



Bound by Blood

Halloween Love Series - Book 1

by Sam Cheever

1

Phelan Donald stood in the center of a clearing and lifted his nose into the air. The night was deeply, densely dark, and filled with the sounds of movement from unseen creatures. Their warm scent roiled around him, making his stomach growl hopefully.

A sharp crack split the night, followed by a soft curse, as someone stepped on a twig. Phelan's keen, dark gold gaze swung in that direction. His skin quivered and his canines elongated. He scented the air and caught the sensual tang of a female shifter, infused with a power cocktail of anger, excitement, and aggression.

He grinned. It was an interesting mix for a female.

Phelan melted into the shadows beneath the trees and waited, listening to the soft footfall of the woman as she approached the clearing. When she pushed through the trees and stood just a few feet away, his senses exploded.

Her scent rolled over him, making his body clench with need. His mouth watered and his fangs ached, but more importantly, his groin tightened at her musky female scent. She was moderately tall for a woman, broad shouldered and narrow hipped, with long legs and lean, muscular arms. Her hair was midnight black, cut short and spiky. The moonlight glazed the spiky silk with silver highlights.

Her face was a small oval in the dusky light, with high, pronounced cheekbones and slanted golden-brown eyes. He swallowed hard and fought the urge to grab her. To taste her lips and her body. Phelan frowned. No female had reached his sensual core for a long time. He wasn't sure why this one had. She was definitely attractive. But so were a lot of the women he dealt with on a daily basis.

He decided he should have fed before coming to work.

Suddenly the female stiffened, her nostrils flared as if she were scenting the air, and her head swiveled in his direction. She turned her body toward him, widening her legs in battle stance, her hands fisted at her sides. "Show yourself."

Phelan's shock nearly made him gasp. She'd scented him. How was that possible? As he separated himself from the shadows and stepped into the clearing, a single thought slid through his mind. This was no ordinary female.

Cassidy Rai sucked air into her lungs, her long, narrow eyes widening. He was magnificent. Standing somewhere well over six feet, with close cropped, burnished gold hair, densely muscled arms and chest, and long, massive legs, the man standing at the edge of the clearing was like something from a Greek myth.

His square jaw tightened as he watched her, and his pretty gold eyes narrowed slightly. Outwardly he appeared relaxed, but she could almost see the waves of tension vibrating off of him. "What are you doing here?"

He laughed.

Cassidy jerked in surprise and glared at him.

"What am *I* doing here? *I* have business here. The better question would be, what are *you* doing here? It's a dangerous night for lovely young women to be wandering around in the woods alone."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I can protect myself. And you have no business here."

He peaked an eyebrow. "Is that so?"

He took a step toward her, every line of his massive body taut with aggression. For the first time Cassidy started to worry that she'd bitten off more than she could chew. She sent a warning to her pack mates, knowing full well they were spread out all over the huge woods. If things went badly, it was unlikely any of them would reach her in time. "Stay where you are."

Incredibly, he stopped. Cocking his head at her he grinned. "Why should I?"

She frowned. "Because I told you to."

He shrugged, "And you are?"

Cassidy fought the urge to step backwards, putting much needed space between them. His scent was calling to her, making her nipples harden into rigid peaks. She could sense the wildness of his spirit from ten feet away. "I'm a guardian."

Her pulse shot upward as her eyes widened. Why had she told him that?

He went completely, perfectly still. The aggression she'd been feeling from him increased several-fold. Cassidy tensed too, waiting for the attack. As a member of the Guardian Lupa Tribe, Cassidy was supernaturally fast and strong. No mere human male was a match for her. She could outrun, outfight, and outthink humans without even straining. But this man. This...creature...standing before her was an unknown quantity.

He covered the distance between them in the blink of an eye and grabbed her arms before she could move. Cassidy looked up into the deep gold of his eyes and gasped. She recognized the power pulsing there. "You're pack?"

He shook his head and grinned, showing his teeth.

Such very large teeth.

Cassidy gasped.

His fangs were very long and very white. Much too long to be wolf. He was vampire. But not entirely, he had the eyes of a wolf. She blinked, her mind struggling with knowledge she didn't want to accept. Then he pulled her close and buried his face in her neck and Cassidy started to struggle.

She kicked out with her legs and wriggled violently, using all her strength in a futile attempt to break away.

If he was what she *thought* he was, she was going to die. But nothing said she had to make it easy for him.

