-control she wouldn't be walking home in her dirty work clothes and maybe hadn't called her boss some of the names that had been on her tongue for a long time. Well, at least she hadn't hit him, though for a moment she had been severely tempted to use her neutering tools on him. Why couldn't she just be what she wanted to be the most — a self-composed, even-tempered person? Maisie wanted to be able to make decisions that were well considered and have patience with her fellow workers and all other people in her life, but it never out worked for her. She just couldn't... at least not for longer than a few minutes, then they begun to drive her crazy.

She sighed. Why couldn't she just stand above the day-to-day irritations and annoyances? For once she hoped to have found a place to stay for a while. She really liked her flat, she had been able to cope with the animal keepers and the salary was okay. Most of all she had liked to be left alone, no-one supervising her work except the weekly meeting with the director. Working on her own had been fine with her because Maisie had always been a loner, a thinker, an introspective person. The only company she really enjoyed was animals.

Maisie smiled when she thought of the one animal species that had made her job even more fun. For the first time she had been in contact with wolves, and found that they were the most likeable and intelligent animals she had ever met. The way the wolves had accepted her, even allowing her to play with them right from the beginning, had surprised all of the animal keepers and had earned her respect and envy in equal measure. Leaving the wolves behind would be the hardest thing for her, but she would be damned before she would start this public relations shit and play nice, letting herself be pushed into something she didn't want to do. She understood the need for PR and all that stuff, but that was the director's job or someone hired for it, most definitely not hers. She wouldn't be able to work there any longer if she had to deal with stupid questions from visitors, TV crews or whomever on a daily basis.

Deep in her thoughts, Maisie nearly ran into a group of children that came around a corner, all of them dressed up in various Halloween costumes. Despite her bad mood, she chuckled inwardly when a midget Spiderman kicked her cola can with all his might into the overweight Harry Potter walking in front of him, causing overweight Harry to turn around and threaten midget Spiderman to tell his father, while a weeping little Miss Liberty in a pink costume was telling a slightly taller Bart Simpson walking in front of her to stop slapping a small version of Darth Vader who was also crying. Behind the wildly misbehaving group, a man in a Jack Skellington mask tried to tell them all off, probably developing the migraine of his life from being forced into Halloween duty, poor guy.

Maisie stopped and watched while the group ambled down the pavement until they reached the next house and starting the trick or treat session. All of the children were suddenly united again in their own task for tonight, namely collecting sweets.

Smiling, Maisie turned around to continue her way home, only to find herself nearly running into a man who seemed to take Halloween way too seriously. He was huge and bulky, wearing heavy boots, black trousers and a long black coat. His nasty grin showed the most amazing fake fangs she had ever seen. What impressed her most was his scarred face and the pitch black eyes that were observing her as if she was an insect soon to be crushed. The intense gaze sent shivers down her spine.

Could black eyes glow? Maisie was just about to tell him off for invading her space when she felt a terrible sting in her right arm and fire rushing through her veins. She lost control over her extremities when unbearable pain flared and finally, she was granted the mercy of unconsciousness.

* * *

Maisie became slowly aware of the sounds of voices buzzing around her. She felt drugged, like the one time she had used pot in her teenage years; everything was fuzzy and she wasn't able to concentrate on her surroundings. Making an effort, she remembered someone carrying her and roughly laying her down on a cold stone floor but she hadn't been able to command her body to move.

Caught in her half-conscious state, she felt a sting on her arm, followed by a now familiar pain that scorched through her veins. She recalled this had happened before but when and why? Just when she thought she had an answer to that question, a deep mean-sounding voice said, "Wake up, dog."

Fighting against the pain, she tried to open her eyes, but the lids felt as if they were glued together, and her mouth and brain seemed to have been stuffed with tiny cotton balls which made her gag. What had happened to her?

The voice sounded again, harsher this time, more demanding, "Come on, wakie-wakie." Maisie forced her eyes open and this time it actually worked, only that she squeezed them shut immediately after glimpsing the same scarred face she had seen earlier tonight. She suddenly remembered with clarity what had happened to her. She had been kidnapped!

"Get up!" the man commanded, adding a painful kick to her ribs. Maisie hesitated a moment, which was obviously enough for him to bend down and harshly snatch her to her feet, bruising her arm in the process. The room spun around her. Before Maisie was able to protest, she was shoved forward until she stood in front of a tall and important looking man who radiated danger and significance. She looked at him. His

clothes seemed to be from those expensive looking boutiques on Elm Street, his tuxedo the epitome of custom-tailored clothes.

“Kneel down!” her kidnapper ordered, shoving her back and pushing her to her knees. Maisie hit the floor, trying to suppress her anger about the way she was treated, fear twisting her stomach into knots. Looking up into her captor’s cold eyes, she asked shakily, “What do you want from me?”

She didn’t get an answer. Instead she felt the weight of his gaze on her body, hot as burning coals, producing a further clenching in her middle. *Stay calm*, she said to herself, *panicking won’t help*.

The guy in the expensive looking tuxedo met her eyes for a moment, obvious disgust on his face. In a voice that chilled Maisie to the bone, he addressed her kidnapper: “You dare to disturb our gathering because of this... this...” he pointed a finger at Maisie, “human?”

Whispers around them made Maisie realize that they weren’t alone. A larger group of people, dressed in equally expensive looking clothes, stood at the other side of the room and a small band was seated not too far away from where she knelt. The women wore long evening gowns in amazing colors and jewelry that didn’t look cheap like the stuff Maisie was used to seeing. The men wore tuxedos and dinner jackets. *What kind of people are they? The Mafia?* she thought. All of them had strange alabaster skin as if they had never been subjected to daylight, and their lips shone bright red. As a matter of fact, she realized, her kidnapper and the tuxedo-wearing guy in front of her had the same unhealthy complexions and artificial looking lip color.

Maisie harbored a faint hope that with a large group like this someone would come to her aid, but she found that hope shattered. She was only observed with detached interest, as if they were putting up with her interrupting a nice evening. In the meantime, her kidnapper seemed to have found his voice again, yet there was no trace of superiority left in it. He sounded shaken when he replied, “But Master, she smells of wolves and I thought we had found another one...”

