

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

Jory Strong

Kiziah's Reading

CARNIVAL TAROT



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Kiziah's Reading

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CARNIVAL TAROT:

KIZIAH'S READING

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Acknowledgements

For Jennifer K – Head Cheerleader and Chief Nag. May this story inspire you!

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Chapter One

The scene in front of Kiziah Stillwell was just like she'd experienced it in her dream. Cheap carnival rides under a star-speckled autumn sky. The air brisk, chilled, loaded with the smell of hot dogs and cotton candy, filled with tinny musical themes and the voices of carnies vying with one another, each trying to entice the men strolling with their wives and girlfriends to stop and try their luck, to part with their money and attempt to win a stuffed animal.

Kiziah stopped in front of the fortune-teller's tent. Madame Helki. She hadn't seen the name in her dream, but she'd seen the red hand painted on the canvas front, a spread of tarot cards above it.

"You've come for your reading?" a voice questioned from the darkened interior of the tent, startling Kiziah with the wording. Could the fortune-teller really know about the dream?

Kiziah touched her fingers to the base of her throat, gently outlining the small dreamcatcher she wore underneath her jacket and shirt. It was the only link she had to the nomadic silversmith who'd died before she was born, unaware even that he'd fathered a child.

Her father's people, the Chippewa, believed all dreams came from external sources and not from the subconscious of the one experiencing them. That's why they had originally fashioned the dreamcatchers, to trap the bad dreams but allow the good ones through.

Maybe the old woman had sent the dream. Kiziah's hand dropped from the necklace. Or maybe her mother's spirit had, knowing that today of all days, Kiziah would be thinking about the past, aching for the return of old times, for something of her mother.

Kiziah moved into the tent and took a seat, ignoring everything but the ancient fortune-teller in front of her and the deck of cards now in Madame Helki's hands. The cards were the only important *thing* in the tent, everything else was just a special effect put into place in order to create a setting, an atmosphere, a show for those who viewed the reading as entertainment—or needed to see something different than what they saw in their everyday environment in order to believe.

Kiziah knew better. She had a lifetime of memories proving it didn't matter. Readings done in restaurants, at playgrounds, while sitting in the backseat of her mother's car and leaning over the front so she could view the cards a traveling companion was interpreting as they drove to yet another psychic fair—their travel trailer, their home on wheels, being pulled behind them.

"You've come for your reading?" the ancient fortune-teller asked again, understanding in her voice, the merest hint of amusement in her eyes.

"Yes."

Madame Helki handed the cards to Kiziah, not asking for a specific question but waiting patiently. Kiziah shuffled them, opening herself up to the message she felt sure was out there for her. The reason for the dream and her presence in the garish tent, a metal creation covered with tarp to make it seem more than just a carnival amusement.

She stopped shuffling when it felt right to do so. Cutting the deck and restacking it before handing it back to the woman across from her. In quick succession three cards were placed on the table.

The past. The present. The future.

The High Priestess.

The Hermit.

The Wheel of Fortune.

Madame Helki leaned over the cards, nodding slightly. "Much of your life has been influenced by a woman. A woman who introduced you to the mysteries of a world that can't always be seen. But she is gone now except in dreamscapes where spirits can sometimes touch the lives of those who are important to them." Sympathy moved through the fortune-teller's face. "So now you maintain a distance from others, traveling alone, living a solitary life. Seeking. Trying to find meaning, a place for yourself. A belonging." Her fingers settled on the table, underlining the Wheel of Fortune. "Soon. Very soon, an opportunity will present itself. A destiny not planned for, even by those who will draw you into their world. But you are well suited for it. You need only to use the strength and courage you have gained and the wisdom bestowed on you by The High Priestess in order to grasp and hold what fate will soon offer you."

* * * * *

The warm water struck Cable Luske's body, chasing away the chill he'd gained during the boat ride out to sea in order to dispose of the body. Christ. He hadn't seen that one coming.

He would never have guessed that a fellow padrall—one whose family had served the vampire race for more generations than his own—would try and abduct a kadine, a vampire's mate. What insanity.

His own reputation would suffer for it. *If* Matteo Cabrelli chose to make an issue of Cable's failure to keep Sarael guarded until the very moment when Matteo came to reclaim her. But how was he to know there was an enemy in their midst?

Cable tried to work up some concern at the prospect of being lectured by the higher-ups in his order, by his father, of possibly being reduced to errand boy for a while, but couldn't. Not when the rest of his life was about to crash down around him. Not when he felt like things were coming to an end with Fane.

Sorrow moved through him. Pain. The fingers of future heartbreak reaching back and stroking him. Yeah, he'd get over it eventually. It was just getting *through* it that he had to manage first.

Fane was a dhampir. A soldier of the vampire race, a man born to protect his kind until The Transformation, when he became a full vampire. A reproductively mature male who would want a bride, a kadine, a woman who could give him the children who would become the next generation of soldiers.

Two years ago when the relationship had begun, the prospect of Fane's Transformation hadn't bothered Cable. Fane's parents had been alive, as had his brother.

But now they were gone. Killed by the Believers, the secret society whose original mission was to destroy any creature that could take on the form of man, but was more than mortal.

Vampires had been the primary target of the Believers. But over the centuries their description of "human" had narrowed, and those they'd chosen to hunt, kill and persecute had expanded to include witches, psychics and anyone with supernatural ability or talents.

During the last year Cable had managed to ignore thinking about the truth of his future with Fane, to avoid facing it or discussing it—even though he believed that in the end Fane would feel he owed it to his father's memory to not only avenge his death but to produce the next generation of dhampirs. Cable had helped Fane gather information, eventually finding a name to go with the bomb that had killed Fane's family. But now Cable knew he couldn't avoid the future any longer.

The Transformation was approaching. Cable had been around enough dhampirs to recognize it—even if he wanted to ignore it, wanted to pretend it wasn't so close.

But he could sense the restlessness in Fane. The Hunger. The Heat.

Cable's cock grew hard thinking about how aggressive Fane had become in bed. How insatiable. How dangerous.

There were times when he'd avoided being bitten only because Fane had been underneath him, tethered or with his face pressed against the mattress in order to maintain control. Cable closed his eyes, taking his shaft in hand. Pumping up and down. Christ, he was horny. He longed for the feel of fangs sliding through his skin, dreamed of the ecstasy of being taken while Fane fed, of taking Fane while the other man bit him.

It was madness. The consequences serious for a padrall who became obsessed with that particular high. Nothing was as addictive as a vampire's bite when the one being bitten was allowed to experience it without the fog of enthrallment.

There were places, brothels, where padralls who'd succumbed to the lure and the addiction were kept to service vampires and dhampirs who preferred their prey aware. The fallen padralls were little more than whores, never trusted again because of fears of what they might do if they found themselves repudiated or replaced. A large number of

them died by their own hand once their looks had faded and they were no longer favored by the men who visited the brothels.

He'd avoided Fane's bite not just because of the possible consequences but because it would only make him desire Fane more desperately. Christ. He should have stuck to women, a pleasure Fane had only occasionally indulged in. Or blonds. He and Fane were alike in that regard, usually avoiding dark-haired partners.

Hell, maybe it said something about both of them that they could easily pass for distant cousins. Their bodies similar in build, their eyes so brown they appeared almost as black as their hair.

Cable closed his eyes and tilted his head back, wishing the hot water could pound the desire for Fane out of his head. He needed to put some distance between himself and Fane. To walk away from the relationship before Fane came to him and asked for him to arrange for the creation of a kadine—a mate.

Who else would Fane trust with such an important undertaking? And yet to undertake the task would be a living hell. One that could extend for decades—unless one of the women who were little more than breeders, their rights to their daughters nonexistent from the moment of conception—was selected.

Pain speared through Cable's chest. Fuck. Would Fane expect the two of them to stay lovers until Fane claimed his bride, until he sexually bonded with her as he turned her into his kadine? And then what? Stick around, helping them raise their children, aging quickly while they aged over centuries?

Christ! What a future that was. And Cable wanted no part of it. No part of any of it.

Long ago, the alien race from which the vampire had evolved had come to the conclusion it was better to raise future mates than to find them among the human population. To convert humans as adults was too arduous, too painful for all involved, and too many of them were lost in the process—dying or going insane. They'd found it easier to cultivate families who would offer their daughters for money and power.

In those early days, daughters were chattel, bought and sold, their fate of little concern in the human world. But as civilization changed and the padralls became wealthy, powerful families in their own right, their daughters became desirable wives to kings and lords and merchant princes, and they no longer wished to turn them over to the vampires they served. And so another source was cultivated, families who would gain riches from allowing their daughters to provide female children whose blood would be altered at birth and who would be taken away as soon as they were weaned, raised from infancy to take their place as vampire mates.

It was still possible to convert full humans, but it was a painful process. Only those who were born to be brides, who were given their future mate's blood at birth and at the confirmation ceremony were spared the excruciating agony that becoming biologically compatible, able to bear a vampire's children, entailed.

Cable grimaced, finding the system of creating brides distasteful, but he was in no position to change it. True, the padrall families had prospered and gained power with

each generation, but their livelihood and survival was irrevocably tied to the vampire race. There was no escape. No breaking the bonds forged so long ago that there was no written record of it. Betrayal – on any level – was a death sentence.

The bathroom door opened and Cable knew without looking that Fane had entered the room and stood watching him through the glass shower stall as he slid his hand up and down his cock. He should turn his back, or better yet, get out of the room and out of the house completely.

But he didn't.

What he felt for Fane went beyond sheer lust, though there was plenty of that. It was love. A hopeless, destructive emotion when it was directed toward a dhampir, one who would soon change into a full vampire and need to breed, one who was consumed with revenge – against the Believers in general, and the bomber who'd killed his family in particular.

The shower door clicked open, allowing cool air and Fane's scent to swirl around Cable. He tried to ignore them both.

It was impossible.

A calloused hand stroked along his spine. Another covered his own where it was wrapped around his cock, pumping up and down for several strokes before leaving in order to cup Cable's balls and make him groan.

"Something's bothering you," Fane said, tightening his grip, knowing just how much pressure to exert, knowing just where and how to touch another man. Where and how to touch Cable.

"Yeah. What's new?" Cable turned his head away slightly, his eyes remaining closed as he tried to minimize the impact of Fane's presence, the desire to turn into him, to allow their bodies to touch, trapping their cocks against one another as their tongues met and dueled in a wet, heated kiss.

"Matteo won't make an issue of what happened with Sarael," Fane said, crowding closer, his water-slick penis hard against Cable's side, swamping him with a lust that had nothing to do with vampire pheromones. "By now he's no doubt made the third exchange of blood and she's already gone through the last changes. He'll be content to take her back to Italy and begin an investigation within the padrall order there."

"Great," Cable said, the tone of his voice conveying how little he cared. His continued failure to open his eyes and look at Fane a subtle challenge he knew wouldn't go unanswered. It was insane. Pushing Fane's buttons would only escalate the situation.