2

She threw a forearm up and tried to knock him away from her neck. Though she had superhuman strength she didn't move him even an inch. He slid strong hands down her arms and pinned her hands to her sides, holding her there, helpless. Cassidy tried to knee him in the crotch but he was holding her too tightly and she couldn't get anything behind it.

She suddenly realized there was no pain. She went completely still, waiting for the pain to start. Incredibly, all she felt was air on her neck. Little puffs of air as he breathed out against her skin.

Her eyes widened as she realized what he was doing. He was scenting her.

He lifted his head and his face was close, too close. Cassidy found her gaze sliding toward the full, perfectly sculpted mouth. "You *are* Lupa Guardian."

It wasn't a question. He'd taken in her scent, rolled it around on his tongue, and isolated her pack. And probably her ranking within that pack. She forced her gaze back to his eyes and nodded. "I told you that."

He stepped back and Cassidy took a deep, steadying breath.

Amazingly, he extended his hand. "I'm Phelan Donald, with the Indianapolis Police Department."

She narrowed her eyes. "You're a cop?"

He nodded.

She realized her hands were shaking. She told herself it was from adrenaline overload. But honesty made her admit to herself that it was more likely an overload of an entirely different hormone that was causing her body to shiver and quake. Stuffing her hands into her pockets to hide the shaking, Cassidy cocked her head at him. "What are you doing in these woods?"

"Probably the same thing you're doing."

Cassidy let out a soft sigh. Something, or someone had been killing pack members within Ft. Harrison Park. So far they'd been able to protect the few humans who'd been in danger of

being attacked. But they were limited by their need to keep their presence in the 2500 acre park a secret. “You’re Lupire.”

Phelan narrowed his gaze on her. “I’m on the Commission.”

She nodded. The Vampire Commission. It was the ruling body for all things paranormal in the States. “As an elite protector?”

He inclined his head. “I’m here to help.”

She became aware of her pack making its way toward her and frowned. Now she had to decide whether to call them off.

“Yes, call them off. Tell them you’re okay. You can hunt with me.”

Cassidy licked her lips. Okay. He’d just pulled a thought from her mind. Was that usual for a protector?

No. I am elite protector.

She jerked as his deep voice filled her mind. “Get the hell out of my head!”

Phelan smiled. “Sorry, occupational hazard.”

Glaring at him she asked, “As a cop or protector?”

“It’s really the same thing isn’t it?”

She shrugged. He moved and she became aware of how near he’d been. As he stepped away from her his heat went with him. Cassidy lifted her nose and closed her eyes. His scent infused itself into her cells, warming them and making them pulse with pleasure.

“I think you have a demon problem.”

Cassidy’s eyes jerked open. It took her a beat to realize he wasn’t talking about her specifically...or him. The guilty flush slid away. “You think a demon’s been killing pack members in these woods?”

He nodded, lifting a hand to trace a finger down the three hundred year old Walnut tree in front of him. “His signature’s on this tree.” Phelan’s voice sounded distant, as if he was lost in his own thoughts.

Cassidy walked over and stood beside him, peering carefully at the tree. She didn’t see squat. “Where?”

He reached over and grabbed her hand. Cassidy tried to pull it away but his fingers were like iron bands against her skin. He lifted her hand toward the tree and held it over the spot he'd been stroking, not touching the bark but hovering just over it.

“Do you feel that?”

At first Cassidy thought he was referring to the way her sensual core clenched and warmed at his touch and scent, but her fingers started to tingle and she realized she was feeling the demon's electronic signature. She grinned. “Cool.”

He nodded, dropping her hand. “I've been following it for a couple of hours. It seems to be making its way toward the center of the wood.” He looked up at the full, fat moon overhead. Shaking his head he swore silently. If one of the nasty things was there he had no doubt there'd be more of them. He'd have to check the other pack grounds in the State as soon as he got this one cleaned up.

“Halloween?”

He nodded. “Every year it's the same thing. The barrier between the dark and the light worlds thins and all kinds of ugly nasties break through.” He took off toward the center of the woods. “Let's go.”

Cassidy sent a message to her pack as she took off. *I'm with an elite protector. We're tracking a demon in the wood.*

She could easily feel their alarm at this piece of information.

Their psychic signatures throbbed with unspoken questions. But, like good soldiers they waited for the pack leader to ask.

Darius didn't disappoint. *Are you sure this is a protector?*

Cassidy sent him an affirmative response. He is Lupire.

This sent new shockwaves through the psychic hotline. Cassidy smiled.