He wasn't able to finish his sentence. The meaty sound of a fist connecting with his cheek was heard and he disappeared from Maisie's sight. Turning around, she saw her kidnapper roll under the force of a second blow. His master stood in front of him, having moved impossibly fast. How had he done that? Maisie closed her eyes and rubbed her face with both hands. This had to be the most realistic nightmare ever. She was sure that she would wake up any moment now and find herself lying on the couch, the TV running and some empty beer bottles scattered around on the floor, but when she opened her eyes again, she only saw the black look on her kidnapper's face. This was no nightmare, she thought in dismay.

Nevertheless, she wasn't ready to give in. Maybe she could try and get out of this mess. It seemed that she wasn't the one that they wanted. Perhaps she could persuade them to let her go. Her kidnapper seemed to have fallen from grace, which could work to her advantage. Maisie mustered her courage and said, "Excuse me, as I am obviously not the person you want... well, maybe we could just pretend that all of this didn't happen." She felt all eyes turning to her and had to force herself to continue, "Or I could pay you and you let me go somewhere. I will never be able to find the way back to this place. I really have no idea where I am..."

A sudden kick to her ribs left her breathless and made her collapse, writhing in pain. Foul breath drifted to her nostrils when the master leaned over her and said, "You shut up or I'll forget myself and kill you myself right here and now." Another kick drove the rest of the air out of her lungs.

The master's voice was cold when he addressed her kidnapper again. "And you... you stupid fool. She smells like a wolf!" his voice thundered. "Like a wolf, you stupid excuse for a vampire. You do realize that there is a difference between a wolf and a werewolf, don't you? And did you ever notice the words "Zoo" written on the back of her jacket? Could it be that maybe she smells of wolves because she works in a zoo? I would end your existence right now if you weren't my nephew's son, but that won't be an excuse the next time something like this happens." He paced some steps before he turned around again, continuing his tirade. "Get rid of her! Kill her, drink her empty, take her to the dungeons. Whatever. And make sure that I don't see your ugly face again until I call for you. Is that understood?"

Maisie felt like she was trapped in a bad movie. *Vampires. Kill her. Werewolf? How can he just order my death?* The words felt like blows to her stomach. “Wait! Wait a second!” she exclaimed. Despite her pain she tried to get up, only to feel hands on her shoulder holding her down without mercy. She continued, feeling helpless in the face of such violence but knowing she had to speak up now, before it was too late, “This is some kind of bad joke, right?” Her heart pulsed thick in her throat. “You can’t kill me. Please!” she begged, her voice breaking.

Delighted laughter and excited whispers echoed around the room, people demanding to see her killed, to witness her death or even participate in it. Tears of anger and fear sprang into her eyes when silence was ordered by the master. He went on, “Friends, friends, please. We have a pleasant evening planned that is already delayed. There will be another time for a kill; you wouldn’t want to come too close to her. She stinks of wolf. Please, let us continue where we were interrupted.”

Music began to play. Maisie felt someone grabbing her, urging her up. She stumbled out of the room, her kidnapper half dragging, half shoving her. People, no vampires, began to dance to pleasant music as if nothing had happened, as if her death warrant hadn’t been signed. No one paid any attention to her. She was dismissed, forgotten like an insect that had been crushed, nothing more than an annoying interruption.

Maisie soon found herself in the entrance hall, still in a state of shock over what had just happened and terrified of what was to come. Her kidnapper kicked her towards a flight of stairs, his furious black eyes boring into her own. Between clenched teeth, he gritted, “I think it is only fair to have a wolf-like creature have its fun with you as you seem to have an affinity for wolves. I bet the alpha is beyond hungry and I guess you know how starving beasts behave once provided with food.”

He moved closer, until she gagged on the rank animal smell of him. “I can promise you that your limbs will be torn apart one after another while you are alive. She isn’t going to simply kill you, no. She will play with you before she feasts. And I will so enjoy imagining what she does.”

His scarred face was inches from hers, his fangs nearly touching her lips, his gaze so cold that she felt her own temperature drop in response. Fear had been replaced by panic. Her pulse fluttered. He pressed his body even closer into hers, forcing her two steps back and trapping her against the wall. Both of his hands slipped around her throat, squeezing just a bit, enough to make her gasp for air in fear that he would begin to squeeze more. He smiled and went on, "And while she is playing with you, I will be visiting the slave quarters and enjoy myself immensely with one of the new arrivals, imagining your pain and anguish. I know that you will be screaming and crying and begging for mercy. But guess what! No one will come and rescue you." He laughed and pressed against her harder, letting Maisie feel his hardening penis through her thin trousers.

She squirmed and tried to put distance between them, only to feel his tongue licking over her cheek, making her feel disgusted and ashamed and afraid of being raped before he left her to her death. Before she could do more than whimper in protest, his rough hands turned her around and she was shoved down the stairs. Maisie had a hard time catching her fall and steadying herself enough to stop her movement before she fell headlong. Her bruised ribs were complaining and she had to bite her lower lip to prevent herself from crying out, not wanting to give him any kind of satisfaction or turn on.

Eerie sounds echoed up the stairs, bringing back memories of a haunted house attraction she had once visited with her foster parents. As she had as a child, she now feared that the sounds bombarding her were not coming from a tape but from real people, real ghosts, real monsters. Only this time she had proof that her nightmares were more than just bad dreams. Switching on a light was not going to save her this time.

The further down the stairs she went, the more she was able to distinguish the sounds that drifted up to her. There were cries for mercy, curses, screams of pain and agony, cruel laughter and more undistinguishable sounds that made her feel sick and alone.

Was that it? Was this the end of what life had in store for her? Would she really die tonight? She was torn between a desire to stay calm and rationalize what was

happening to her and the more primal urge to run, the latter getting stronger with each passing moment. Recalling facing the bear that awoke too early out of his anesthesia some years ago, Maisie realized she had been wrong back then, thinking she knew fear. What she felt right now was naked terror, stripped of any hope, robbed of all security, of everything she thought she knew... like the fact that vampires didn't exist and werewolves belonged to fairy tales told to frighten naughty children.

Why was all of this happening to her? How could a day go so wrong? Maisie decided to try pleading once again, knowing that neither fighting nor running would help her. She turned around, looking into the soulless black eyes of her kidnapper: "Listen, why don't you let me go?" she asked. "No one needs to know what really happened and I could give you all the money I have saved. Please." But she only received a snort in reply, followed by a painful blow to her cheek that made her vision explode into white sparks for a long moment.