Cable groaned when Fane's arm went around his waist, his hand coming to rest on Cable's hand again, his thumb brushing over the tip of Cable's cock, making it pulse and leak, the fingers of the other hand tightening and releasing on Cable's balls before lightly exploring the place behind them. Cable clenched his jaw against the pleasure of Fane's touch and closeness. He told himself that he should push Fane away and get the hell out of there.

He opened his eyes instead and turned to Fane, angry at himself, angry at Fane. His emotion making the kiss they shared aggressive, a ruthless struggle for control instead of a lazy exploration of passion.

Within seconds Cable found himself pinned to the wall, Fane's cock hard against his own, rubbing, pressing, while their tongues dueled and their hands roamed, relentlessly finding each erogenous zone, a battle for dominance, a dance that in the beginning of their relationship had been safe. A contest fought for enjoyment, to heighten the pleasure between partners whose future blended easily. Who had found companionship and love when neither had been expecting it.

A tremor of fear mixed with longing shot through Cable when Fane's canine teeth elongated into fangs. One slip-up, one careless movement and his tongue would bleed.

Neither one of them was prepared to deal with the consequences if that happened.

Need roared through Fane. The press and slide of Cable's tongue against his, the nearness of it to his fangs a maddening temptation he couldn't endure.

With a deep hiss of frustration and anger, he ended the kiss and stepped back. His skin felt too tight for his body, his cock pulsed in angry demand, his gums ached. He wanted to fuck, hard and fast, without restraint. He wanted to do it as he gorged himself on Cable.

It was primitive instinct and violent emotion combined with The Hunger, The Heat. And the sound of Cable's rapid heartbeat, the hint of fear coupled with the knowledge that Cable was trying to pull away from him only drove the lust higher.

The Transformation was drawing near. Fane knew it. He cursed it as deeply as other dhampirs desired and welcomed it.

With the change came the need to drink a foul mix of herbs in order to control The Hunger. He would no longer be free to drain everything from those he hunted—from the Believers—to take their life essence along with each swallow of their blood. He'd be relieved of his duties as a soldier for the vampire race, expected instead to take a kadine, to mate with her so a new generation of dhampirs would be created.

Rage rushed through Fane. Hatred toward all Believers but especially toward the one who called himself The Apostle, the one who'd created the bomb that killed his parents and brother as they drove away from the theater, no doubt lost in a discussion of *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Until that had happened, Fane had thought to take Cable as his lifelong companion when the change occurred and he became fully vampire, to make the required exchanges, sharing blood three times so they would be sexually bonded, so Cable's life would be irrevocably tied to his. So Cable would need his blood to survive.

Such a thing was condemned by most of the padrall orders, a leftover tenet from the past when the earliest of them had altered the course of their own history by choosing to serve without benefit of extending their lifespan. Those early leaders fearing the loss of their souls with centuries of life.

Fane had not broached the subject with Cable, believing there was plenty of time. Not wanting a confrontation—or a rejection. Knowing that not only would Cable be condemned by his own order if he agreed to tie his life to Fane's, but some would revile him, seeing a male companion as weak and submissive. Though there was no truth in that characterization of their relationship, and among Fane's own kind there was no reduction in status for either a vampire or his male mate. With existence spanning centuries, it was foolish to choose unhappiness when selecting a companion. And while Fane had fucked women, he had never shared as much of himself with any other human as he had with Cable. Had never felt as deeply about one as he felt about Cable.

With an older brother to carry on the line, and parents who had only borne and raised the first generation of sons, and who would continue to raise more, two or three during each quarter of a century, there had been no pressure for Fane to reproduce. But all that had changed with their deaths. Now he would need to take a kadine. He owed it to his father and brother.

Anger howled in Fane, mixing with the lust as the scent of their combined arousal surrounded him, as his eyes met Cable's. He moved in again, pressing his body to Cable's, hissing when his penis rubbed against Cable's, when Cable's hand dropped, encircling both their cocks, pumping up and down so that exquisite heat shot up Fane's spine and made his balls pull tight against his body.

"Turn around," he ordered, feeling the wildness growing, the need to dominate. The very heat and hunger that drove a vampire to take a bride, a kadine.

"It's too dangerous," Cable said, his other hand lowering, grasping Fane's balls and pulling them against his own, fondling, squeezing, showing that he commanded Fane's body as thoroughly as Fane commanded his.

Fane closed his eyes. Gathering his resolve. He needed to fuck tonight, not get fucked. "Turn around," he repeated.

Cable soaked in the sight of Fane. The taut face, the tense, water-slick body. It had been days since Fane had taken the dominant position, controlling the pleasure. He leaned in, pressing his lips to Fane's, his tongue twining with Fane's before lightly tracing Fane's fangs—testing Fane's control and sending a pulse of desire through them both.

With a groan, Cable pulled back, freeing his hands and using one of them to reach for the lubricant they kept next to the shampoo, handing it to Fane. Fane's nostrils flared, his eyes darkened.

Cable turned around and braced his hands against the wall, spreading his legs, his balls hanging between them—a sight he knew would further inflame Fane. Just as it never failed to drive his own lust higher.

With a hiss, Fane moved in, reaching around and taking Cable's cock in his hand, sliding up and down so that Cable bucked, so that arousal leaked from the swollen head. The lubricant bottle dropping to the floor in the second before Fane's fingers circled the pucker of Cable's back entrance then slipped in and out, preparing him, both

of them growing harder, hotter, more anxious to couple, to connect, to ignore the future in favor of the wild pleasure of the moment.

And then Fane was there, panting and groaning, working himself in as he continued to manipulate Cable's cock. It was heaven and hell. A dark ecstasy for both of them.

When he was fully seated, Fane pressed his chest to Cable's back, savoring the slick feel of flesh against flesh, his lips brushing across Cable's shoulder and neck. Every cell in his body screaming for him to strike, to pierce Cable with his fangs as thoroughly as he was piercing him with his cock.

"Christ," Cable panted, fucking his cock in and out through the tight grip of Fane's hand, pushing backward in the process and driving Fane's penis deeper, the movement scraping the pointed tips of Fane's canine teeth against Cable's neck and drawing blood.

It was too much. Temptation too long denied. Desire held in check when the heart wanted a consummation.

Fane couldn't resist. His fangs sank deeper, his mouth forming a seal against Cable's skin. He drank as he fucked. Feasted as he made love. Taking everything, body, soul, blood. Only lifting his head at the end, to shout in pleasure as he came, as Cable's body shuddered and jerked against his, as wave after wave of semen jetted through their cocks.

They sagged against the water-warm tiles of the stall, stood as the hot blast from the showerhead struck them, washing away the seed but not the memory of what had happened. They didn't speak as the barrier of the future rose between them.

Fane closed his eyes, knowing he should say he was sorry. But the words would be a lie. His cock pressed against Cable's buttocks, need and desire having already filled it again. Fantasy flooding his mind. He wanted to leave the shower, to take Cable on the bed, to let Cable take him, blood flowing between them. A sacred covenant bonding them together.

A hiss escaped when Cable tensed underneath him, the dominant urges of the vampire race swirling in Fane. He was so close to turning, so close to needing a companion in order to control The Hunger. To cope with the changes that would occur when he went through The Transformation, when he lost the ability to maintain a human form as he moved about in the daylight hours.

Cable stilled. Cursing himself. Cursing Fane.

He closed his eyes. Fighting off the pleasure that still lingered. Willing his cock to go limp. He was hard again, on the verge of selling his soul in order to experience the ecstasy of Fane's bite along with the forbidden pleasures he'd fantasized about.

It was insanity. A path to hell, paved by heartbreak and suffering. "Get off me," Cable said, the muscles of his arms bunching. His chest tightening.

Fane tried to step back, but The Heat and Hunger ruled. His body was screaming for him to strike again, to gorge himself on Cable's blood even if he had to pin Cable

against the wall and swamp him with the pheromones used to lure and control prey. His cock was throbbing, aching, his heart was howling at the choices being forced on him.

"I'm almost out of control. I need a kadine." It came out harsh, guttural. Tortured. The words powerful enough to force some distance between their heated, water-slick bodies.

"Yeah. What's new?" Cable said, escaping from the shower and taking only enough time to dry off and dress before leaving the house and driving into the darkness. Putting physical distance between, wishing the night would allow him to hide from the heartache that had finally found him.

Chapter Two

Kiziah paused as she exited the fortune-teller's tent, a tingling along her spine forcing her attention away from Madame Helki's words. She rubbed her arms and concentrated on the source of her uneasiness, wishing she had more psychic ability, though she was glad she had enough to determine that the cause of her sudden wariness was human instead of supernatural.

She glanced around, focusing on the individuals rather than the broad landscape of the carnival. No one was looking at her and yet her gaze was drawn to a man throwing darts at a booth a short distance away.

He seemed oblivious to anything other than the dartboard, but something about him scared her. Something beyond the buzz cut or the ornate cross tattooed on his neck. She knew better than to go by external appearances. She'd grown up around men whose looks spanned the range from long-haired sixties hippy to tattooed biker-bad.

The man finished with his darts and turned slightly, his eyes meeting hers and she knew she'd been right in picking him out of the crowd. Something dark and twisted lived inside him. Something that enjoyed inflicting fear and pain.

She broke off the eye contact and moved away from Madame Helki's tent, shivering as she felt his gaze on her back. Her stomach knotting as she thought about where she'd left her car. The distance and the darkness adding to the sense of foreboding.

Cable's body responded to the sight of the blonde emerging from the fortune-teller's tent, his cock going rock hard so fast that it made him dizzy. Christ. Like he needed to add more insanity to his life. He was still reeling from what had happened with Fane. Still hurting from hearing Fane acknowledge the truth they both knew. Knowing that they'd finally reached the break-point in their relationship.

He adjusted his jeans, trying to gain some relief from the press of them against his erection, disgusted with himself for coming to the carnival in the first place. What did he expect the fortune-teller and the cards to tell him that he didn't already know?

The blonde stilled, her body language causing Cable to step into the shadows and look around. Something was bothering her.

It took only an instant for Cable to spot the Believer. Fuck! His hand slipped into his jacket pocket for the cell phone. Where there was one Believer there might be two.

The blonde turned and began walking. The Believer pushed away from the booth where he'd been playing darts and followed her. Cable flicked open his phone but before he could touch the first button, an amused voice said, "I believe I can handle this without assistance."

Cable snapped the phone shut, irritation scraping over him and making him grit his teeth. "I'll leave you to it then," he said, walking away without looking at Domino Santori. The last thing he needed was to be in the presence of another dhampir tonight.

Cable paused at the entrance to Madame Helki's tent just long enough to ensure that she was alone. "Ah, I was expecting you," she said, and he closed his eyes briefly. Christ. Was this what a descent into madness felt like? Even *he* recognized that his emotions were all over the map tonight. But he took a seat across from the fortune-teller, his heart racing when he noticed the cards. Three of them, lined up in a row. The past. The present. The future. The High Priestess. The Hermit. The Wheel of Fortune.

He tensed. Despite the number of times he'd visited with her when he was guarding Sarael, she'd never giving him a reading.