Darius frowned in her mind. *We head to the moon temple now. Will you join us?*

Cassidy could hear the yearning in his husky voice. Darius had been after her to be his mate for months. But she had resisted. She wasn't even sure why. She just didn't feel that way toward him. Although she *would* enjoy the power and prestige the union would give her. She knew she'd be miserable if there was nothing more there. *We're heading that way.*

She suddenly realized where the demon was heading. “Holy crap!”

Phelan turned his head. “What is it?”

Cassidy looked at him, her eyes widening in horror. “I know where it’s going.”

He stopped and turned to her, his sexy golden eyes focused on her with slightly scary intensity.

“We hold a ceremony at the center of the wood each Halloween. A ceremony to strengthen our pack and keep the dark magics away for the rest of the year. We fuse all our power during this ceremony.” She turned haunted eyes toward him. Even in the dim light under the dense tree cover Phelan could see the color leeching from her face. “Oh my god, Phelan. With all our magic combined we create a power large enough to...”

“Create a hole in the barriers to Hell and let everything out.” He finished for her.

Cassidy nodded, grimacing at the blunt truth.

He frowned. “Will all the packs do this tonight?”

Any color she had left in her face fled southward. “Most, yes.”

Phelan sighed, shaking his head, and took off running. Maybe he should get a desk job.

3

It moved through the dense tree growth, creating a nearly silent path through the vegetation that closed up and hid the demon's physical trail as soon as it passed.

It had stopped to feed on the fresh, succulent flesh of a deer a while back, taking valuable time to gain the necessary strength. Once the demon completed its mission it would have all the energy it needed for a long, long time.

Glancing upward, the demon narrowed bright red eyes at the fat, full moon above its head. The glow of the astral globe pulsed downward, almost visible in its potency, bathing the Earth in strengthening rays and thinning the barrier between dark and light. The demon breathed deeply of the power saturated air.

The fiend from Hell could feel the pack all around it. They vibrated with the need to change form and gather in worship to the fat moon above. Soon, their power would be the demon's power. It would be used to feed the ascendancy of darkness, blotting out the painful light of Earth. A rancid, burning lightness that was anathema to the demon and all his kind.

The light would be swept away on a wave of nearly limitless power, on a night filled with the sweet darkness of death and destruction.

Halloween. The demon's party night.

The demon stopped at the edge of a clearing and stared across the vegetation free space before it. At the center of the clearing was a single, large, flat stone. An altar to goodness, reinforced with the power of good intentions and buffered with the stain of good will.

But this night on Earth —Halloween 2009—the altar would run with blood and serve as an open portal to Hell, allowing those who, for the space of eternity, have waited in ugliness and pain below, to breathe the sweet, blood tinged air of freedom once again. Free of the stinging fires that marked their every breath in the pits of Hell.

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Phelan stopped suddenly and lifted his nose, scenting the air. Cassidy came up behind him. She was completely silent, not even her breath on the cool night air betrayed her. But Phelan realized he would have known she was there even if he couldn't feel her sweetly scented heat.

“It nears Midnight. My pack is moving toward the hallowed place now.”

Phelan nodded, with his special sight, he could close his eyes and see dozens of forms moving toward the center of the wood. He saw their electric signatures as bright dots in the inky darkness. But he couldn't see the demon. The fiend was like a thicker shadow in the dark, nearly impossible to see unless it was moving. Phelan believed the demon was in place. It had stopped moving a while ago. He turned to Cassidy and found her closer than he'd expected. Close enough to reach out and touch. And every fiber in his body was screaming for him to touch her. Phelan's fingers twitched and he clenched them into tight fists before he could reach for her.

Cassidy watched Phelan carefully. His body had gone rigid when he stopped, his eyes rolling closed and his impressive jaw tightening as he sensed the darkness around them. He was incredible. He was heat and light and raging testosterone in a huge, well muscled package. And he was flinging pheromones around the place like candy.

She knew because she was sucking them in as fast as he was flinging them off.

She licked her lips as her gaze slid across his broad back, down the massive arms, past the narrow waist, and landed on the hard, round geography of a truly fine pair of buns. Her body tightened with hunger and her fingers twitched with the desire to touch him.

Her gaze finally lifted from his butt and fixated on his mouth. They were standing so close that his hot breath bathed her face softly. “The demon is in place. I don't think it will attack your people until the power ceremony is complete, but just to be safe, you should call them to us.”

Cassidy forced her lips closed, savoring the taste of his breath on them as she nodded. Then she sent the call into the night and felt her pack jerk to a stop in surprise. After a moment she looked up at him. “They're coming.”

