



## Once Lost

“Oh my god. I’m freaking lost,” I muttered to myself, casting the light from my cell phone in a three-sixty.

The only stupid person in the history of stupid people to explore a dark, abandoned cave. Alone.

“Idiot!”

I forced down another shiver as I crept along the loose dirt. I should turn back. I’d considered it a handful of times already, but something pulled me in here. A noise? A feeling? A sixth sense I needed to find...

My sanity. Obviously.

Wind whistled through the tunnel, while the most ferocious storm I’d experienced in years wreaked havoc outside the cave. Of all the days to hike these mountains. At least I carried emergency supplies, so I could wait it out.

I’d dreamed of this forest for months. The same trees over and over like an invisible thread subconsciously drew me here. For what? A storm?

Reaching a junction, I paused and considered which direction to turn. Bitter cold air burned my lungs with each inhale. My luck, I'd freeze to death in here and no one would ever find me.

I shined the light from my phone left and right, feeling like I'd walked for hours even though I knew that wasn't true. Hang on. That wall looked familiar. Had I come this way already? Was I walking in circles?

A high-pitched, almost painful whine echoed from my left. The same noise that lured me further into the tunnel after I dashed in out of the rain, prompting this crazy quest.

Was an animal hurt? Was it stuck down here unable to find its way out?

Lost, like me?

I turned left. Heaviness settled low in my belly with each step. Darkness curled around my shoulders, squeezing air from my lungs. A warning to turn back.

Clearly, I didn't listen.

I forced one foot in front of the other. My heart raced so wildly it slammed against my ribs making me dizzy.

Around another bend, soft flickering light lured me to the end of the tunnel, blocked by a floor-to-ceiling pale shimmering...barrier.

Shudders danced along my spine.

I shined my phone light up and down as I peered through the ripples trying to see inside the cavern. Bright amber eyes stared back at me.

I froze.

That wasn't any animal trapped in a cave. It was a freaking wolf.

The wolf whined, pacing back and forth, growing more agitated the longer I stood on the other side. As I raised my free hand to hover near the shimmering air, the wolf paused. Its head tilted, wary eyes watching my every move. A low growl rumbled in the cavern,

awakening every cell in my body.

Something compelled me to push forward, to slide my fingers through the cool, silky layers of the barrier. The wolf's nostrils flared. In an instant, the barrier vanished. Dark shadows swirled in the air around the wolf as it thrashed its head from side to side.

I staggered back and turned to run.

An inhuman sound echoed in the cave making me stop. In one swift motion, the wolf transformed into man. Dark wavy hair, smooth chiseled jaw and high cheekbones gave him an almost regal look. My pulse kicked as my gaze slid along the golden-tanned skin of his broad shoulders, over his perfectly defined chest, down the rigid peaks and grooves of his abs, landing on his—

Did I mention he was naked?

What. The. Hell?

My phone fell from my hand, landing face up. The dim light reflected in his unearthly amber eyes as he closed the distance between us. "I've waited so long."

I swallowed past the giant lump in my throat. "For what?"

Who trapped him here?

*Why do I feel like I know him?*

Air punched from my lungs the second his arm lifted to brush his knuckles along my jaw.

"For you."

"Me?" I squeaked, shaking my head. "I rushed inside the cave. Then I searched the tunnels for..."

"Me. I've been calling you."

His thumb circled my cheek making my heart flutter. Warmth swelled through my middle and I instinctively leaned into his touch as though I'd known him all my life.

Had I?

“I’ve waited centuries. Cursed to remain here until found by my one true mate.”

Centuries? One true mate?

My brain was about to explode.

His gaze locked with mine, igniting something ancient in my blood. Those deep amber eyes fueled with intensity and primal need.

Strong, rough hands gently cupped my jaw, angling my mouth to his. How did this feel so good? So right? I not only wanted to kiss him, but I ached to explore the intensity between us.

I raised on my toes and met him halfway. Warm, soft lips caressed mine in a kiss that clenched my soul, blew it apart and fused it back together in a single moment. Tiny zaps of lightning shot through my middle, swirling together, building and strengthening into a brilliant ball of light. His tongue teased along my bottom lip and I opened for him, deepening the kiss, surrendering to all the sensations.

I’d planned this hike so many times, wondering why I kept dreaming of this forest, yet I found every excuse not to go. Was it fate? Was I really destined to find him? A man, half-beast, cursed to live an existence waiting for his mate.

Me. I was his mate.

He’d waited for me.

He drew back, searching my eyes as our panting breaths collided between us.

“I was lost,” I whispered.

“Once perhaps. But no longer.” He kissed my forehead in a touch that squeezed my heart. “Now you’re here. With me.”

*The End!*

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