Desperate, she tried to push past him only to feel his fist connect with her stomach, causing her to double over, struggling not to vomit. He hit her hard, as if he had used a hammer instead of his fist. Pain exploded through her body and she collapsed on the stairs, trying to get into a fetal position to protect her vulnerable parts. He growled, "Get up and going or I'll drag you into the cell myself!" Another more hurtful poke to her body caused her to stagger to her feet, though the pain she felt nearly caused her to fall down again.

At times in the past, Maisie had envisioned being killed in a carnivore attack or by a venomous snakebite, or something similarly dangerous. It was the hazard of her chosen profession. She thought she had been prepared to die, knowing it had happened to other vets, no matter how cautious they were. But about to get killed by a werewolf... a carnivore, a fairy-tale predator... a small, bitter laugh escaped her.

Steadying herself with a hand on the wall, she reached the end of the stairs where a long corridor stretched out in front of her. It was only illuminated by torches. She hesitated a moment, feeling a poke to her back advising her that it was better to continue walking. The sounds became louder and more real. *Oh God.*

She stumbled along the corridor, weeping freely and sobbing for breath, the pain from her ribs nearly making it impossible to move. She didn't want to die.

The corridor came to an end and brutal hands shoved Maisie through an open door to her left. She couldn't avoid falling down on the floor and felt the skin on her hands and knees scraping hurtfully. Her body seemed to be one big bruise. The door was slammed shut behind her. Maisie was left in semi-darkness, only a single torch producing a bit of dirty orange light in the cold, damp cell.

Maisie looked anxiously. She was alone. There was no werewolf or anyone or anything else with her that she could detect. She felt new hope. Maybe this had been a bad joke on her expense. She skidded over the stone floor until her hand connected with something strange. It took her a moment to identify what she was touching — humerus, femur, tibia, rib... a heap of human bones.

She hastily scrambled into a corner, sitting with her back pressed against the cold stone wall, her arms wrapped tightly around her severely aching side. Breathing was pure agony now. Her position would do any good if she was attacked, but protected on two sides by the walls was an illusion that made her feel safer nevertheless.

It took a while before her eyes fully adjust to the semi-darkness, at least until she was able to make out that the ceiling wasn't very high and that there was water running down the walls. She could also see the human bones, scattered in her panic. *Who died here?* she thought. *And who killed him or her? The werewolf? A vampire? Something or someone else?*

Old childhood fears were creeping up on her, triggered by the darkness and the bones she had found. However, thinking about her fears wasn't really helpful. She brought her head up with a jerk and strained her ears. Was there a sound coming from the far corner of the room, or had that been just another drop of water, splashing on the ground? Her chest felt so tight that she had problems breathing. Her imagination begun to run wild, drawing pictures in her head of all the creatures that could possibly call the cell a home — bats, snakes, insects, hairy spiders, rats, as well as all sorts of

monsters that her rational mind knew didn't exist. On top of that was a supposed werewolf that was going to eat her, if her kidnapper had been telling the truth.

There was the sound again... and it was definitely not caused by a water drop, Maisie thought. It sounded more like someone shuffling, moving... it had to be something alive. Rats. That had to be rats and they were sniffing for her. There had to be more than one to make as much noise. What else could it be?

She bit her lip to stop herself from screaming.

* * *

Ylva was brought back to her cell. Today's torture session had been lame compared to what she was used to; it had seemed nearly uninspired, like a duty her tormentors had to fulfill. Usually they were eager to hurt her as much as possible, but today they had held back. It happened very infrequently and rarely, usually after the arrival of new slaves. Anyhow, good for her; she didn't feel half as bad as usual.

A wave of dizziness washed over her, caused by the damned drugs they used to keep her tame. She wondered how many more decades it would take to get her addicted to the stuff. As through a veil she recognized the door to her cell. The door was opened and she was shoved inside, hitting the floor hard. Some things just didn't change, Ylva thought. The door was closed behind her. At that moment, the most delicious scent hit her nose and went right into her brain, awaking every hormone in her body, triggering an ancient instinct that lay dormant in her kind, waiting for that one special day. Something deep inside her awoke, making her whole body tingle all over. The drug that had been administered fizzled into nothing as she awoke.

She took another deep breath, inhaling the one scent she never thought to smell. How could that be? Opening her eyes, she stumbled to her feet and saw a small figure squatting in a corner, a really small and weak looking human figure. But the scent unmistakably came from over there.

Ylva moved over and pulled the figure into a standing position, hearing a whimper in response. A female, no surprise there. But a human? She continued to hold the woman and brought her closer to her face, unable to stop inhaling. *How intoxicating, how amazing.* She licked her lips, feeling her mouth water in response to the aroma lingering in the air.

There was no doubt. This scent was unique and to smell it had been a dream long ago buried. She felt her body beginning to react with force, her canines hurting in reaction to the need to taste, to lick, to bite which was growing every moment. She opened her mouth and was surprised when she heard a small voice begging, “Please, no.”

Looking into pleading, watery green eyes, Ylva felt something deep inside of her react. Usually, exposure to weakness disgusted her kind but this was different. Ylva felt touched within a cold and lonely place deep inside herself that had grown into a black hole over the years of her captivity. For the very first time since witnessing the death of the last of her pack she felt a glimpse of new hope. Hope that had been brought to her through a small and weak woman in her arms. She acknowledged that the arousal of her senses felt better than being greeted by the pack after a long and successful hunt, or running free and wild during a full moon... but the woman’s fear was also irritating the hell out of her.

“Don’t, please,” the woman repeated with the fearful tremor in her voice that made Ylva grind her teeth and suppress the urge to shake her. She felt compassion, a feeling she wasn’t used to. Smelling fear coming from the small figure in her hands, Ylva fought down the urge to simply claim what was hers by concentrating on that other feeling... compassion... how strange. *What did one do with that?* Still holding the smaller woman in her arms, she asked hoarsely, “Who are you?”

The frightened green eyes blinked once before the woman answered in a shaky voice: “I am Maisie... Maisie McCloud and I... I was kidnapped by the... vampires. They are vampires, right? And... please... you are hurting me.”

Ylva lifted an eyebrow in response. “My name is Ylva. You know what I am?” Ylva asked. Maisie only nodded, apparently unable to form coherent words. “Good,” Ylva

said, “ Then I don’t need to explain.” Her face began to shift and furry ears grew out of her head, causing Maisie to black out.