With their preternatural speed, it only took a few moments for Cassidy's pack to start arriving. One by one they melted silently from the shadows and stood around them, until Phelan could turn in a full circle and see pack. His golden gaze measured each one as they emerged from the wood, looking for the pack leader.

His search ended when he spotted a small, dark haired man with blazing green eyes. The man stood with his hip cocked against a tree and his hands shoved into the pockets of his jeans. His square jaw held the thick, dark bristle of a neat beard. The hair on his head was cut military short.

He reeked of barely suppressed power. Though he was physically smaller than many of his pack, his metaphysical stats were off the charts.

Phelan inclined his head toward the alpha. "I'm Phelan Donald. Thank you for allowing me into your territory."

The man's full, well shaped lips tipped upward sardonically. "That would have meant more if you'd said it *before* you tramped all over my woods."

Phelan allowed himself to smile. "I apologize. But we have a serious problem here. We'll need to work together tonight or all Hell's gonna break loose...literally."

The alpha focused that startling green gaze on him for a long moment before pushing away from the tree and sauntering toward Phelan.

Phelan watched him carefully, reading an extra tension in his aura as he glanced toward Cassidy. He pulled a deep breath into his lungs in surprise. *Perfect. The evening's festivities would include a nice dose of frustrated jealousy to go along with the bloody altercation they had ahead of them.*

The alpha stopped in front of Phelan and extended his hand. "I am Darius."

Phelan took the offered hand and returned the testing squeeze, impressed by the smaller man's physical strength.

Darius turned to Cassidy and gave her a slight nod. "Cassidy. Please go join the pack."

She blinked, her face clearly showing the insult of being so casually dismissed before she hid it behind a blank mask.

Phelan fought the urge to take up for her, knowing it would just add timber to the already blazing fire in the alpha's eyes.

Cassidy moved stiffly away, toward the rest of her pack. Phelan watched her go with his inner sight, but kept his gaze firmly on the alpha.

Darius watched him closely. He seemed to be judging Phelan's reaction to Cassidy's dismissal. But if he was looking for something to initiate the fight he clearly sought, he wouldn't find it in Phelan's carefully blank expression.

Phelan fought to regulate his scent, knowing the alpha would be able to scent the lust he felt for Cassidy. Just as he could clearly scent Darius' lust for her.

"Tell me why you are here." Darius crossed his arms over his chest and waited, his gaze fixed unwaveringly on Phelan's face.

"There's a demon in these woods. It's come to drain the power from your All Hallows Eve ceremony. If my suspicions are correct, it will use the power to open the barrier between Hell and Earth."

Darius' green gaze narrowed, but other than that he didn't move. He was so still in fact that Phelan had to fight the urge to reach out and jab him with a finger to make sure he hadn't gone into a coma. The rise and fall of the alpha's chest was barely discernible. Finally he swore softly.

You are Lupire correct? So you can hear me?

Phelan twitched in surprise as Darius' voice filled his head. Only a very powerful alpha could manage psychic communication. *Yes.*

I don't want my pack to die.

I understand, but we have no choice. We have to fight this thing. If we are careful we can minimize...loss.

Darius stared hard at Phelan for another beat and then expelled a soft breath and stepped back. This act of respect for Phelan's life space told the pack that he was accepting the other man's leadership for the moment. "So, what is your plan?"

4

The demon lifted its glowing, red eyes toward the sky. The moon's rays surrounded it like a halo, pulsing with the enhanced power of All Hallows Eve. It was a full, fat moon, a rare occurrence on Halloween, and one that held magical significance for those who knew the prophecies.

Prophecy stated that, on this night, when the barrier between good and evil is at its weakest, if the moon shows full and potent in the sky, the time is ripe for lifting the barrier and releasing all manner of evil into the human population. The delectable human cattle were tasty tidbits for all who lived in the regions of fire well below the Earth.

The demon lifted its snout and scented the air. The warm, sweet musk of wolf danced toward him on a soft breeze. The time neared. Soon the demon would step into the center of a tsunami of light magics, and bend the power toward its own purposes. And then it would feast on the tender, warm flesh of wolf. Until its stomach threatened to burst.

The first wolf padded silently into the clearing.

The demon melted back into the shadows, regulating its breathing so that it could not be detected by the arriving pack. The clearing was filling quickly now, the wolves pawing nervously at the dirt and sniffing the air carefully.

The demon sneered at them from its hiding spot. The shifters were puny specimens. The demon couldn't believe they held the power to unlock the door between dimensions. But even as he had the thought a larger wolf entered the clearing. It was a magnificent creature, with dense muscles covered in silky black fur that was tipped in silver. Obviously the alpha. At its side was a slightly smaller white female with black markings. The alpha leapt to the top of the altar and the female began to circle the perimeter of the pack, her slanted golden-brown gaze searching the tree line where the demon waited.

