

## CHAPTER ONE

There was nothing angelic about Heavensent, Maine. Kyla Yaeger felt evil all around her, watching, waiting. A hell of a lot more was going on here than one werewolf. Her stiletto heels clicked on the sidewalk as she hurried up the street, but she couldn't outpace the feeling of malice. She had to block it out. Nothing could distract her from her mission. As an elite werewolf hunter, she had a contract to fulfill—slaughter the werewolf haunting this strange little town.

Anticipation of the next hunt pulsed through her. She hungered for it as an addict craved the next hit. Maybe someday she'd find the peace she longed for, but that couldn't happen until she avenged her parents' murders.

The fresh smell of pine from the surrounding woods wafted by on the slight breeze. The aroma brought the memory of that hunt in the Adirondacks. Determination flowed over her like ice through her veins. If she met the black wolf again, this time she wouldn't miss.

Quickening her steps, Kyla reached the homey-looking restaurant, a welcome touch of normalcy in this place tainted by wickedness. She hoped she could get a table for her and Todd while he parked the car. As she grabbed for the door handle, someone on the other side pulled the door open. Losing her balance, she wobbled in the entrance as a hand cupped her elbow, steadying her. An electric charge shot up her arm.

"Sorry." The deep voice was definitely male, with a trace of a British accent, and so close to her ear she could feel his warm breath. She inhaled his scent of spice, familiar yet exotic.

The timbre of his tone ignited a spark of recognition in her. She was eye level with a very masculine chest covered by a black T-shirt that stretched over hard muscles and defined biceps. Slowly raising her gaze she met deep topaz eyes—eyes shadowed with sadness that spoke of pain and unbearable loss. Thick black hair framed the rugged beauty of his face. The large jagged scar on his neck saved him from being too perfect. She didn't know him, yet she felt as if she did.

How odd.

He stood holding the door, not moving. The awareness in his eyes gradually changed to shock, then fear. Rooted to the spot, Kyla couldn't look away.

A roaring noise filled her head and pain stabbed her temples, signaling a vision. The man, the restaurant, the street wavered. Disjointed scenes flickered before her.

*A tall man, his face hidden in shadows, his long black hair blowing in a rush of wind, stood before an empty grave. She felt his crushing grief as if it were her own.*

She blinked and the vision left her. And so had the mysterious stranger. The restaurant door closed slowly, leaving her alone on the sidewalk. She looked both ways down the street, but the man seemed to have disappeared.

"Hey, I thought you were going to get us a table. I found a parking spot a few blocks away." Todd, her best friend and business partner, sauntered toward her. He frowned. "What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost, or maybe a werewolf."

"I don't know what I saw." A shiver ran through her.

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As if he could outrun the image of the intriguing woman from the restaurant, Nick Radford

drove his Jag fast, too fast, along the winding road that led from the village up to his cliff-top mansion. He rounded a sharp curve and glimpsed the churning sea below. One tire hit gravel and spun. Fighting for control, he propelled the car back onto the road. Too bad he couldn't control his thoughts as easily.

The woman's face flashed into his mind again. Long black hair and pale, fine-boned features. When he'd looked into those clear green eyes, recognition, longing, and lust had shaken him until fear overrode all other feelings. But fear of what?

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Home in record time, he jerked the car to a stop on the circular drive, cut the engine, pulled the keys from the ignition, and jumped out. Fighting to banish the picture of the black-haired beauty, he ran up the stone steps leading to the old manse. The fast drive and the physical activity couldn't dislodge the mysterious woman from his thoughts.

He entered the cavernous living room, threw his keys on the nearest table, strode to the sideboard and poured a tumbler of whiskey. He drank it in one gulp, then poured another.

Pacing, he stalked to the window and stared at the darkening sky streaked with deep gold and purple. Too agitated to stand still, he paced again. Soon the moon would be full and the Beast inside would struggle for freedom; freedom to roam the deep woods, to run along the wild, winding path that led to the seething ocean below. Bloodlust stirred. The Beast craved the hunt. And Nick hungered for revenge.

The Beast sensed the demon Montague was near. Nick had always been able to control The Beast, but it grew stronger with every full moon and he feared he couldn't control it much longer. Soon he'd leave the mortal world. But first he'd destroy the demon who'd cursed him.