The old fortune-teller laughed, an amused sound that reminded Cable of Domino. She leaned forward, turning the first two cards over and leaving the third exposed before picking up the deck of remaining cards and handing it to him. "Choose one."

Christ. He couldn't believe he was doing this. But he couldn't prevent himself from obeying her, shuffling the deck and cutting it until he felt compelled to stop and remove the card that had risen to the surface of the deck.

Madame Helki took it from him. Nodding to herself as she placed it across the Wheel of Fortune.

Everything inside Cable tightened at the sight of The Lovers. A man and a woman standing naked underneath a tree.

"You have reached a turning point, a place with many possible outcomes and a chance for great happiness," the fortune-teller said. "You must recognize and reconcile your own needs in order to fully embrace the opportunity that will soon present itself to you."

"A woman?" Cable managed, his voice very nearly a croak. He hadn't been intimate with one since meeting Fane, though his thoughts went immediately to the blonde who'd been in the tent before him. Were the three cards on the table hers? Were the two of them linked by the Wheel of Fortune?

Madame Helki's eyes crinkled with amusement as she gathered the cards and returned them to the deck. "I can't tell you anything more."

* * * * *

There was a moment of disorientation, an elongation of reality in the instant before Kiziah's surroundings snapped into focus. And then fear raced in.

She was walking in the direction of her car, crowded by darkness and surrounded by empty streets as heavy footsteps followed a short distance behind her. Their owner projecting a menace she recognized from outside of the fortune-teller's tent.

The man with the ornate cross tattooed on his neck.

Kiziah knew it with certainty even before she looked back and saw him. She opened her mouth to scream, but the sound was trapped in her throat, held there as though phantom fingers were preventing it from escaping.

True terror tried to push through the barrier but the only sound to escape was a small whimper.

Her heart raced, beating so fast that pain rippled through her chest.

She stumbled and very nearly fell, then regained her balance and began running.

The man raced after her and she could feel his anticipation, his enjoyment of her fear. His utter belief that he'd catch her before she could escape.

And then just as quickly as she'd first become aware of him, the sound of his footsteps ended and didn't resume. His menace replaced by that of a supernatural presence behind her.

She kept running, daring a glance backward and seeing nothing, but she didn't stop until she was locked in her car and driving away. Her body shaking in reaction. Her lungs burning.

God! What had just happened? Why had she left the carnival without an escort? She could have asked someone to walk with her or begged a ride from someone. Instead she couldn't remember leaving at all.

Miles from where she'd escaped the man pursuing her, she pulled over so she could gather herself, so she could force her thoughts back to the moment she'd stepped out of the fortune-teller's tent, to her first awareness of the man who'd been following her. She remembered deciding then and there that she wouldn't walk back to her car unless she was sure it was safe.

What had she done next?

Kiziah rubbed her eyes. The move triggering a memory, a sense of being in the presence of something supernatural, a touch on her shoulder so she'd turned, a glimpse of obsidian eyes, a desire to go to her car, followed by a haze of nothingness until reality returned.

Her heart jerked. Her mind sharpened with understanding.

She'd been hypnotized. Used for bait to draw her assailant into the darkness.

She shivered, the Wheel of Fortune rising, a specter in her mind, and with it, Madame Helki's words. *Very soon, an opportunity will present itself. A destiny not planned for, even by those who will draw you into their world.*

Kiziah had been aware of supernatural presences before, but she'd never had one touch her life so directly. Was this the beginning then? The point of divergence? The place where the influence of The Hermit yielded to that of the Wheel?

Unbidden, tears came to her eyes. The thought of The High Priestess putting them there. The card of the past. Of the mother who had also been her best friend, her confidant, her teacher.

Pain speared through Kiziah. A year ago on this very day a driver running a red light had collapsed her world. Crashed into it and created carnage. Leaving death and destruction behind as he'd walked away with only a few scratches, so drunk he was hardly aware of what he'd done.

Kiziah fought against the tears welling up. Braced herself to endure the tight fist of agony as her heart was squeezed mercilessly by the loss of her mother.

She took a deep breath, her earlier thoughts returning, lending her strength. Maybe her mother's spirit *had* sent the dream that guided her to Madame Helki's tent. Without the dream, she would have bypassed this town and the carnival altogether. She would have gone straight through to Ashburg, settling in at the campground where many of the men and women she'd grown up among were already camped, waiting to set up booths at the psychic fair.

She pulled the dreamcatcher necklace out from underneath her clothing. Whether or not her mother's spirit was behind the reading, or responsible for the presence of the supernatural being who'd both used her and saved her, Kiziah knew tonight wasn't a good night to be alone. She needed bright lights and people. A warm place to sit. Music to fill her mind and crowd her thoughts out.

She put the car into gear and drove into town. Relief pouring through her when she spotted a brightly lit coffee shop, the sign out front announcing that a local band was playing. She traveled another block then parked. Laughing at herself when she caught herself glancing back to check the travel trailer—the one currently at a nearby campground and not being pulled behind the car.

The Hermit. It was an honest representation of the last year. More than once she'd thought about how her life resembled a turtle's. Solitary. Moving from place to place, her home with her wherever she went. A place to retreat, to close the door behind her when she wanted to block out the world around her.

Not tonight though. She didn't want to climb into the Airstream and be alone in her shell.

The realization of how deeply her need for companionship was on this particular night made her heart ache, made her realize that the need was deep enough that despite what would come in the morning—the awkwardness, the hollowness, the loneliness—if she had a chance...

Yeah right. This was small town America and she was a stranger. The few times she'd given in to the need for physical intimacy had been when she was working a craft fair or a psychic fair, the men she sought comfort with also working the fairs or with someone she knew.

She entered the coffee shop, the artsy-crafty feel of it making her feel at home. There were empty chairs, but the tables were full with groups of people or couples laying claim to the area around them. A few of them glanced in her direction before refocusing on their companions. The warmth of the room, the mellow music, wrapping them in a cocoon of togetherness.

Kiziah leaned against the serving bar. The coffee mug hot against her palms doing its best to thaw the ice-cold spot at her center.

This isn't going to help. This was a mistake.

The music. The couples. The groups of friends. They only emphasized how alone she felt. A truck stop with rowdy, laughing men, twenty-five-cent table jukeboxes and whiny, fighting kids being attended by tired, irritable parents would be better. It was easier to lose herself in that kind of a crowd, to keep her thoughts at bay.

A silent laugh lightened her spirits, pulling the corners of her mouth into a tiny smile as the image of The Hermit formed in her mind again. She had to believe that something important was about to happen, that something in her life was about to change. Otherwise the dream sending her to the carnival was just a dream. The card reading just an entertainment. And the surreal events afterward unexplainable.

So rather than retreat she claimed a two-person table near the door when it became available and concentrated on the warmth of the coffee shop, the smells. Forced herself to sink into this place at this time, to avoid thoughts of the past or the future as the music flowed over and through her.

She wasn't aware of the time passing. Couldn't have said how much of it had gone by before the door behind her opened and closed, the cold fall air rushing over her along with a crisp masculine scent.

Kiziah looked up, immediately caught in dark chocolate eyes, her pulse jerking and racing when a smile formed on kissable lips, when the stranger cocked his head and asked, "Is this seat taken?"

"No."

His smile widened. A hand settled on the back of the chair. "Is it all right with you if I claim it?"

"Yes."

He laughed, a warm, husky sound. "Save it while I get a coffee?"

"Sure."

She grimaced. Her answers looping through her mind as he moved to the counter and ordered a drink. Great. He was going to think she was queen of the monosyllable.

Her heart lurched and her body tightened traitorously. If she'd dreamed up a man to spend the evening with, he would look like this one. Dark-haired. Dark-eyed. Totally masculine. And yet...his laugh, his eyes, he wasn't a man who was afraid to feel.

So what was he doing here? Alone?

Kiziah wrapped her hands around her empty coffee mug and forced her eyes away from the stranger. Maybe he was a traveler, just passing through town. A man who didn't want to spend the night holed up in some dismal hotel room.

The fact that he came here instead of a bar told her something about him. She shivered, aware of the moment he turned away from the counter and headed toward the table.

The loneliness and need for companionship that had driven Kiziah into the coffee shop returned, bringing a ripple of nervousness with it, an ache that settled in her belly. This was the part she wasn't very good at. The reason why her sexual encounters were few and far between.

She forced herself to take a deep breath. To concentrate on the here and now again. This was something. Better than what she'd had a few minutes ago. She'd get herself another mocha and enjoy the music. She'd sit back and soak in the cozy illusion of being here with a gorgeous man, one who would probably star in her fantasies when she returned to the camper, alone.

Desire moved through Cable, along with an unexpected tenderness as he focused on the blonde who'd agreed to share her table with him. Did she have any idea how vulnerable she looked? How desirable?

There was a sadness radiating off her. A loneliness that found an echoing chord inside of him.

Christ, he'd been thinking about the reading. About *The Lovers*. About her. And here she was. Here they were together.

Hell. Maybe this was exactly what he needed. A night in a beautiful woman's arms. A night with his cock pumping in and out of a woman's slick, welcoming channel.

He didn't even know her name yet, but he could already imagine himself stripping her out of her clothing, peeling each layer away in order to reveal a body made for pleasure. She was lithe, her breasts the perfect size, large enough to claim his attention, and yet... He gave a small laugh, knowing there were men who claimed breasts could never be too big. But he and Fane both favored—Cable's thoughts veered off, but returned to their original destination. Both he and Fane favored women who looked like this one. Blonde, dark-eyed, soft. Though they'd never shared a woman.

Hell, Fane probably couldn't even remember the last woman he'd been with. And it had been over two years since Cable had been with one.

He rubbed his chest, wishing he could ease the ache in his heart. He couldn't risk being alone with Fane again. Couldn't even be angry over what had happened in the shower. Fuck!

His cock responded to the word. To the images. To the lingering sensations coursing through him, starting at the point where Fane had bitten and streaking through his nipples, his sac, his penis.

Cable forced his attention back to the woman as he took his seat and they introduced themselves. Making small talk and listening to the mellow jazz for a while, becoming comfortable with each other, forming a barricade of warmth against the chill of the deepening night.

Kiziah tried a hundred different conversation starters in her mind but didn't utter a single one of them. Pathetic. She might as well have a capital "L" on her forehead when it came to men. Not that she couldn't talk to them, she could. She could talk their ears

off when she was working and they stopped by her booth and expressed an interest in her dreamcatchers.

That's because you're in your comfort zone, Kiz. Maybe it would have been better if we'd stayed in one place, instead of traveling all the time. Then you would have had a normal childhood. I should have...

A lump formed in her throat as her mother's clear voice echoed in her thoughts. She could see her mother's features soften and grow sad. Could read the guilt there over the nomadic lifestyle—the traveling from psychic fair to psychic fair, to weekend festivals and craft shows.

No way, Mom. I love this!

Promise me that if you meet a man...