The female's gaze stopped for a moment and held, focused on the exact spot where the demon stood. The fiend thought for a moment that she'd spotted it. But she jerked suddenly and turned to the alpha, then continued patrolling the perimeter. As her intense gaze slipped away, the demon melted further back into the shadows, certain that it had just missed having the purpose of its mission thwarted by the too-sharp senses of the female.

I found it.

Good, turn away. We don't want it to know we've seen it.

Cassidy's frown emerged as a tiny whimper. Her wolf face couldn't frown so the magics transformed the expression into sound.

Cassidy!

She jumped. *Okay, okay, don't get your fur in a bunch.* She forced her gaze from the ugly, hulking beast in the trees and continued to pace the circle. As she moved she sent the information out to the rest of the pack.

Is everyone in position?

Cassidy smiled, her tongue sliding out to lick her lips. Phelan's commanding tone was not sitting well with Darius. She wouldn't be at all surprised if Phelan found himself challenged by the alpha before he could get himself out of those woods.

She blinked as she realized it was possible that *none* of them would make it out of the woods alive. Her eyes slid to where Phelan waited and she licked her lips again. He was power incarnate. If anybody could get them through the night it was Phelan Donald, Lupire cop.

Her chuckle came out as a quiet yip and the wolf on top of the altar cast his golden gaze in her direction. *Stay focused, wolf!*

If wolves could stick out a tongue Cassidy's would be waving in his direction at that very moment.

Phelan's warm chuckle filled her head. *I'll give you a chance to get rid of some of that pent up anger after we kick this demon's ass, she-wolf.*

Cassidy's tail tucked with embarrassment. *In your dreams, Lupire.* This time his chuckle sent desire spiraling through her body and Cassidy had to fight the urge to take off, running full speed through the wood, in an attempt to outrun her feelings for the dangerous creature staring at her through the night.

And she wasn't thinking about the demon. At least not the one with horns.

We begin.

The demon smiled as the huge, black wolf on top of the altar began to howl. The wolves standing in the clearing joined him in song until the air throbbed with the pulse and power of their music.

Soon another kind of power joined them, pulled forward by the combined magic of their voices calling to the moon. A shimmering fog lifted from the ground and danced around the shifters' paws, flowing directly toward the huge creature on the altar.

The demon frowned at this. It had thought the power would reach skyward, toward the moon, in a thick white column of magic. But apparently it had to go through the alpha first.

Then the demon blinked as it realized the shimmering streams of power came from outside the circle, from the trees around the clearing. How could this be? The fiend looked at the small wolf forms in the clearing. They were creating none of it.

The demon realized suddenly that they were mere wolves. Decoys! It took a step, unsure if it should run or fight.

Silence dropped into the night with the force of a rock. A ripping sound brought the demon's gaze back to the altar with a jerk. The alpha had nearly tripled in size, his fangs hanging well down his face, curved and razor sharp. His golden eyes blazed toward the demon, pulsing with incredible power. His claws scraped at the thick rock of the altar upon which he stood, throwing dust into the air as he gouged deep furrows into the solid rock.

The demon could smell fear in the air. Its own fear, along with the fear of the animals in that clearing. A single, bright, clear howl broke the magic tinged silence of the night. The demon's gaze slid to the female.

She stood just outside the pack, her long elegant snout lifted and her mouth opened wide in song. From where it stood in the shadows the demon could see her throat throbbing under the effort to send her song toward the waiting moon.

One by one, the wolves in that clearing joined her.

The edges of the clearing started to boil and a line of larger wolves padded into the clearing, their snouts lifted toward the sky in song.

The creature on top of the altar didn't join in. But the magics being created by the pack were still sliding toward him.

The demon tried to take a step toward the altar, determined to kill the creature standing on it before the alpha could gain his full strength. But its feet wouldn't move. The fiend looked down and saw the fog wrapped around its feet and calves. It was a cold, slimy fog, filled with dark magics, and it seemed to be pulling all strength from the demon's body wherever it touched. The numbing fog began to lift toward the demon's head. The fiend's knees buckled and it fell forward, slamming its head hard against the nearly frozen ground. The demon scabbled for purchase on the cold ground, trying to climb to its feet and fight. But the numbing magics kept it prone.

The ground rumbled and the howling stopped.