Ah shit, that wasn’t my intention. Ylva closed her eyes and tried to control the feelings burning inside her. The special hunger made it hard to think clearly... she was horny as hell but at the same time felt that she had to make sure that Maisie was alright. She slowly opened her eyes again, studying the weak human female that hung like a sack of potatoes in her hands. She wasn’t bad looking, if somewhat puny. Reddish-blond hair, a cute face, deep green eyes, the color of emeralds... nice. Only Ylva wasn’t into any of these things and most definitely not into ‘cute’. She had always dreamed of a strong mate, someone to lead a pack with, someone who knew how to fight. She raked her gaze over Maisie and sniffed again. How weak the female was! But there was that unmistakably scent that identified her as Ylva’s mate and changed everything. Ylva shook her head. *What were the odds of meeting your mate in a surrounding like this? A mate like this. Small, afraid...* but there she was, undeniable

And there was something else... there was another odor beneath the strong mating scent that had affected her first. Ylva sniffed the bundle in her hands. Wolves... the human sniffed of wolves. Strange, very strange... Maisie wasn’t a werewolf, but there was more, there was something else that didn’t fit, only Ylva couldn’t put a finger on it. *Where had that small blond come from who was obviously afraid of her and not yet ready to mate?* What should she do? She couldn’t waist time and ‘befriend’ her. Was that the right word for it? Ylva wasn’t sure.

Tired and still hurting Ylva gave in to the strange need to care for Maisie. Who was she to fight Great Fenrir’s plans for her? The scent and her reaction to it sealed their relationship. The rest would have to unveil itself as the god permitted.

Ylva carefully laid Maisie on the straw that served as her bed and shifted back into full human form. It probably wouldn’t help to scare her mate when she woke up again. Lying down herself she snuggled up to the small blond, gathering the fragile form into her arms, keeping watch over her until Ylva drifted into sleep herself, dreaming of chasing after a running blond woman with sea green eyes...

* * *

The first thing Maisie was aware of when she drifted into consciousness were the muscular arms around her, holding her in a firm grip that made her feel protected and safe. Warm breath tickled her neck, and for a moment she allowed herself to bask in the new and pleasant sensation. She began to drift off again, relaxing in an embrace that felt like... home, yeah, that was it. *Nice!* But just when she was half asleep, she remembered all of a sudden where she was and what had happened, and the warm feelings vanishing in an instant. Her eyes popped open. She saw who was holding her — the woman with long canines and furry ears, the werewolf. A very much asleep werewolf that was pressed against her, holding her like a lover would. Maisie snorted... now where had *that* thought come from?

She studied Ylva a moment. Never before had Maisie seen a woman with muscles like that, well, beside the ones on television that were into bodybuilding. She had a feeling that these muscles weren't just to show off. The werewolf was beautiful, just not like a model or an actress kind of beautiful. No... there was a dangerous aura surrounding her, something... animalistic, something that sent a pleasant shiver down Maisie's spine and awoke feelings... long buried needs within her. That scent... she closed her eyes and deeply inhaled the spicy scent that lingered in the air, obviously coming from the werewolf. If that scent could be bottled...

Maisie opened her eyes again, startled to find herself being stared at by the werewolf, whose eyes were a vivid shade of blue. The steady gaze stole her breath; she couldn't remember anyone ever giving her such a look of longing and desire. Wasn't the monster supposed to eat her?

There were butterflies in her stomach when Ylva moved very slowly, as if trying not to frighten her. Maisie felt hypnotized when she was gently pulled into a mind-blowing kiss. A wave of heat went through her, a moan escaped her lips and her tongue instinctively sought Ylva's. She was unable to suppress the need to respond.

Maisie felt a blast of pure lust, hot and wet and ready to be taken. Reality fought its way back into her brain and reminded her who she was kissing. Maisie struggled to sit up and get away from Ylva, but didn't get far when suddenly the other woman's face was again close to hers.

"Lesson number one," Ylva purred. "Never try to run away from a were or you will become prey in its eyes. We love stalking and hunting; it's in our blood. And we kill easily."

Maisie continued staring at Ylva, not understanding what was just happening to her. The werewolf's eyes had changed into an even darker blue, heavy lidded with obvious lust. Maisie felt herself reacting to that heat, echoing the longing she saw. It felt as if her body was betraying her.

"But it isn't my intention to kill you," Ylva growled in Maisie's ear, "you and I will escape together."

"What?" squeaked Maisie.

"We will escape after having mated and you, Maisie, will lead my new pack with me. We are destined for each other." Ylva's voice was a deep rumble that vibrated through Maisie's body. She knew that she should fight Ylva off, but she couldn't... she didn't want to.

Maisie stuttered: "B-b-but... I'm not into women like that!"

Ylva's hands began to roam over Maisie's body, leaving hot trails on her skin.

"Maybe so, but it seems that you are very much into wolves." Ylva's eyes gleamed. She put an arm around Maisie's waist, letting out a sexy growl that caused Maisie's knees to buckle. There was no point denying that for the first time in her life, Maisie felt naked lust... lust for Ylva who radiated danger and wildness. It was utterly erotic. Maisie gave in and didn't struggle any longer, having decided that if she was going to die, there were worse ways to go.

* * *

Ylva turned her mate around and pressed her against the wall, pinning her there while whispering, “You are beautiful! You make me so hot!” She set her mouth on Maisie’s neck to nip her flesh with her long canines, the delicious smell of Maisie’s arousal hitting her hard. “Mine,” she growled. With one swift movement, she tore Maisie’s jeans away, slicing her panties open at the same time.

Maisie whimpered from apparent shock and need in equal amounts, inwardly begging Ylva not to stop even if she could not speak a coherent word. Her breathing grew erratic. Ylva sensed that all that was left inside Maisie were raw need and lust. To know she had reduced her mate to such a state felt great, amazing and fucking fantastic.

Ylva was driven by the sounds coming from Maisie, feeling the need to make the human female surrender. She was well aware that she maybe was a bit rough but also knew that they were running out of time. The vampires could show up anytime and Maisie had to be transmuted by then if there should be any chance of surviving.

She bit down on Maisie’s shoulder, producing a mark that would be visible to all other werewolves, claiming her as her mate and starting the process of change. The searing pain made Maisie scream, the sound muffled by Ylva’s mouth on hers. “Turn over,” Ylva commanded.