Kiziah looked down at the table. The sadness she'd been trying to escape when she sought refuge in the bright coffee shop suddenly catching up to her again. A year ago today she'd been "out on the town"—at her mother's urging. Trying to find something in common with the friends of a friend of a friend's client who had invited her to join them while they went from bar to bar looking for "Mr. Right" or at least for "Mr. Tonight". If she hadn't been with them...

Maybe she'd have been killed too when the drunk driver ignored the stoplight and plowed into her mother's car. Or maybe she would have been able to prevent it. Maybe since she would have been driving...

"Something wrong?"

Cable's voice pulled Kiziah out of her thoughts. She gave him an apologetic smile. "Sorry, I guess I'm not very good company tonight."

He gave a soft, husky laugh, surprising her by taking her left hand in his. "That makes two of us." He brushed his thumb over the backs of her fingers. "Let me guess. Boyfriend troubles. That's the only reason I can think of for someone as beautiful as you are coming here by herself. Or maybe you were supposed to meet him, and he didn't show?"

Heat moved through Kiziah's face, embarrassed pleasure. Did he really think she was beautiful? She avoided answering by turning the conversation back on him. "If neither one of us is good company tonight, what's your story? You're more tempting than dark chocolate. Girlfriend problems?"

Cable's smile was a irresistible mix of sad and wry. "Boyfriend problems. A breakup that's been inevitable for a year."

"Oh." Yeah. It figures. Kiziah suddenly felt deflated.

The fist that had been holding Cable's heart in a vise grip loosened. Christ, she was so soft, so vulnerable, so genuine. He wanted to wrap his arms around her and shelter her from loneliness and pain. He wanted to find refuge from the same emotions in the heaven of her body.

He squeezed her hand and met her gaze, stealing himself for her reaction. "I haven't been with a woman in over two years."

Kiziah's eyes widened slightly and Cable felt a laugh building. Just being with her lightened his spirits.

"Oh," she said. "Oh."

The laugh escaped. "Yeah—oh." He leaned over and looked into her empty coffee mug, making a show of inhaling. "Mocha? So you find chocolate hard to resist?"

She was finding *him* hard to resist. Something inside of her loosened, making room for a small flicker of courage to flare and take hold. Whatever happened between them, she was going to make the most of this night.

Chapter Three

Fane prowled through the darkened house. Every cell in his body screamed for blood while his cock raged for sex. He was more dangerous now than he'd been when he encountered Cable in the shower.

Anger howled through him. Frustration. Regret.

I need a kadine.

As soon as he'd uttered the words, he'd wanted to call them back. Wanted to retreat to the bedroom with Cable, to fuck until The Heat and Hunger faded and they could talk about the future.

Fane closed his eyes, covering his jeans-protected cock with his hand as his body shuddered in remembered pleasure. As he relived those moments in the shower when Cable's hot blood had rushed into him as they'd fucked.

Could he really give that up? Could he really give Cable up?

There were other dhampirs. Other families to produce the soldiers needed in order to keep their race safe. Children weren't required of him.

And yet... He owed it to his parents not to be all that was left of their union. Owed it to his father to produce sons. But even as he thought it, he could picture his mother's gentle smile. Her lips pressed against his forehead, her whispered words, *Be happy, Fane.*

How many times had she told him that? Even when he was a grown man?

Would he be happy if he gave up Cable?

Maybe there was a way to have both what he wanted and what he needed. In the long history of the vampire race, there had to have been men who enjoyed women as well as other men. Men who wouldn't choose one over the other when it came to taking a companion.

A trickle of fear slid into Fane's heart. A possibility that he rarely faced head-on. Even if he could claim a kadine as well as Cable, there was still no guarantee Cable would suffer the condemnation of the other padralls and agree to bind his life so completely to Fane's that Fane's death would trigger his own.

Fane's hand tightened on his cock. His blood roared through his veins as the primitive instincts of his ancestors flared to life. A dark ruthlessness that lurked in the deepest region of a vampire's soul. There was no law that said companions had to bind themselves willingly.

In the very beginning, none of the humans had been willing.

In the end. It didn't matter.

After the three exchanges of blood were made, a vampire and his chosen were almost one being.

Fane tried to force his mind away from such thoughts but a hint of them still lingered. Driving him to start pacing again. Prowling through the house like a caged predator.

Where had Cable gone?

To Domino Santori?

He doubted Cable would seek the company of another dhampir tonight. Especially one like Domino, whose sense of humor could be dark and biting. One who still believed he could avoid the hunger for a kadine in favor of fucking a variety of women.

Had Cable gone to the carnival, then?

It would be closed by now. But that wouldn't matter. They'd spent so much time there guarding Sarael that they easily fit in. And Cable had visited with the fortune-teller, Helki, more than Fane thought was wise. Would he seek a tarot reading in order to deal with what had happened in the shower? In order to deal with Fane's careless words regarding a kadine?

Fane's chest tightened, his heart aching as though a hand had reached in and wrapped it in a fist. His guts burned. He had no control over what the cards and the fortune-teller might say to Cable. He had no control over what Cable might do.

Without conscious thought, Fane moved to the door. He would go to the carnival in search of Cable. And if he didn't find him there, then he would seek out Domino and together they could hunt a viable prey. He was too close to turning now to risk hunting alone. If he found no one deserving of death, he wasn't sure he could stop from killing an innocent once the first hot splash of blood filled his mouth. Even for a dhampir, such a thing could warrant a death penalty.

* * * * *

Kiziah rubbed her palms against her jeans in an effort to both warm them and to still the slight trembling as she walked over to the travel trailer where Cable was already out of his car and waiting.

They'd been the last to leave the coffee shop, retreating to the nearly abandoned campground at the edge of town, the place Kiziah had unhitched and set up the Airstream before going to the carnival and then into town.

She rubbed her palms against her jeans again. Nervous. Not for her safety. There were a few campers scattered around the site and she trusted Cable. Otherwise she would never have led him back to her home on wheels.

She wanted this. She needed it. Even if it was only for one night. Only an illusion of real intimacy. She didn't want to be alone tonight. She wanted to be held, kissed, made love to. And she wanted to give comfort in return. Cable needed what she had to offer just as much as she needed what he had to offer.

Cable's heart melted when he saw the nervousness in Kiziah's face. He pulled her into his arms and pressed his mouth to hers in a coaxing first kiss.

Christ. It felt so good. So different than what he'd been used to for the last couple of years.

Tender. Welcoming. Two people who could please each other without first having to struggle to see who was going to be the dominant partner.

He traced the seam of her mouth with his tongue and she immediately opened for him, her body going soft against his. Her arms going around his neck as her tongue responded to his, letting him lead, letting him take charge of the kiss, the night.

He groaned, trapping her against the door of the trailer and deepening his assault on her mouth, twining his tongue with hers, his hands smoothing over her back and sides as his erection throbbed against her front.

They were both flushed, aroused when he lifted his mouth from hers. Cable wanted to get inside, to peel her clothing away and explore her body, to get lost in her wet heat, but he didn't want to let go of her long enough to do it.

He lowered his head and recaptured her lips, his hands tugging her shirt out of her jeans this time so that he could feel her smooth skin against his palms as they traveled up her sides, pushing underneath the camisole she wore, stroking her nipples with his thumbs so that she whimpered and he swallowed the sound, taking it deep inside himself, reveling in her need.

His cock pulsed and he ground his pelvis into her, covered her breasts with his hands so that her nipples stabbed his palms in silent demand. Christ, she was perfect.

He forced his mouth away from hers, trailing kisses along her cheek, her neck, fantasizing about what it would be like to feel her lips on his skin, to feel her teeth and know it was safe. "Let's go inside," he whispered when he reached her ear. But instead of releasing her, he explored the sensitive canal with his tongue until she was shivering against him, her hands trying to get underneath his jacket and shirt so she could touch him.

With a groan he stepped back, giving her room to unlock the Airstream and then following her inside. Taking a moment to notice that the travel trailer was warm and welcoming, done in blues and beiges. Soft and muted. Peaceful, with dreamcatchers hanging in front of the windows.

"This is nice," Cable said, pulling Kiziah into his arms again and nuzzling the side of her face. "But this is nicer."

Kiziah wrapped her arms around his waist, enjoying the hard strength, the heat. This time she succeeded in finding skin, her hands exploring the muscles of his back as he once again pressed his mouth to hers and coaxed her lips open so that his tongue could slide against hers, could move in and out, making her labia swell and ache, making her body feel restless and needy.

When the kiss ended he shrugged out of his jacket as her fingers made quick work of unbuttoning his shirt. "Definitely more tempting than dark chocolate," she said,

pushing the material off his shoulders, her breath catching at the sheer beauty of him. He was the closest thing to a fantasy lover she would ever get.

Cable laughed, a husky sound that forced her eyes off his chest and abdomen and up to his face. "Fair is fair," he teased, getting rid of her jacket and the flannel shirt she was wearing, leaving the ultrafeminine camisole so that he could torment them both by teasing over the rigid points of her nipples, sucking and biting through the thin material before kissing along her shoulder and neck.

Her hands went to his sides, his hips, the front of his pants and he growled against her neck but didn't stop her when she unbuttoned the top button and then carefully lowered the zipper, heat rushing into her when his cock sprung free, brushing against her hand as though demanding attention.

She wrapped her fingers around his penis and it jerked in response, making him groan and lift his face. Cable's hand covered hers, tightening, pumping up and down, both of them watching as the head of his cock beaded and grew more flushed. "I won't last if we keep this up," he said, "and I want to. I want to take my time with you."

With a groan he pulled their hands away from his erection, this time finishing what he'd begun and stripping her out of her camisole before kneeling to remove the rest of her clothing.

Christ, she was exquisite. He hadn't been with a woman in so long, but even then, he couldn't remember a time when he felt this enthralled by one. Kiziah was flushed and wet between her legs, her cunt lips bare and her mound waxed except for a small strip of honey-dark curls. He leaned in and nuzzled her, licking along her slit and over her tiny, erect clit, consumed with the need to thoroughly explore her feminine flesh.

Kiziah jerked in reaction to his touch, hunching over and burying her fingers in his dark hair, not sure she'd be able to remain standing if he continued his assault. Her legs very nearly giving out when his tongue dipped into her channel, stroking in and out before he returned to her clit and began sucking.

Cable lifted his face and her stomach fluttered at the raw desire she saw there. Her heart swelled with a wild mix of emotion. No man had ever looked at her like that. No man had ever taken this kind of time with her before.

"Christ, you're beautiful," he said, sliding his hands down from her hips and using his thumbs to open her wider.

She shivered under his regard, her labia growing more swollen as arousal seeped from her opening, coating her lower lips as though trying to tempt him into a kiss.

Cable groaned, leaning forward once again, licking her, sucking her, claiming every inch of her cunt with his tongue as she clung to him, whimpering, panting, straining toward a release that came all too soon and yet not soon enough.

This time when he pulled away one of his hands dropped to his cock, encircling it, squeezing it as though he was on the verge of losing control. His face was taut, strained, flushed.

"Let's get on the bed," Kiziah whispered, trailing her fingers over his cheeks, his neck, his torso as he rose to his feet.