The demon forced its heavy head to lift and saw that the creature from the altar had leapt to the ground and was stalking towards it. Saturated with power as he was, the alpha made the ground tremble with his every step.

The demon struggled to gain its feet but couldn't move. All it could do was crank its red eyes toward the force of certain death moving inexorably toward it. A cry of frustration trickled from its throat.

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Phelan stopped and stared down at the demon. It was well over seven feet tall, with rock-like skin and large, curved horns on its head. Its eyes shone like fierce red lights through the fog surrounding it. Its mouth hung open, the lower jaw weighted down by several rows of dense, brown teeth. Its upper jaw sported two enormous, curving canines that had jagged edges meant for ripping and shredding.

It smelled like the bottom of a landfill.

Every cell in Phelan's body objected to the type of kill he had planned for the evil package at his feet. It went against his sense of fair play to kill a helpless creature, even one wrapped in a skin of thick, oily evil.

Infused as he was with power from the pack, which he'd transformed to black magics to defeat the demon, his fangs ached with the need to kill and his claws spasmed rhythmically, ripping the rocky ground beneath them to shreds.

But his mind was still the mind of a cop. And the cop in him wouldn't let him kill a helpless creature.

Darius get your pack out of here.

5

He could feel the alpha bristling in his mind. *What are you doing, Lupire?*

Just get them out of here.

You assured me that my pack would be in no danger from this creature.

They won't be if they leave now.

What if it gets past you.

It won't.

Phelan, no!

He slid his gaze toward Cassidy and their eyes met. *Leave with your pack, she-wolf. I'll find you later to...say goodbye.*

Darius' low growl filled his head.

When they continued to hesitate Phelan lifted his snout in a roar. *Go!* He waited until he felt them beginning to leave and then focused his gaze on the demon and removed the power cocktail he'd created to hold it down.

The thing didn't move for a beat. It jerked suddenly as it realized the black magic was no longer holding it down. In the blink of an eye the demon shot to its hooves and attacked.

The force of its attack sent Phelan backward. He quickly closed his jaws over the demon's thick arm and wrenched hard, feeling the hard tissue give way under his massive teeth. The demon's head went back on a pain filled roar, but its mouth descended and captured Phelan's shoulder, ripping into it with those razor sharp canines.

The smell of blood permeated the air.

Somewhere in the distance Phelan heard whimpering.

He brought a massive paw up and slammed it into the demon's side, managing to knock it off its feet. He felt the wrenching pain on his shoulder as the demon pulled him along with it.

They rolled across the clearing, wrenching apart at the end, and came to their feet at the edge of the wood.

The demon opened its massive jaws and spoke, its voice deep and gravelly as it wrenched words around the butcher shop collection of teeth. “You will die tonight, wolf.”

Phelan widened his jaw in a smile, showing the equally impressive rows of massive white teeth between his jaws. His response was a bit more concrete. He leapt upon the demon’s chest and sent him sprawling backward to the ground. Before the demon’s head hit the ground Phelan’s jaw was around its throat, tearing the hard flesh from bone.

As the sour flesh ripped away, it spewed a foul tasting blood into Phelan’s mouth. He spat the blood into the dirt beside them and slammed his claws into the demon’s chest. The demon screamed as Phelan drove his claws deep and tore, exposing the demon’s small, black heart in its plundered chest.

Phelan stared at the beating heart for a moment, reluctant to touch it. The shriveled, black heart was as dangerous to his soul as the creature’s blood had been. Infused as he was by the black magics, he knew the black heart would most likely send him reeling toward darkness. The urge to consume it, and gain an unprecedented level of black power, would be nearly impossible to resist.

But he’d chosen this path, and it was up to him to finish it. He reached toward the heart...

No!!! As her voice burst through his mind, a small, white form hurtled through the air and landed on the demon. A second form, larger and dark grey, hit him hard and knocked him away.

Cassidy’s fear pounded in her chest as she landed on the terrifying creature. But she’d felt the fear in Phelan and her mind, connected with his in a way that defied explanation, read the reason why. She’d had to do something. She couldn’t just let Phelan destroy himself to save her pack. So she’d done the only thing she knew to do. She took the thing head on.

And, with a single thought, she’d dragged Darius into the fight with her. She prayed she wouldn’t have to live with the consequences of that choice.