Maisie obeyed. Ylva began licking, biting and suckling her skin. From her reactions, Maisie was already craving Ylva’s touch, enjoying even the pain. Her body was so responsive, Ylva could not get enough. She thrust her fingers brutally into Maisie and at the same time bit her shoulder again, this time piercing a vein and letting her saliva penetrate Maisie’s bloodstream.

It would not be long now.

* * *

Maisie felt something inside her exploding. Her whole body was on fire and it felt as if she was being ripped apart, her bones breaking and mending at the same time, forming and deforming again and again. The pain was unbearable. She felt the need to let loose a loud agonized roar that made her afraid of herself. The animal was coming out of her, the beast beneath the skin.

After what seemed an eternity, the pain ended. Maisie panted, realizing her body was lower to the floor than it ought to be. She glanced at herself, somehow not surprised to find that she had changed into a red wolf, her furry body held by a surprised Ylva.

For the second time that evening, she lost consciousness.

* * *

Maisie sat on the straw, feeling the cold creeping into her bones. She had woken up a while ago, finding herself alone buried under the straw. Ylva hadn't been in the cell and Maisie had no idea where she was. She couldn't remember one iota of what had happened after Ylva had fucked her senseless... well, she had felt herself beginning to turn into... something. After that, she drew a blank.

Even though she hated herself for it, she felt the other woman's absence like an open wound. She longed for Ylva's touch, longed to be held by her, wanted to...yes, what. Make love? Sex? Never before had she been so utterly satisfied but then the pain had set in and she had thought she would die. Anyhow, how could she have enjoyed what Ylva had done to her? And where was that damned woman?

Maisie rubbed her eyes, feeling exhausted. She got up, hoping that movement would dispel the cold and distract her from the feeling of loneliness. She was sore all over, every muscle hurting as if she had completed a marathon. What wouldn't she give for a hot bath and some food and for her old life back! But she knew that the last one wasn't possible anymore. Maybe she should just be thankful for being still alive, having survived the vampires and having escaped the fate of being eaten by a werewolf. All her limbs were intact.

Nevertheless, was being mated and made into one of those monsters really better? She knew that she hadn't only dreamed or imagined becoming a wolf... a werewolf. She could still feel the echo of her surprise at being in a different body, feeling a different kind of strength and energy. And the scent coming from Ylva had even been stronger than before... that damned, intoxicating smell that had made her brain to mush and had given her an orgasm that... damn, she didn't want to think about this.

In the past she had always been the one in control. Not that she had many lovers, but with Ylva... damn. Maisie knew that she wanted to, needed to feel this energy, this power, this lust of being dominated again. *Shit! Shit! Shit!*

After having completed pacing around the cell and cursing Ylva's name several times, Maisie heard movement outside the door and hurried back to the straw to try and hide herself, a reflex that she didn't think twice about.

Just when she had hid herself, the door flew open and hit the wall with a bang. A figure was brutally thrown in, bashing into the floor hard. Maisie knew that this had to be Ylva. An urge to get up and run over to her welled up, but then she heard another person coming in — a vampire, she supposed. Maisie decided to stay under cover. The vampire took two steps into the cell, obviously searching for something. When he turned around she saw her kidnapper's familiar scarred face.

She held her breath while he went over to a corner where the heap of bones still lay. On his way he deliberately hit Ylva. Maisie was hard pressed to get up and tear the vampire apart for hurting her mate. *Damn, where did that thought come from?* But it felt like a natural reaction, every part of her being screaming to get up and show this asshole what a werewolf was made of.

Scar-face bent down to pick up a bone. Maisie heard him snicker when he went back toward the open cell door. He stopped in front of a slightly moving Ylva and snarled at her, "I guess you enjoyed your little take away meal, don't you?" He kicked Ylva again, much harder than the first time, before finally leaving the cell and closing the door behind him.

Maisie waited a few minutes before getting out of the straw and crawling over to Ylva, who lay unmoving. She carefully touched the other woman's face, noting her shirt was ripped open. The wounds on her back looked like whip marks. How could they treat anyone like that? How could they dare to... Maisie shook her head, fighting against the protective streak that she felt for Ylva.

Maisie felt movement under her hand and asked softly, "Hey, how are you?"

A pair of pained blue eyes looked up at her. Out of reflex, Maisie moved her hand away, eager to put some distance between them. She was unsure how to behave, feeling torn between caring for Ylva and beating her for what she had done.

Ylva quietly got up, struggling with every movement. She limped over to the pile of straw. "Water," she said, pointing to a flask at the end of the straw pile. "Please."

Not leaving the injured woman out of her sight, Maisie brought her the flask and watched her drink several long gulps before the flask was handed back to her. "Drink," Ylva said in a voice that tolerated no dissent, "and relax." A small smile spread over her face and a warm shimmer emerged in her blue eyes.

Maisie drank some of the cool liquid, still not sure what to make of the situation. Silence hung heavily between them until Maisie couldn't fight the urge anymore and sat down next to Ylva, taking the other woman's hand. Warm fingers curled around her own hand and a thumb began to stroke her palm, sending the most delightful sensations through her body.

Looking at Ylva, Maisie said, "I don't know what to think or do. I hate you for what you've done."

Ylva nodded as if she understood but then asked, "Did you ever wonder why you never got along with other humans?"

"I don't understand...?" Maisie stammered, surprised. Images of her lonely childhood and her equally lonely teenage years played through her head.

“Did you know that even before I bit you, you were not fully human yourself?” Ylva asked, smirking.

“You are insane,” Maisie said. She barked out a laugh, shaking her head.

“Maybe,” Ylva chuckled, clearly enjoying the warmth of Maisie’s hand in her own, “But tell me, do you feel lonely but dislike other humans around you? Do you feel as if you never belonged? Do you prefer your meat medium or raw? Did you win your fights in school? Even against the seemingly stronger males? Do you know about the birthmark on your back? Should I continue?”

Maisie felt numb. Each question could be answered with a yes and made her flinch. Still, she didn’t understand what point Ylva was trying to make.

Ylva continued, “There are wolves in the zoo you are working for, right?”

“Yes.” Maisie frowned.

“I read the word zoo written on your jacket and guessed that you are working there. What is your job exactly?” Ylva asked.

“I am a veterinarian.”