"Let's," Cable said, covering her mouth with his, kissing her, sharing the taste of her own arousal with her before stripping out of his remaining clothes and taking her hand, leading her to the large bed at one end of the travel trailer.

"We'll have to improvise later," Cable joked, dropping six brightly colored foil packages next to the pillow as he settled on top of Kiziah, kissing her before adding, "It's been a while since I needed them and that's all I could scrounge up in the car."

Kiziah laughed, twining her arms around his neck and rising up to press her lips to his. "You think we'll need more than six?"

"Oh yeah."

Cable closed his eyes and rested more of his weight on her, just savoring the feel of her underneath him as their tongues glided against each other, the softness, the curves, the smooth place between her thighs. A place nature had designed for a man's pleasure, a man's cock.

It felt so good. So right.

He'd forgotten—or maybe it had never been this way with a woman before. He didn't know which. He didn't want to think about it.

He just wanted to feel. To lose himself in her. To forget everything else and be in the moment. With her.

"I won't last long the first time," he warned. Opening his eyes and looking into Kiziah's, his heart expanding and beating wildly when her face warmed with color, when she said, "It's okay, you've already...it's already been good for me."

"It'll get even better," he said, nuzzling her nose with his, kissing her, building the passion again until she was whimpering, writhing, her hands destroying his control, her arousal-slick folds coating his penis until it was equally wet, engorged to the point of pain.

With a groan Cable levered himself away from her long enough to slip on a condom, shaking his head when she offered to do it for him. He was too far gone. Just the sight of her hands on his cock would be enough to cause him to erupt, spewing his seed on her mound, on her stomach.

Christ.

His cock jerked in warning at the images alone. Screamed in protest at the latex barrier. He wanted to feel her wet heat. To slam in and out of her without anything between masculine and feminine flesh. He wanted to know Kiziah as thoroughly and as intimately as a man could know a woman.

She welcomed him with open arms and legs when he settled over her again, wrapping them around his body while her own hand guided him to her entrance. He groaned as he slipped inside her, shook with the need to rut on her wildly. "Kizzy," he

whispered and she bit him for using the nickname, unleashing a rush of hot emotion, of savage need – the bite a reminder of what had happened in the shower with Fane.

Cable couldn't fight the lust burning through him. Couldn't stop it from overwhelming his desire to go slow and savor every second.

He thrust in and out of Kiziah. Swallowing her cries even as his tongue mimicked what his cock was doing. Both of them straining, panting, pressing against each other as though they were trying to become one, the tight fist of her sheath around his cock as she climaxed triggering his own eruption, making Cable cry out as he came in a long, shuddering eruption of seed and pleasure.

* * * * *

"You're close to turning, my friend," Domino Santori said as Fane slid into the sleek black sports car and closed the passenger door behind him.

"Close, but not yet there."

"Close enough that I can feel The Heat radiating off your skin. Close enough that The Hunger rides you so fiercely that you smell of it—among other things. You're prepared? You've made arrangements for someone to guard you during The Transformation, to give you first blood so that you won't be forced to hunt immediately?" Domino cocked his head. "You've arranged for Cable to continue making himself scarce?"

Fane stiffened. "Don't worry about it."

"How can I not? If precautions aren't taken, I might be forced to hunt you." Obsidian eyes gleamed in the reflected light of the moon. "Even as a fully turned vampire, you would be no match for me. What fun would that be?"

Fane hissed, his eyes glowing red, his fangs flashing, but Domino only laughed and said, "It's a good thing you called me. I've already seen a brother through what you'll soon be facing. When the need arises, I'll stand with you." He laughed again. "Or on you, if that's what's required of me."

For a long moment Fane's body remained tense, anger pulsing through him along with the desire to attack, to savage—to gorge himself until only one heart remained beating in the confines of the small car.

The thought brought him up short. Sent a shiver of real fear down his spine.

Domino was a fellow dhampir. A man who had been friends with Fane's brother. Who had been like an older brother to Fane on more than one occasion.

"Have you learned anything more about the bomb-maker's whereabouts?" Fane asked, forcing his attention away from the rush of Domino's blood, channeling the primitive emotions that rode close to the surface as The Transformation drew near toward the Believer who'd murdered his family.

"Nothing is certain, but I think one of the others will soon lead us to The Apostle—or will be persuaded to tell us where he is."

"You think The Apostle is coming here?"

Domino shifted the car into reverse and shot down the long driveway. "I don't know. But perhaps we'll get lucky and find someone to ask tonight."

"What about the Believer you've been following for the last couple of months?"

"Byrd? He's still useful, at least for a few more days." Domino easily shifted gears, moving through the lower ones until they were racing along the deserted highway. "Don't worry, when the time is right, I'll gather everything he knows. In the meantime, I found another one of our enemies prowling around the carnival tonight, long after Sarael had been returned to Matteo. He knew next to nothing. He was like the others I've encountered so far. A deviant who enjoyed inflicting pain, hiding his sickness behind a cause he didn't fully believe in. Until tonight I thought the lack of intelligence and belief was an indication of how low our enemies have had to go in order to fill their ranks. But now I'm beginning to wonder if those we are finding and destroying are nothing more than cannon fodder. A distraction to keep us occupied or to gain information about how many of us are in the area and how effective we are."

"A trap?"

Domino shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not."

"And the woman we thought they were hunting? Sarael?"

"The Believer I encountered knew nothing about her. His interest was in the fortune-teller, though the prospect of raping and killing her was not nearly as appealing to him as doing the same to a beautiful blonde who emerged from Helki's tent."

"You eliminated him?"

"Of course."

Fane shifted in his seat, thinking about what Domino said. It meshed with the vague feelings of uneasiness that occasionally fought their way to the surface of his consciousness.

He'd had little time to think about them until now. Even before Cable discovered the woman who was most likely Matteo Cabrelli's missing mate and they'd come to guard her until Matteo could arrive from Italy, Fane had been fighting the beginnings of The Transformation.

A chill moved through him at the possibility that an elaborate trap was being set by their enemies. Distraction could be deadly for a dhampir.

Unlike what he would soon become—fully vampire—he was still human enough to die if he became careless. True, he wouldn't be killed easily. He had strengths, powers that made him a difficult target, an affinity for knives that allowed him to use and control them with his mind alone—but he was still trapped in a human body. He was without the vampire's most effective self-defense mechanism, the ability to change into mist and dissipate into the air. Once The Transformation had taken place that would change and he would be very nearly impossible to kill. But the price he would have to

pay in order to gain the unseen form of his alien heritage would be the loss of his ability to remain in the sun in a human shape.

It was a price he wanted to delay paying until the Believer who called himself The Apostle had been found. Until he had the satisfaction of draining the bomb-maker's life one swallow at a time, reducing him to an empty husk, a corpse to be eradicated in a great ball of fire, consumed by one of his own bombs.

It was Fane's obsession. The sweet thought of revenge the only thing he'd fantasized about in the last year—other than having Cable at his side during the centuries that lay ahead.

Cable. Fane's cock hardened thinking about him. Renewed frustration and worry moved through him. Domino had already said that he'd seen Cable for a brief moment at the carnival. But by the time Fane arrived, there was no trace of Cable and he wasn't answering his cell phone.

What if he'd fallen into the hands of their enemies? He was fully human. Easily killed. Fane growled. Perhaps he should abandon this hunt and look for Cable instead.

"Trouble in paradise?" Domino asked, his amusement like sandpaper over Fane's skin. The knowledge that Domino was aware of his arousal and could guess the direction of his thoughts grating on Fane's nerves.

"Don't concern yourself with my affairs."

"Affairs? That surprises me. You're so often in each others' company, cheating would seem impossible."

Fane ground his teeth together. "You know what I meant."

"You want me to 'not worry about it' just as I'm not to worry about how close you are to turning? I would hardly be honoring your brother's memory if I left you to make mistakes you'd live to regret. So I will give you this bit of advice. Don't be so quick to throw away your happiness. Find a woman you like." Obsidian eyes gleamed with amusement. "Or allow Cable to find one. Keep them both."

"After the first exchange of blood, after the first fuck, I'll be sexually bonded to my bride. You know that."

"So take her at the same time that Cable's cock is buried inside of her." Domino's laugh held a wealth of amusement. "Unless the thought of a cunt repulses Cable. Then again, if the tight fist of a woman's channel is not to his liking, perhaps he could close his eyes and thrust into her back entrance and pretend it's you."

A low growl sounded deep in Fane's chest. A warning that he'd only take so much of Domino's humor. "Cable has no problem with women. If anything he has more experience with them than I do."

"There you go then. Problem solved. You can have Cable as well as a kadine if you handle it correctly. I've been told that one of my early ancestors found a way to do it. Once you and Cable have reconciled, have him check the records that the padralls are

so obsessed with keeping. It's possible that my ancestor shared the details of his mating with one inclined to preserve it for future reference."

Domino's teeth flashed white in the darkness. "And then all you'll need is a woman. Perhaps the fortune-teller can assist you in finding a third for your bed. Despite the difficulties Matteo experienced in claiming Sarael, Helki's reading did ease the way for Sarael. But if you insist on following tradition when it comes to a kadine, then choose among the women who provide the future brides rather than asking that one be created and raised specifically for you."

Fane shifted in his seat. The thought of going to the padralls and arranging for introductions, of "shopping" for a potential bride—of no doubt having to appear as though he and Cable were no longer together—settled heavily in his gut, chasing the blood from his cock and leaving it unenthused.

He closed his eyes and tried to remember the women he'd been with before Cable. Fleeting images came to mind. All of them blonde, all of them easy prey. Forgettable as soon as he'd pulled from their bodies.

Unlike Cable, who enjoyed women and men equally, Fane had more often been drawn to those of his own sex. Perhaps that was why he was finding it so hard to reconcile what he felt he owed to his father, the taking of a kadine and the birth of sons, with what his mother would say were she still alive. *Be happy, Fane.*

Be happy. Fane hit the redial button on his cell and his call once again went directly to Cable's voice mail. A small hiss escaped. A surge of anger moved through him. A trickle of fear following in its wake. *Where the fuck was Cable?*

Chapter Four

Kiziah smoothed her hand over Cable's chest, exploring his small hard nipples with the tips of her fingers as she rested on an elbow and looked down at his face. God, he was gorgeous. But even more importantly, he was nice. Funny. Ultramasculine and yet gentle at the same time. Sweet, though he would probably object if he heard her call him that.

She laughed softly, watching as his cock filled again as a result of her attention. He hadn't been joking, they just might have to improvise by morning. Half of his supply of condoms was already depleted and he didn't show any sign of slowing down.

Or hurrying.

It felt like they had forever.

Kiziah's heart lurched in her chest but she refused to think beyond the here and now, beyond enjoying and savoring this time with him. There was no point in setting herself up to feel let down when he left.

"My turn now," she murmured, changing position so that she was straddling him, teasing his mouth with kisses, sighing with pleasure as his hands immediately went to her breasts, cupping them, rubbing his thumbs over pouty nipples.