Released from Phelan’s hold as Darius knocked him away, the demon grabbed Cassidy in both massive claws and shook her. She swiped her fore claws across his face, ripping the skin around his fiery eyes. He roared and tried to fling her away, but she held on, her fear giving her strength well beyond her abilities. Her jaws closed over the demon’s cheek, tearing at it. The hard flesh finally gave way, but as the black blood flooded her mouth she whimpered in pain and lost her grip. It felt like acid against her tongue, burning the flesh until she wasn’t sure she’d survive unscathed. The demon flung her away from him. She flew through the air and slammed

up hard against a nearby tree, sliding bonelessly to the ground. Phelan's terrified voice, calling her name, was the last thing she heard before she lost consciousness.

Cassidy! Phelan took a step toward her.

Fight Lupire, or I'll kill you myself. Her death will be on your conscience!

Darius' words stung Phelan into action. He turned to find the alpha clinging to the demon's back, his strong jaw fixed around the back of the thing's neck and his claws ripping everything they touched.

Black blood flew everywhere, Phelan could smell burning flesh and fur as Darius' paws sizzled under the acid-like substance.

Phelan threw his head back on a roar, reached into the demon's ravaged chest, and wrenched the heart free.

As soon as he touched it he felt the siren song of its powers calling to him. The demon dropped to the ground at his feet and he shimmered back to human form, lifting the black heart to the moon above. Power washed over him, healing all wounds and making him feel as if he stood high above the rest of the world. The moon's power called to him, throbbing through his veins like laughter, and the world around him seemed brighter, clearer than ever before.

His eyes slid to the small form at the base of the tree. She'd returned to human form as she died and she lay in alabaster perfection before him. Only a small spot of blood on her forehead marred her flawlessness.

He reached for her mind and found only a spark. *Live for me Cassidy.*

Nothing.

CASSIDY! His cry was a howl in his mind, the words lost in the rampaging emotions there.

The black power called to him and his mind slid away. He smelled blood and the blood lust rushed through him. His canines grew, piercing his bottom lip as they surged from his jaw.

His fiery golden gaze slid around the clearing, searching for the source of the blood. His eyes found the alpha, bending over the still form of the girl. Before he knew what he was doing he was beside them, still holding the black heart in his hand.

The alpha looked up and fear filled his eyes. "No! Get away from h..."

Phelan reached down and flung the man away. With his enhanced powers, the pack leader felt no heavier than a feather to Phelan. Phelan knelt and bowed over the girl, reaching out to touch the smear of blood on her perfect, alabaster forehead. He slid the blood coated finger past his lips and moaned with pleasure at the sweet, clean taste of it.

6

Fight the dark, Phelan. Come back to me.

Cassidy's words slid through his soul as her sweet blood worked its magic on his body. Phelan's mind fractured, torn by pain and lust. He broke into spasms of shaking, the shriveled thing in his hand dripping blood that sizzled in the dirt below.

Phelan focused hard on the sound of her words in his mind, pulling at their meaning with his broken mind, losing it, and then grabbing hold again, until, suddenly, he knew what he must do. He reached down and touched her chest, above her barely beating heart, and sent the magic into her. She jerked and her body came up off the ground under the effects of the massive power.

Phelan was dimly aware of the alpha hitting his back again, and the bright pain of teeth against his neck. But he didn't care. He felt Cassidy's heart begin to beat harder, and color flooded her pale cheeks.

When Cassidy gasped a breath and her eyes opened, Phelan threw back his head and laughed, the sound deep and booming, as it reverberated through the dense tree growth of the wood.

Her body settled gently back to Earth and Phelan stood, dropping Darius in the dirt behind him unnoticed. With a roar, Phelan flung the black heart into the sky.

It flew impossibly high, toward the bright moon above, and then erupted into flame, sparking like a tiny star, and disappeared. Phelan sagged to his knees in the dirt.

Silence reigned.

Phelan felt as if every cell in his body had been beaten and sucked dry of energy. He could barely keep his head above the ground. A soft hand touched the back of his neck and slid like silk down his back. "Are you all right?"

He pulled her scent into his lungs and felt his body begin to heal. After a moment he nodded. She started to rise but he grabbed her wrist, pulling her down to her knees in front of him. "Don't go. I need you."

Their gazes met and held. Her lips quivered with some emotion he couldn't identify. He ached to taste them, to pull the essence of her life into his cold exhausted body. Phelan leaned

forward slightly. She swayed toward him. Their lips met and Phelan's heart surged at the sweet contact. Strength returned to his body in a rush.

His arms slid around her waist and he pulled her up tightly against him. Her soft breasts crushed warmly against his ribs and his aching hardness pressed her soft belly. Cassidy whimpered and opened her lips, drawing his tongue to hers with instinctual skill. Phelan groaned as he tasted her sweetness, and pulled her so tight against his body that she cried out.