Ylva snorted. “Well, one of those dumb blood-suckers thought because of the pack smell on your clothes that you were one of us, yes?”

Maisie nodded slowly.

Ylva shook her head and said, “They are so damned stupid, but whoever took you wasn’t so far away from the truth. Wanna know why?”

Maisie remained quiet, unsure if she really wanted to know but Ylva continued nevertheless, “One of your ancestors seemed to have been a shapeshifter. A coyote shapeshifter to be more precise.”

“Ugh,” Maisie stared, not understanding what Ylva had just said. Everything seemed too surreal. First, she had been thrown into this cell to be eaten alive, then she had mated with a werewolf, and a female one at that. Now she was told that she never had been fully human herself. Although all of this sounded absurd... when she considered the evidence, it made sense in a strange kind of way...

“You transmuted into a red wolf... a beautiful one, by the way. Gray fur, interspersed with black and fiery looking reddish hair on your legs and underparts. Our pups will be beautiful...” Ylva’s voice had turned into a purr and Maisie felt herself reacting to it, a blush covering her face.

Ylva laughed, a dark and husky sound. She sniffed the air ostentatiously and grinned. “You know,” she said, “we would be all over one another for days if we were free. I can hardly hold myself back as it is.” She touched Maisie’s face. “You are so hot... it makes me crazy.”

Masie licked her suddenly dry lips, imagining how it would feel to have Ylva’s hands on her body. Her eyes widened in surprise at the jolt of arousal that thought gave her. “Wait,” she said, getting up and stepping aside, “hold on.”

She paced a few steps, struggling to think, feeling Ylva’s hungry eyes on her, fighting against the urge to rip off the other woman’s clothes and jump the... werewolf. She turned around and faced Ylva. “What does being mated to you mean? Do you... I mean are we mated for life like wolves?” A flare of anger made her add, “You didn’t ask me if I wanted to be transmuted.”

Ylva stared, seemingly perplexed by the change of topic. “But it wasn’t a decision to make,” she said. “I just fulfilled your destiny... your call.” It was clear she felt at a bit of a loss.

Maisie glared at her with fire in her eyes. “You could have asked, you know. Maybe I would have wanted to live my life as a human... or whatever I was. Don’t you ever do something like that again!”

Ylva gaped at her, recovering after a moment. She moved stiffly over to Maisie and said, “Don’t try to pretend that you really liked living a life where you had to conform to boring humans with boring goals in their life? Don’t you crave to live life to the fullest? I offer you passion, ecstasy, loyalty and a pack which will grant you a sense of belonging you will find nowhere else.”

“You are offering me an illusion. We are prisoners and I was supposed to be your meal for the day.” Maisie counterattacked, waving her hand.

Ylva frowned. “No, you are wrong. I don’t offer you an illusion, I offer you a chance. We will be escaping tonight and live a live to the fullest outside this prison.”

“And then? Who says I can trust you? That you won’t be eating me or... leaving me?” Maisie asked, tortured by doubt.

Ylva scowled, but she must have sensed Maisie’s insecurity, since instead of snapping she pulled Maisie in a hug while whispering into her ear, “I am a wolf. We are no treacherous race like humans are. We are mated for life whether you like it or not.”

Maisie let her head fall against Ylva’s shoulder and gave in, enjoying the warm and strong arms that were wrapped around her in a gentle embrace. What did she have to lose? Her life hadn’t been all peachy before and maybe... maybe her new life would be better. She glanced at Ylva and said, “I want to learn how to trust, I really do, and but you have to promise me that you never do something as important as changing me without consulting me first.”

Ylva swallowed hard and replied, “I promise that if I can I will always seek your counsel first. But...”

Maisie put a finger on Ylva's lips, silencing her. "Fair enough for me. We'll have to see how it goes" She replaced her finger with her lips, giving Ylva a long and passionate kiss that left both of them breathless when they ended it. "Now," Maisie said, smoothing her hair, "you said something about escaping. How do we do that?"

* * *

Ylva waited, every sense focused. She was sitting on the pile of straw, having heard the guards advancing seconds ago. How long had she been waiting for this moment? And there, the key was turned and the cell door pushed open.

"Get up and to the wall. You know the procedure," one of the guards said. He was heavily armed as always. But the guards had become careless and only one of them entered while the other one waited outside, not paying close attention to what was happening in the cell. Ylva let out a little growl but stood up and turned around, facing the wall in a show of obedience. Just when he came close behind her to inject the drug, Maisie, who had been hiding in the straw pile, jumped up and hit him on the head with the water flask, causing him to sway a bit before he turned around, staring at Maisie with wide eyes. Ylva wasted no further time getting into action.

She had endured the guards' torture since being captured and had learned to endure and persevere. Now the time had come to allow herself to vent her rage and use the strength of this emotion to her advantage. The guard squeaked, his face slick with sweat, every pore of his body sending out the delicious aroma of fear and the knowledge of what was coming for him: death. First she had considered separating him from his internal organs, but instead she went straight for his jugular, decapitating the man with one slash from her claws and sent his head flying through the room. One enemy less, she thought in satisfaction.

She rammed her fist into the wall, letting out a roar that made the solid walls tremble and brought the other guard running into the cell. The moment it took him to process what he saw was just enough time for Ylva to sever his head as well. Two down... she licked her bloody hands, enjoying the metallic taste of her enemies' blood.

Maisie looked pale and queasy, but she stood braced ready to face whoever entered the cell next. “Is there anyone else coming?” she whispered.

Ylva shook her head and went to the open door. “Come on. Time to go.”

They left the cell. The corridor was empty, torches providing just enough light to create an eerie atmosphere. Maisie turned to Ylva. “Isn’t someone supposed to stop us?” She reached for Ylva’s still sticky hand. “And why aren’t there any noises coming from the other cells? This is creepy.”

Ylva just shrugged, taking Maisie’s hand into hers. “Well, how goes that saying... never look a gift horse in the mouth?” She began to hurry towards the staircase only to be stopped by Maisie, who said, “We need to free the others.”

Ylva wasn’t sure she had heard right and turned around. “What? Are you mad? What others?” she asked.

Maisie pointed to the other doors that lined the corridor. “There are more prisoners. We have to open their doors.”

Ylva stared at Maisie, wondering if she was stupid, but Maisie unblinkingly insisted, “We can’t just run and leave them. If there are really no guards around... this is just the opportunity and I have the keys.” She held up the set of keys that she must have taken from one of the guards without Ylva noticing it.