She closed her eyes, soaking in his touch, savoring the kiss. Memorizing them so that she could relive the pleasure over and over again in her fantasies.

If she could have conjured up a man, Cable would be him. He was a dream lover, and yet so much more. A man she could grow to love if she had a chance. A man she could easily envision at her side.

Kiziah forced the thoughts from her mind. Concentrating instead on the stroking and twining of her tongue against his. On the slow buildup of pleasure, the fullness as blood rushed to her labia, making it swell so that her cunt lips parted in preparation for his cock.

She wanted to give him the same pleasure he'd given her earlier and so she reluctantly left his lips, trailing down his neck, licking over his masculine flesh and thrilling at the way his body tightened and strained underneath her wet kisses and sucking bites.

"You're killing me, Zia," he groaned when she took his nipple between her teeth, arching so that his engorged penis rubbed against her slick folds. "You're killing me."

But she knew it was a small death he gladly sought. And she wanted nothing more than to give it to him.

She tightened her grip on his nipple and reveled in the way he cried out, spearing his fingers through her hair and holding her to his chest as his breath quickened and his

cock leaked. When she bit down harder, he groaned, panting now, urging her to move lower, to taste more of his flesh, to take his straining penis into her mouth.

She allowed him to guide her. To hold his own cock as she took everything above his hand into her mouth. Tormenting him with her tongue, with the threat of her teeth, with short sucks, and the feel of her lips against his engorged head as she teased him, sliding up and down on him.

Cable was in heaven and hell. Ecstasy with the threat of torture hanging over him. Each time her lips settled on the tip of his penis he jerked for fear that she would lift her face and leave him.

"Zia," he groaned, unable to articulate more than a shortened version of her name as his buttocks clenched and his balls pulled tight. Aching. In desperate need. And then there was no room for any thought. For any words as her hand covered his, feminine strength added to masculine power, both of them holding his cock as she drove him to a release that had him bucking, grunting, shuddering.

* * * * *

Fane shifted position in the confines of Domino's sports car as they waited for the Believers they were hunting to emerge from the hotel room. He felt restless, irritable, as though his skin could no longer contain his body. "Why delay any longer? Let's take care of them now and be done with it."

"And risk having the police called? We can't be sure how many are in the room or how quickly they can be brought under our control."

Fane snorted, but before he could comment, the door they'd been watching opened and a Believer emerged, followed by two others. All of them dressed in black, their expressions serious, men embarking on a task.

"A little different than those we've been encountering," Domino commented.

"We can take them."

"Of course."

The men climbed into a dark sedan and drove away from the hotel with Domino following at a distance. They headed into a wealthy section of town where large homes built in an earlier century waited at the end of long, tree-lined driveways.

"Not their usual prey," Fane said, anticipation building. "Perhaps they're meeting someone."

Domino's teeth flashed in the dark interior of the car. "We can only hope."

The sedan continued to travel for several blocks before easing to a stop underneath a huge oak tree. Domino pulled the sports car over as well, its headlights off for most of the time they'd been following the Believers.

Fane looked around, trying to guess where their enemy was heading. Most of the houses were darkened, the occupants asleep, their cars tucked away in garages. But one house glowed with muted light, its driveway lined with cars.

"It might be wise to call some of the others," Fane said, referring to the dhampirs and vampires who'd come to the area to hunt the Believers.

"Perhaps," Domino said, but neither of them reached for their cell phones immediately. Instead they watched as the three men moved around and lifted the sedan's trunk, pulling out an assortment of guns. Domino laughed. "And perhaps not. It looks like our prey has gathered for a kill of their own. Do you have a preference?"

"If they make it as far as the house, I'll take the right side."

"Fair enough."

They slipped from the sports car, blending with the darkness, their eyesight well used to seeing in the dead of night. As they'd guessed, the Believers headed for the house whose occupants were entertaining guests, bypassing the front door in favor of trying to enter the residence where the trees and darkness could hide their activities.

The Hunger rose in Fane as he stalked his prey, a burning that had his stomach spasming and his fangs fully extended well before he'd gotten close enough to his victim to hear his heartbeat. Thoughts of blood filled Fane's mind, thoughts of sinking his fangs into human flesh and feeding as a life was ended. The intensity of his desire to kill, a need that had nothing to do with his prey being one of their enemies, sounded a warning in Fane's mind, but he didn't listen, didn't stop.

He drew close to the first Believer as he was crouched next to a window looking inside where the residents were gathered around a table, chanting ancient words that had the hair on Fane's neck rising in alarm. Witches. Warlocks. A coven gathered to summon power or information from the dead who lingered with unfinished business.

Fane had intended to take his enemy to the ground and feed, but the presence of the coven made him hesitate and draw a knife instead. The release of his enemy's life force might well impact whatever was going on inside the residence, but it couldn't be helped.

With a hiss Fane closed the distance, not bothering with the pheromones which could enthrall, determined instead to enjoy some measure of revenge for the death of his family, even if The Hunger wouldn't be sated.

In Fane's hand the knife parted skin and muscle as easily as if it was cutting butter left out on the dining room table. Blood gushed from the opened throat, slick and shiny in the moon's light, coating the black leather of the Believer's jacket as his heart emptied him of life with each panicked beat.

It was over too quickly as far as Fane was concerned. A waste of blood and a far gentler death than his enemy deserved.

Fane dropped the body to the ground, his nostrils flaring at the scent of so much blood, his body shuddering painfully, angrily as The Hunger snarled and raged, scraping his insides like a caged beast. He took a step forward and stumbled, The

Hunger not yet ready to loosen its grip on him. To stop its knife-sharp rebuke, the rake of talons through his internal organs and across his skin. Fane hunched for long moments, willing the pain away, but if anything it grew more intense, nearly dropping him to his knees.

Domino emerged from the darkness at the end of the house. His expression mocking for one instant, but as soon as he saw Fane, his amusement disappeared. "The Transformation is upon you," he said, reaching Fane's side and taking his arm. "Those we saved tonight will have to clean up after us if I can't return in time to do it." Obsidian eyes gleamed as humor reappeared. "Can you walk or do you wish to live with the memory of being carried back to the car?"

Fane hissed, his fangs extended, a flash of threat as he forced himself to stand, though he didn't shake off Domino's hand on his arm. "You took care of the other two?"

"Yes, and even managed to extract information from the second before wondering if you'd encountered trouble or were just playing with your food."

"What did you learn?"

"I believe I have found the reason so many Believers are in the area. Several of the witches inside are just passing through, on their way to a psychic fair in another city. The men we disposed of followed them here and learned of tonight's activities, then received orders to kill them here."

Fane hissed. Anger and hatred leaving little room for an awareness of the pain spiraling through his body. "The Apostle. He'll strike at the psychic fair."

"Most likely."

They reached the car and Fane jerked to a stop, gasping and bending over, pain streaking across his abdomen, so intense he felt as though he was being disemboweled. It came in jagged strikes, each one expanding and lengthening to cover more area, working upward to concentrate on his heart and lungs, so that his body was coated with sweat by the time he could get into the passenger seat.

He'd known what to expect since childhood, but there was no way to prepare for The Transformation, for the intensity of the pain that screamed through him as his body altered—the alien cells multiplying rapidly, mimicking the information contained in the part of him that was human then savagely attacking and eradicating all traces of his humanness. The Hunger of a full-blood vampire would follow, a bloodlust that would make him extremely dangerous until he'd fed for the first time after The Transformation. And even afterward, he'd need the herbs to manage it until he took a mate—the exchange of blood coupled with sex triggering a survival mechanism that would temper his needs.

Fane was barely aware of the drive. Barely aware of the trip down to Domino's basement. But when Domino disappeared, only to return carrying silver bindings studded with bloodstone, every cell in Fane's body screamed for him to escape, to fight

like a man possessed, to kill a fellow dhampir if that's what was necessary in order to avoid being bound.

He'd allowed Cable to tether him to the bed more often lately, but the soft strips of leather had been symbolic, a reminder to help Fane maintain control over The Heat that was a harbinger of The Transformation. To keep him from biting Cable and exchanging blood with him.

The bindings in Domino's hand were a true prison. They would paralyze Fane's limbs once they encircled his wrists and ankles. They'd make him completely helpless until the conversion was complete and he gained a second form.

Fane hissed, filled with a swirling wildness. The need for blood and freedom temporarily displacing the agony of his cells changing. Without thought he reached for his knives, anger joining the mix when he found that Domino had removed them.

For long moments they faced off. Domino blocking the only exit. Fane battling against the riot of ruthless, feral impulses that had served his ancient ancestors well in the primitive surroundings they'd found themselves in, but would create havoc in the modern world.

Bit by bit Fane gained control of himself, using remembered conversations with his father and brother to do so. He would not fail them by turning into a rogue, by forcing Domino to hunt him. "Do it," he growled, holding his arms out in front of him.

Domino glided over, silently clamping a band around one wrist and then the other before taking one of Fane's limp arms and guiding him to a pile of blankets on the floor. Their presence making Fane's eyes narrow with suspicion, making him glance around at the lack of windows, the door which sealed firmly, allowing no escape of air. A vampire needed only a small gap in order to enter and exit in their dissipative state. "You're about to change."

"I'm close. But not as close as you apparently." Domino placed the bands on Fane's ankles and helped him to lie down before settling a few feet away. "I'll stay with you until it's over and be here to give you first blood." A flicker of amusement followed the comment. "And to make sure you take your herbs like a good boy."

Fane's response was lost in a gasp as his body went rigid with agony, the pain once again making itself known.

* * * * *

Cable woke to morning light streaming through the dreamcatchers that hung in front of each window. His first thoughts were about the night, about the woman who lay snuggled against him, her back to his front, her buttocks pressed against a cock that was already standing at attention and ready to serve.

He smiled and rubbed his cheek against her hair, tightening his arms around her for an instant before relaxing his grip. It felt good to be with her. It felt right. Peaceful.

Normal. As though none of the rest of his life existed, except in a nightmare. As though there were no vampires, no dhampirs, no padralls or kadines.

He closed his eyes and just savored the feel of her, soaked in her warmth, her softness, how good it felt to be wrapped around her. How good it felt to lie with a woman – with her.

He'd had girlfriends in the past. And he'd been faithful to them. But he wasn't going to lie to himself about his needs. He wasn't going to promise something he couldn't give—long-term monogamy—one man, one woman. He couldn't have promised a male lover either, though a different set of rules applied with Fane.

Cable rubbed his cheek against Kiziah's hair again. Christ, it hurt to think about Fane.

He didn't think he could make the arrangements for the creation of a kadine for Fane. He sure as hell couldn't take part in overseeing how she was raised, what she was taught, what her life experiences were so that her interests and personality would meld with her future mate's.

The thought of it sickened him on so many levels. Left him feeling heart-sore—though he knew Fane hurt too.

He should have fought the attraction early on. God knows, he'd been warned off Fane by most of the padralls in his order. He'd been sent on errands that would separate the two of them. He'd even been sent to the order's version of a chaplain-shrink, not just in the hopes of "curing" him of Fane but of "curing" him of men in general. The second a request by his father no doubt, who still had not reconciled himself to the truth that his youngest son was not solidly heterosexual.