He forced himself to loosen his grip and pulled away. Standing up, he reached down for her, drawing her to her feet. "Come."

Cassidy was dimly aware that Darius had disappeared. She reached for him with her mind as she followed Phelan from the clearing.

Silence. He'd shut her out. She felt a moment's sadness that it had come to this between them. But she'd been trying to tell him for months that she was not his mate. At least now he'd finally understand.

Phelan led her away from the stink and carnage of the clearing, to a place where the ground beneath the trees was covered in thick, soft moss. He lay her down there and lowered himself down beside her.

He stared down at her with his unreadable golden gaze. "Are you sure you want this, Cassidy?"

He swept a lock of her hair off her cheek and she grabbed his hand, pulling a long, calloused finger into her mouth in response. She sucked the warm finger fully into her mouth before sliding her tongue up its length, and then capturing the tip of it between her teeth. She bit the end of the finger gently, piercing the pad with a sharp canine.

Phelan gasped as a bright drop of his blood mounded from the tiny wound. He reached down and took one of her hands, doing the same to her.

As they held their hands upright between them, Cassidy said. "I always knew my heart would tell me when I'd found my mate. I've held onto that belief for months now while..." Her words trailed off as she wondered if it was a good idea to mention Darius at that moment.

Phelan nodded. "I sensed his interest from the first. I know you don't return it."

She sighed and glanced away. "This is probably a little too fast for you. I'm okay if you don't feel the same way. But a wolf knows when she's met her mate. It doesn't take long to recognize the person we are destined for."

Phelan lowered his head and pulled her finger into his mouth, greedily sucking the tiny drop of blood from the silken skin. When he pulled the moistened finger back out he smiled. “You forget I’m wolf too.”

Cassidy’s lips spread in a slow grin. She leaned forward and licked the sweet, coppery offering on the tip of his finger. “We are mated.”

Phelan touched his lips briefly to hers. “We are mated.” His hands smoothed over her lush, naked body, enjoying the soft, warm feel of her skin and the sensual jolt to his system as her body reacted to his touch.

He lowered his head and kissed her throat, then buried his nose in her neck and inhaled her sweet, musky scent.

Magic pulsed between them as he rose over her. His body hardened and throbbed with eager anticipation. His eyes sparked from the heat of her touch and his heart beat hard and fast in his chest. Impossible as it seemed, Phelan had known, even before she’d shared her feelings with him, that he’d found his mate. His kind rarely did. Yet on this most magical of nights, All Hallows Eve, 2009, Phelan Donald, Lupire, had found his perfect mate in the midst of a demon infested wood. His lips curved against her throat and he moaned in stark pleasure as she moved against him, urging him on with her eager body.

Cassidy lifted her hips in silent plea and Phelan happily complied, driving deep into her body with a groan of sheer pleasure. She wrapped her limbs around him and sighed as he began to move. Waves of delight assaulted Cassidy as Phelan moved within her. Sensations grew and sharpened. Beneath her body, the thick carpet of moss was soft and unnaturally fragrant. The woods boiled with activity and sound. The air warmed and throbbed with the power they created. The scent of the wood enveloped her. Cassidy’s body called the magic forth and consumed it. Her limbs thrummed with the power they created. Her stomach tightened.

As the intensity of Phelan’s sweet invasion built and deepened, Cassidy felt the pleasure burst within her. She threw back her head and screamed, the human sound morphing quickly to a lupine howl.

The sound brought contentment sliding through Phelan and tore release from his body. He dropped his head and nuzzled her neck, licking the bulging vein there tenderly.

“Do it!” She screamed.

Phelan plunged his fangs deep, bringing them both crashing back into release again. And as her sweet lifeblood filled his mouth, Phelan felt the last of the cold that had settled into his heart and mind decades ago, sliding away.

Cassidy shivered as Phelan licked the pinprick holes on her neck to heal them. She nestled more deeply into Phelan's heat and sighed her contentment. "I love Halloween!" She murmured into his warm, fragrant neck.

Phelan chuckled, and rolled to his side, pulling her close. He buried his nose in her sweet smelling hair. In the distance something surged skyward, lighting a path to the moon. Cassidy said. "Phelan...is that what I think it is?"

His eyes popped open. "Holy shit!" He leapt to his feet. And grabbed her hand. "Shift now, we'll cover ground faster as wolves. The large black wolf and the smaller white one shifted mid-air as they leapt forward, and ran toward the site of the skybound light. Mated and happy they might be, but it was still All Hellows Eve, and apparently the world still needed saving.

The End