Ylva growled impatiently and tried to drag Maisie behind her. “We don’t have time for something like this. Come on.”

Maisie only let go of her hand and shook her head. “You go if you want to.” She turned to the first cell and opened it with the key. Ylva didn’t know what to do, torn between her freedom and the need to stay with her mate. Her stupid, thick-headed pain-in-the-ass mate! *Great Fenrir!*

She heard a small scream coming from within the cell that Maisie had just disappeared into... *Maisie was in the cell.* Ylva flew over and entered, filled with horror at the sight of the two guards who were inside the cell. One of them was naked from the waist down, his trousers pooling around his ankles. His face was scarred and consorted with anger; he held Maisie off the floor, his hands around her windpipe.

Ylva could see how Maisie desperately tried to draw air. She wanted to run over and crush the bastard but had to counter the attack of the other guard that came at her. "Change!" she shouted at Maisie. "Change! Damn it!"

She let out a wordless scream of fury while deflecting a blow from the guard's knife. For a fleeting moment she wondered if her reflexes were still as good as they had been before her captivity. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Maisie transmutating into wolf form, surprising her attacker so much that he let go of her. It gave Maisie a break to breathe in some desperately needed air.

Ylva was able to ram her fist into her opponent's stomach and rip his throat out with a second move, his blood spraying all over the place. Without wasting any more thought about the vampire she had killed, Ylva hurried over to where a red wolf growled at her attacker, who in the meantime had recovered from his initial surprise. Now it was one vampire against two werewolves and he had to divide his attention between his enemies. Maisie bit his leg as soon as he turned towards Ylva, which made him turn around again, causing him to stop paying attention to Ylva, who broke his spinal column with one hard kick. She noted with grim satisfaction that he was still alive when he hit the floor. Good. She hoped that he would suffer long and she only wished she could enjoy his screams.

She felt her mate's form pressed against her legs and bent down, staring into Maisie's eyes and scratching her behind an ear. "Are you okay? How do you feel?"

Maisie changed back before she answered, "As if a bunch of chattering monkeys took residence in my head. You really have to teach me how to change only partially." She moved a hand to her hurting throat. Ylva took a deep breath, feeling nearly dizzy from relief that Maisie was okay. But she was also angry at her mate and demanded, "What

was that about ‘don’t make major decisions without consulting me first?’ Could you maybe have waited before I made up my mind to follow you?”

Maisie looked bashful but had no time to defend herself when Ylva heard a door banging and angry voices shouting. Ylva grabbed Maisie and said, “Come on, we really have to run.”

But Maisie shook her head and went over to a half-naked woman who was sitting on the floor, obviously in shock Maisie helped her up and said pleadingly to Ylva, “We have to take her with us, Ylva, or she will die.”

Ylva was beginning to get furious. *Why can’t Maisie just do as she’s told?* Their first priority was to escape and survive, not rescue other prisoners. She was just about to growl at her when Maisie looked at her with those pleading green eyes that made Ylva weak in the knees and whispered, “Please, Ylva.”

Oh great Fenrir. That was a merciless strategy. Ylva snarled. “Get her up and going.” She turned around and put her head carefully out of the cell, looking up and down the corridor. She sniffed, surprised that with all that noise, they still remained undetected. The only question was how much longer their luck would last.

“Is the coast clear?” Maisie wanted to know. She was pressed against Ylva’s back with an arm around the still shaking young woman.

“Yeah, come on,” Ylva said and felt the young woman pushed into her arms while Maisie hurried over to the next cell, key in her hand. Ylva gave up, surrendering to the fact that Fenrir had chosen someone as thick-headed as Maisie as her mate. What could she do? Throw her over her shoulder and run? She was sure that she wouldn’t live that down ever.

It took Maisie precious minutes to free all prisoners and get them going. In the end the group included two werewolf-pups that were closer to death than to life, but Maisie insisted that she would be able to save them. In the end, a caravan of fifteen ‘beings’ made their way up to the hall. All of them were hurt, angry and gazing distrustfully at

each other, most of them natural enemies when free. But it didn't take much for them to understand that fate had united them against the one enemy they had in common: the vampires. Coming around the corner and into the entrance hall, the group found themselves lined up against a wall of blood-thirsty vampires that stood between them and their freedom.

The scent of a coming massacre was tangible in the air. The vampires were armed with pump-action shotguns, and began firing without warning. A young witch who had been freed of the magical collar that dampened her abilities was able to create a shield around the group that made the bullets ricochet back and blow up in the vampires' faces. Blood sprayed everywhere, but the witch could not maintain the shield very long. She had to drop it. The former prisoners ran at the vampires, screeching, howling and growling for vengeance.

Ylva felt the sweet need for revenge burning inside of her, and was about to jump in and attack when a cold and shaking hand touched the small of her back. *Maisie. Shit.* She wasn't alone anymore and had a responsibility to make sure that her mate was okay, a responsibility that didn't include letting herself or Maisie get killed. *Damn it.* Escape was the first priority, revenge the second. How she hated that!

Half of the former prisoners were engaged in a bloody fight that knew no mercy, tearing away the limbs of their torturers, decimating the city's vampire population. Maisie watched, stricken with horror. Ylva stayed on the sidelines with her, glad that the fight didn't last long. In the end, only two of the former prisoner's lost their lives.

Ylva sighed and turned around towards her mate when she heard a frustrated scream. Her attention was drawn to an open door to her right and she pushed Maisie behind her, feeling an impact in her abdomen and immediately afterward, a second in her chest. She slumped down as searing pain screamed through her body. In the doorway stood a vampire dressed in black: Agvar, her archenemy, the one who was responsible for murdering her pack. Ylva felt her life energy leaving her body. The last thing she saw was a red wolf running past her.

* * *

When Maisie was pushed behind Ylva, she was horrified when the next instant her mate slumped down like a sack of potatoes. It took a moment for Maisie to process that the two shots she had heard had struck Ylva. Blood was streaming out of Ylva's wounds; Maisie knew from experience that these wounds could very well be life-threatening. The chance that the bullets had hit vital organs or penetrated a lung was high. She had to stop the bleeding, had to treat the wounds...