Cable sighed. Maybe he should have tried harder to look beyond the pleasure of the present and concentrated instead on the pain of the future.

Yeah, so what was new about that thought?

The trouble was, until Fane's parents and brother had been killed, he hadn't seen a future that didn't include Fane. They were good together, they enjoyed each other's company. They balanced each other out. They were friends—and lovers. They had fun and yet despite the intensity of their physical attraction, it wasn't all about sex.

Maybe he would have eventually gotten the urge to be with a woman again, maybe Fane would have too, but dhampirs and vampires were free of human diseases, so there was no risk of getting a disease from or giving one to Fane.

Maybe they would have finally broached the subject neither one of them had dared think too deeply about. A centuries-long bond formed by three exchanges of blood. A bond that would alter the cells of his body so that he would gain fangs and need to feed, not on strangers, but on Fane.

The padralls had records that spanned centuries so Cable knew that taking a male companion instead of a kadine had been done many times before—though he'd been extremely careful not to let any of the others know what he was researching. If they suspected he might be willing to break a long-held taboo and bind his life so thoroughly

to Fane's, he'd find himself permanently assigned to some task that allowed little contact with either dhampirs or vampires.

Kiziah sighed and shifted, turning in his arms and nuzzling his chest in her sleep. The smooth flesh of her cunt and the small strip of downy softness rubbing against his cock in the process, making it jerk against her.

His body tightened. A wave of heat moved from the place on his shoulder where Fane had bitten, surging along his spine and through his penis so that arousal leaked from the head and onto her abdomen. He gritted his teeth against the impulse to urge her legs apart and slip inside her. To feel her sheath clamp down on him, to feel the wet heat of her with nothing separating them.

He wanted to bury himself in her. To stay lodged inside her and forget everything else going on in his life. And yet it was so much more than pure escapism. Being with Kiziah felt as right as being with Fane.

The moments in Madame Helki's tent replayed themselves. The Wheel of Fortune crossed by The Lovers.

You have reached a turning point, a place with many possible outcomes and a chance for great happiness. You must recognize and reconcile your own needs in order to fully embrace the opportunity that will soon present itself to you.

Cable laughed despite the confusion of his emotions. Despite the conflicting desires. The painful hopelessness of one relationship and the unexpected, unlooked for possibility of another—because now that he'd been with Kiziah, he intended to stick around and spend more time with her.

Hell, when he called in to report after he visited Matteo Cabrelli and verified that Sarael had been fully claimed and made a kadine, all he would have to do is mention that he'd met a woman and his father would insist he take a vacation, all in the hopes that Cable would end up married with a pregnant bride. That's the way his father thought. Fuck, that's the way most of the padralls thought. They might be living in the twenty-first century, but their culture often seemed as though it had barely crawled out of the middle ages.

Cable smoothed his hand over Kiziah's buttocks, his awareness shifting to the feel of her breasts against his chest. His thoughts looping back to an earlier thread but weaving a different design.

Even for Fane, he didn't think he could give women up. And that was the catch. A vampire and his kadine—or male companion—were sexually bonded so that neither could willingly take another lover. It was a survival mechanism, not only for the individual but for the race.

There were no exceptions to the rule. At least none that Cable had been able to find. He grimaced—not that he'd had a chance to go through every ledger recording the history and lineage of every dhampir or vampire family in the order's possession, much less visit other orders and review their books. Nothing was computerized.

Kiziah mumbled in her sleep, draping her leg over Cable's and pressing closer, adjusting her position just enough so that her erect clit pressed against his shaft like a tiny penis and sent icy-hot pleasure jolting up his spine. This time when his cock pulsed, she whimpered and arousal seeped from her opening, wetting more of his penis than the moisture-beaded head.

He groaned, rolling them over so that his cock was trapped between them, ready to hump against her mound and belly if necessary.

Chapter Five

Kiziah woke with a smile and wound her arms around Cable's neck, making his heart dance just from looking at her. Christ, she was beautiful, inside and out, soft and gentle, a balm for a soul that felt as though it was being shredded.

"About time," he teased.

She laughed, rocking against his cock. "You've been *up* for awhile?"

"Oh yeah, a *long* time."

"Well, we're both awake now."

Cable leaned down and took her bottom lip between his teeth, giving it a gentle nip. "There's a problem."

"Let me guess. A *big* one."

"Huge actually. Enormous."

Kiziah snickered. "Yeah. I can tell."

He laughed despite the ache in his cock and balls. "Worse than you're imagining. We don't have any protection left."

Her eyes widened. "Oh."

Cable rubbed his nose against hers. "Yeah. Oh." He kissed her, a slow lingering touch of lips and tongue. When he lifted his mouth from hers, he said, "I'm clean, if you want to..."

"I'm not on the pill." Color flooded her face. "I don't do this very often. I mean, I don't... There haven't been many."

Tenderness filled Cable. Surprise. *Fuck*. What was wrong with the men she knew? How could they be around her and not get her into bed and into their lives and keep her there?

Cable pressed his mouth to hers again, savoring the softness of her body underneath his, the way she responded to him, letting him lead, trusting him, making him feel as though he was home. He trailed kisses over her cheek, then explored her ear, tormenting her, knowing how sensitive she was there, how much she liked it, her whimpers only inciting him to drive them both higher.

Kiziah writhed against him. Wrapped her legs around his waist and clung to him. She was almost sorry she'd told him she wasn't on the pill. Almost.

She ached. Not just with physical need. But with the need for intimacy. For closeness.

But she was the end result of a night of reckless passion—at least on her father's part—and she wouldn't do that to a child of hers. She wouldn't do that to Cable. She already knew he wasn't the type of man to walk away from responsibility.

Emotion filled her as he raised his head and she saw the tautness of his features, the desire. No man had ever responded to her like he did, had ever made her feel like he did.

Their eyes met and he moved his hips, sliding his cock against her clit, her belly, sending heated ecstasy straight to her breasts so that her nipples tightened into painful buds. He groaned, ducking his head, suckling, biting, laving the pebbled tips until Kiziah was straining against him, hot, desperate for more intimate contact than the rub of flesh against flesh.

When his mouth returned to hers, she closed her eyes for an instant, gathering her courage before whispering against his lips, "We could do it...you could go in the back way."

Cable's cock jerked against her abdomen. "Have you ever done it that way?" His body tensed with anticipation.

"No, but... You've been with...you've had..." Once again her cheeks heated. "I trust you to know what to do."

Christ, she undid him. Claimed parts of him that had been waiting just for her. There was no way he could refuse her offer. "It'll be easier with lubricant. I've got some in the car."

"There's some in the nightstand."

The blush deepened and Cable was completely lost in her. She was the perfect mix of innocence and knowledge. A woman who wasn't afraid to be passionate but who wasn't cynical and brazen like the women he and Fane usually encountered when they were out at clubs.

He levered himself off her and retrieved the lubricant, then settled next to her, kissing his way down her body, rebuilding the passion as his fingers prepared her, their bodies glistening with a sheen of sweat, both of them close to coming by the time his tongue and mouth found her straining clit. She arched upward with a cry as his sucks and licks drove her to orgasm, sending arousal washing over his fingers and providing even more lubrication for his entry.

In a heartbeat he rose above her, guiding the tip of his penis to her back entrance. His lips covering hers as he slowly worked himself into her virgin opening.

He wanted to shout from the overwhelming pleasure of it. He wanted to cry at the sheer intimacy of it. He wanted to plunge in and out wildly. And he wanted to stay completely still, savoring and memorizing every moment as her unused muscles fisted and unfisted on his cock, as her whimpers and shivers corralled his heart.

He began thrusting, shallow digs at first, his breathing hard from the effort to go slow. To control himself and give her time to adjust. But when she began moving against him, accepting his rhythm, arching into him, all he could think about was the

extreme sensations rushing through his cock and up his spine. Christ. He couldn't hold back any longer.

Cable covered her mouth with his, twining his tongue with hers as his hand slid between their straining bodies, his fingers going to her clit, stroking over the naked head and underside until they both cried out, shuddering in release.

They lay together peacefully for a few minutes before taking showers and returning to bed, snuggling and dozing. Waking up in each other's arms. Cable's first thoughts about Kiziah. His second about Fane.

He couldn't move forward with his life, take time off to be with Kiziah until he talked to Fane. If he was honest with himself, he shouldn't have let things get this far with her. But he couldn't feel sorry for it. Fuck no. He couldn't feel sorry for it. If anything, he felt like it was inevitable. Destined.

His fingers explored her spine. He breathed her in. Soaked her in. Madame Helki's words returning in that moment. Flashing into his thoughts again along with the image of The Lovers.

You must recognize and reconcile your own needs in order to fully embrace the opportunity that will soon present itself to you.

This time a deeper understanding came with the words. A truth he couldn't ignore.

He wouldn't be truly happy if he had to give up women. Not just because of the sex, but because of the tenderness that came with the closeness.

Christ, Fane would go through his skin if he tried to cuddle him like this. Hell, *he'd* go through his skin if Fane tried to do it to him.

They had raunchy, rough sex as well as easy, I-love-you sex. They traded off who was the more dominant partner and they liked to be close to one another afterward, often ending up in a tangle of arms and legs when they woke up together, but they didn't do snuggling.

For an instant he imagined what it would be like to have Kiziah in bed with them. To share her with Fane, to experience this same closeness afterward. He and Fane cuddled against her. The three of them content, happy. Complete.

His heart squeezed painfully, filled with longing until he had to push the images aside. Fuck. He needed to finish things with Fane but he couldn't face doing it just yet.

Cable pressed a kiss to Kiziah's forehead just as his stomach gave a low rumble, a reminder that he couldn't live on sex alone. He chuckled. "How about we go out to dinner, my treat." He brushed his hand over her buttocks. "And then we can swing by the drugstore and wipe out their supply of condoms."

Kiziah smiled against his chest. "Maybe we should hit more than just one drug store."

He grinned, rolling to his back and pulling her on top of him. "You think I'm that good?"

"Definitely." She traced his eyebrows, his nose, his lips. Then trailed her fingers down his neck and across his chest, stopping at his nipple.

His cock jerked in reaction and he covered her hand with his. "Food first. Condoms second. Another errand third. Then we can come back and resume from this position."

"It's a deal," Kiziah said, making him groan as she slid off him and got to her feet.

"Christ, you're gorgeous, Kizzy," Cable said, sitting up and watching as she bent over and rifled through a dresser drawer.

She paused and looked back at him, eyes dancing though she sent him a frown. "Don't call me that. Kizzy morphs into Dizzy and when you're blonde..."

He laughed and stood, unable to stop himself from going over and taking her in his arms, pulling her back to his front, the sight of them in the mirror sending a rush of blood to his cock and making him groan as fantasies of bending her over and taking her as they watched in the mirror flooded his mind. He forced himself to let her go, to put on his jeans so he could retrieve fresh clothing from the car.