Fear for her mate made her feel sick to her stomach. The veterinarian in her screamed to treat Ylva's wounds but the wolf in her knew that her priority had to be different. There was an enemy who had to be eliminated. Breathing heavily and shaking in anger, she turned to the door and saw the culprit wearing a triumphant smile on his face, pointing his gun at Ylva. It was a vampire; she was sure it was Agvar, Ylva's archenemy. Driven by blazing hatred, she transmuted without losing time. Following her instincts, Maisie made a gigantic leap towards Agvar and felt a bullet graze her leg before she was able to throw herself at the vampire, carrying him off his feet. For a nanosecond they looked each other in the eye but then, without mercy or hesitation, Maisie ripped out his throat. Blood sprayed her fur and coated her muzzle, thick and hot. She roared in triumph before running back to Ylva, who lay unmoving.

Ignoring her own minor wound, Maisie transmuted back into human form and felt for a pulse at Ylva's throat... afraid by the amount of blood and the paleness of her mate's face. No, her heart cried, it couldn't be true!

"No!" Maisie shrieked, tears in her eyes. "No!"

There was no pulse. Death had claimed Ylva.

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Two months later...

Maisie went down the stairs of her new home, feeling incredibly tired. Another long day was over. Her services as a veterinarian were sought by a lot of weres and shapeshifters from all over the country. It hadn't taken them long to hear about her abilities and her nature. A doctor whom they could trust was new and highly appreciated. How much her life had changed within the last two months! She could never have predicted how different it would become.

Maisie went into the kitchen, smiling at Ina and Krer, her housemates. She enjoyed their company and was happy to share a home, but neither of them was the one she had been missing the whole day. Going with her gut feeling, she went over to the kitchen window and gazed outside. There on the porch she found her brooding mate sitting in her favorite rocking chair, looking up at the full moon and the starlit sky. It was a beautiful night but Maisie knew that Ylva wasn't out there enjoying it. The werewolf looked like she always did when she was trying to understand how she had come to lead one of the strangest packs in werewolf history. Maisie knew that Ylva still had problems accepting the strange mixture of beings that had followed them out to this 'hut in the woods' as Masie called it.

It had taken two weeks for Ylva to recover fully from the nearly fatal shot-wounds, and for a while her survival had been touch and go. Ylva would have died if it hadn't been for the combined efforts of the freed witch and the vampire slave who had known where the herbs could be found that the witch had needed to perform a ritual to bring Ylva back. Maisie shuddered. It nearly hadn't worked.

The time of recovery had been difficult as well as it had been extremely hard for Ylva to learn to depend on Maisie. Several heated arguments had been exchanged, but they had been worth it. Maisie smiled, remembering how Ylva had gotten used to accepting help from her.

It had taken more time before Ylva had realized that the old pack rules didn't work with the pack she was leading now. Maisie understood her frustration, up to a certain

point, but she herself enjoyed the mixture around her. She had just helped Leloup, the elderly werewolf who had been expelled from his pack, to put the two recovered pups to sleep. They were adorable and at times even able to make Ylva smile. Not so the one-legged shape shifter who was washing the dishes. Maisie thought he was a brilliant addition to their group as he was able to shift into eagle-form and patrol the area around them during daylight. Nothing escaped his sharp gaze. And then there was the young female vampire-slave who had finally begun to talk and didn't seem to stop anymore, annoying Ylva no end with her constant chatter. Maisie didn't mind. Ina had a heart of gold which, mixed with her gift of empathy, had been really helpful with the pups as well as Maisie's patients.

Maisie didn't need a gift of empathy to know what was going on in Ylva's head, recalling the one night when Ylva had opened up to her after making love to her for hours in front of the open fire in their room. She told Maisie how she had come to the States as a young were and how her plan had always been to return to Scandinavia to gather her own pack because the society was more liberal over there. An alpha who didn't mate with the opposite sex was unheard of over here. Ylva had only become the leader of the remaining pack after the alpha and beta pair had been slaughtered, leaving Ylva as the only natural born alpha who could in charge. Then the vampires had taken them, and the only thing Ylva had been able to do was to witness what had been done to the remaining pack, watching them die one after another.

Ylva suddenly looked up and stared at Maisie through the window. Maisie took her scarf and went out on the porch. Laying her hands on Ylva's shoulders, she massaged them gently. After a while she asked, "What is on your mind? You look as if you carry the weight of the world on your beautiful shoulders."

Ylva smiled and leaned back into the touch without responding verbally. But Maisie felt a purr coming from Ylva's midsection that meant she was content and enjoying her mate's touch. Even today, Maisie was surprised about how much power and influence she held over this strong woman. She stopped her massage, went around Ylva and crouched down in front of her, looking deep into those beautiful eyes that made her body always feel lots of amazing things. She leant her elbows on Ylva's

knees and said, “I saw two shooting stars in a row earlier. Wanna know what I wished?”

The disarming smile she so loved showed up on Ylva’s face when she replied: “Would telling me about your wishes not mean that they aren’t going to come true?”

“Maybe,” Masie said, smiling coyly, “let me phrase it different: The pups are sleeping, Krer takes care of the dishes, Ina took care of the fire that is burning... as do I. So, wanna go for a run?”

Maisie was well aware that her close proximity caused Ylva’s hairs to prickle and her hormones to surge. Ylva’s reflex was still to try and stay cool on the outside, not wanting to give away how much power Maisie held over her, but Maisie knew that the woman’s efforts were wasted when Ylva growled, “Want me to catch you?”

Maisie chuckled. She knew that catching her was a big turn on for Ylva, whose arousal already hung in a deep husky scent around her. At times like this, when the werewolf was brooding and so bad-tempered that even the pups were afraid to go near her, Maisie knew they needed to spend time alone, just the two of them. Ylva’s physical wounds had been healed, thanks to the werewolf’s constitution, but such a long time in captivity and the constant torture she suffered were wounds that would need longer time and patience to heal.

Instead of giving Ylva an answer, Maisie got out of her clothes and changed into wolf-form. She started to run, hearing Ylva’s husky laughter echoing behind her. The smell of the forest penetrated Maisie’s nose, the soft moss under her feet was cushioning her run. She loved that part of her new life, the freedom to enjoy a night like this, running wild through the moonlit woods.

Ylva was behind her, also in wolf-form. Maisie listened to the rustling leaves and the sound of the light breeze whispering through the meadow’s long grass. If she could have, she would have laughed in joy.

How perfect life could be!