Kiziah dressed, fighting against the hope that was starting to form in her chest. She'd expected to wake up and say goodbye, not have him laugh and tease, invite her to dinner and imply they'd be spending another night together.

She'd planned to head to Ashburg today. She'd been looking forward to the psychic fair, to being among friends, people she'd known her entire life, people who'd known her mother. But now...

The Wheel of Fortune surfaced in her thoughts and with it the feeling that she was where she needed to be. She smiled slightly. Too bad the third card hadn't been The Lovers. Cable felt so right. She could easily imagine him traveling with her. She could easily imagine settling in one place with him.

The Airstream door opened and Cable came back inside to finish dressing. "Ready?"

"Ready."

They took his car, settling on a small, home-style restaurant and lingering over dinner. Joking, teasing, touching frequently as though needing the reassurance of the contact.

"You said you had a third stop to make," Kiziah prompted as they slipped from their booth and left the restaurant. Deciding to walk to a drugstore several blocks away rather than get back into the car.

"I need to visit someone before they leave for Italy. It'll only take a few minutes." Cable glanced at the sky and then at his watch. "But we'd better hustle."

They paused at a street corner and Kiziah's gaze landed on a newspaper rack, shock coursing through her when she saw the face staring back at her from the front page and read the caption. *Police Seeking Information.*

"Fuck!" Cable said, his hand going to his pocket to retrieve some change.

He shoved the change into the coin slot and opened the front of the rack in order to retrieve a newspaper, the display copy the only one remaining.

They both read the short article about the body of an escaped convict being discovered near the carnival, the article ending with a request by police that anyone who'd seen the man or knew anything about his activities to come forward with the information. Kiziah shivered, wondering what the police would think if she told them that he'd been following her – until something supernatural killed him.

She shivered again and Cable put his arm around her, pulling her against him. "You saw him last night, playing darts."

Kiziah jerked in reaction. Her eyes going to his. "How do you know that?"

"I saw you come out of Madame Helki's tent."

Confusion filled Kiziah. Uncertainty. He couldn't have followed her to the coffee shop. Could he? He wasn't the one who had hypnotized her and used her as bait, then saved her. Was he?

Cable stroked his thumb over the frown lines between her eyebrows, smoothing them out, his face taking on an uncertain expression.

"You saw me leave Madame Helki's tent..." she prompted.

"Yeah. And I went in afterward. For a reading." His embarrassed laugh sent a burst of warmth though Kiziah's heart. "There were three cards on the table when I walked in. The last one was the Wheel of Fortune." He hesitated for a second. "I thought maybe they were for me. But Helki took the Wheel and crossed it with a card she had me draw. The Lovers. I wondered... Then when I walked by the coffee shop and saw you in it..." He shrugged and looked away, vulnerable, confused, torn. "My life's a little insane right now."

Kiziah pressed a kiss to his cheek and then nibbled over to his mouth, swallowing his groan of pleasure and glorying in the way he held her tightly against him as their mouths fused together and the kiss deepened.

"I don't want to talk to the police about seeing him last night," she said when they parted in order to breathe. Wondering what Cable would think if she told him what had happened while he was in the fortune-teller's tent.

"I'm sure they've got plenty of people volunteering information." Cable pressed a quick kiss to her mouth. *What had Domino been thinking to leave the body where it could be found?* Christ. One dhampir in his life was enough to worry about. He couldn't worry about Domino too. Cable folded the paper, abandoning it on the drugstore counter after he and Kiziah had spent a few lighthearted minutes in the contraceptive aisle before purchasing condoms and leaving.

It was full dark when they got to Matteo Cabrelli's, though the moon shone down on the old house with a sinister cast. "You want to go in or wait in the car?" Cable asked.

"In."

He leaned over and gave her a kiss. "This'll just take a few minutes."

The front door opened before either of them could knock. "*Don* Cabrelli and his wife are in the drawing room," the elderly man who stood in front of them said, frowning when he saw Kiziah but stepping aside to let them pass.

Kiziah's breath caught in her throat as soon as she crossed the threshold. Her lungs seeming to fill with ice, freezing with instant fear as the aura of the supernatural washed over her. Its intensity stronger than anything she'd ever experienced. She let out a strangled gasp and stumbled, only to have Cable steady her, his expression concerned. "You okay?"

"Yeah," she panted, wondering if a ghost haunted the house. It was spooky enough on the outside to lend credence to the theory.

Slowly the weight and cold disappeared though the awareness of the supernatural remained, tempered by the realization that it lacked menace despite the lethal edge she could sense in its depths. "I'm okay," she said, touched by the concern still evident on Cable's face.

Cable squeezed her hand, cursing himself, realizing too late that given what she'd told him about her mother and her childhood, Kiziah might possess some measure of psychic ability, might be picking up on just how deadly Matteo was, even if she didn't believe in vampires.

They moved into the drawing room where he introduced her to Matteo and Sarael. Despite what Cable had been telling himself, it was a relief not to be on the receiving end of Matteo's hostility. If anything, the Italian vampire was at his most charming, though his possessive gaze repeatedly returned to Sarael, traveling over her body with so much heat that she blushed.

Kiziah's presence was a complication until Matteo drew her into a conversation about the dreamcatchers she made, his interest appearing genuine as he asked her to do some sketches, accompanying her to a desk against the wall and standing with her, their backs turned toward Sarael and Cable.

"It's done?" Cable whispered and Sarael nodded, parting her lips slightly so that he could see the fangs she'd gained after Matteo had exchanged blood with her for a third time. For an instant Cable felt relieved. The task he'd been given would be considered finished as soon as he contacted his father and told him that he'd confirmed Sarael's transformation from human to kadine.

But following the relief came a wash of guilt and sadness along with thoughts of Fane. He couldn't go back to the Airstream with Kiziah and fuck the night away like he'd intended to without seeing Fane first.

Last night it had seemed so right to be with Kiziah, so easy to put aside thoughts of vampires and dhampirs in favor of The Lovers. But coming here reminded him of the world he was a part of. Its restrictions. Its harsh realities. The painful knowledge that in the future Fane would also have a kadine.

They left a few minutes later. Spending most of the drive back to the campground in silence.

When they pulled up in front of the travel trailer Kiziah closed her eyes against the pain that had started to ripple through her heart. Against the laughing moments they'd spent earlier, as they'd joked about condoms in the drug store. She knew without being told that they wouldn't be making use of them tonight.

Forcing her eyes open, she reached over and took Cable's hand as he switched off the ignition, neither of them making a move to open their doors. "You're thinking about him," she said, pleased that her voice sounded so calm.

"About Fane. Yeah." He turned toward her. "I need to go back to the house. I need to settle things with him."

She squeezed his hand. "It might turn out better than you think."

Cable gave an unhappy laugh before leaning in and pressing his mouth to hers briefly. "It won't. I want to see you again, Zia. How much longer are you going to be camped here?"

For a split second she thought about saying she'd wait until she heard from him, but she didn't let those words escape. She'd never expected more than a night together. Though for a few hours, after he'd told her about his visit with Madame Helki, about her own Wheel of Fortune being covered by the card he'd drawn, The Lovers, she'd allowed herself to hope, to dream, to wonder...

But he was right. He needed to resolve whatever was going on with his boyfriend. And she already cared enough about Cable to hope that things worked out in a way that would make him happy. Yeah, she'd probably cry all the way to Ashburg, but she didn't regret the time she'd spent with him.

She needed to leave. She needed to put the fantasy aside in favor of the reality of her life. "I should already be in Ashburg. I've got a campsite and a booth at the fair already reserved, but location is on a first come, first serve basis. By the time I get there I'll be relegated to the worst possible spots in both places."

Pain rushed through Cable at the thought of her leaving. He felt as though he was being torn in two. "How far is Ashburg from here?"

"A couple of hours."

"I'll meet up with you there. Tomorrow sometime. After I've seen Fane. Okay?"

She bit her lip, wishing he hadn't said that. His words were fuel for a hope she knew she couldn't afford. He was rebounding, and despite the fantasy night they'd had together, Cable still cared about his partner. There'd been a wealth of love and heartbreak in his voice just saying "Fane".

She squeezed his hand again and reached for the door handle, swallowing against the thickness in her throat and chest, knowing she was going to break down and start crying if they dragged goodbye out much longer. "Maybe you can still work it out with

him, Cable. Don't give up. If I don't see you in Ashburg... You better get going. So should I."

He wouldn't let her escape so easily. His hand tightened on hers. "Where can I find you?"

Kiziah gave him the name of the campground. "You won't have trouble finding the psychic fair. That's where I'll be most of the time."

"Psychic fair?"

Kiziah stiffened at his tone. Her heart sinking when she risked a glance and saw the tight expression on his face. She'd told him a little bit about her childhood as they'd been snuggled next to each other in the darkness. And he'd been interested in knowing about the dreamcatchers she made. He'd even admitted to visiting Madame Helki and yet now he sounded upset about the fair in Ashburg. "Yes, a psychic fair."

"A big one?"

Kiziah's eyebrows drew together. "Pretty big. Why?"

Christ! What could he tell her? *You remember the guy who followed you last night and was found dead this morning? Well, he was part of a secret organization that kills vampires as well as any humans who might have supernatural ability.*

Yeah. Right. Kiziah would think he was a nut case.

A knot of fear and dread formed in Cable's gut. He needed to let Fane and Domino know. This had to be the reason so many Believers were streaming into the area.

His stomach roiled just thinking about the man who'd been waiting near Madame Helki's tent. If Domino hadn't been there... Shit! He'd just assumed the Believer saw Kiziah and went for her because she was beautiful. But what if he knew she was heading to the psychic fair? What if she'd been his intended target all along? What if the Believers were attacking and killing fair attendees far enough away so there wouldn't be an obvious link between targets?

"I want to go to the psychic fair with you," Cable blurted out. "Stay here for one more night. Please."

When she started to shake her head, he tightened his grip on her hand. Christ, he couldn't show up at the house with her and he didn't want her traveling alone, much less camping among people the Believers might have targeted. He could call and ask Domino to protect Kiziah while he dealt with Fane...if she'd agree to stay. "I'll be back as soon as I can, Kiziah. By morning, for sure. I promise. Give me until then."

She hesitated and he leaned forward, stroking her cheek before spearing his fingers through her hair and forcing her to turn and face him, his heart aching when he saw the conflict in her eyes. Hope pitted against the need to avoid getting hurt. The desire to be among friends rather than to wait alone in a nearly abandoned campground while events she had no control over unfolded elsewhere. "I'll be back. I swear it. Just give me tonight to sort things out with Fane."

Kiziah nodded slightly then wrote down a phone number and handed it to him. "If you work it out with him, just call me. Okay? It'd be too hard to say goodbye again."

Chapter Six

Cable barely got into the house before Fane was on him. Coming out of nowhere. Attacking. The two of them rolling around on the floor, crashing into furniture as clothing ripped and bodies writhed.

They'd fought before, wrestled for fun as a prelude to rough, sweaty sex. But Cable knew within seconds that this was different. A battle on more levels than just the physical.

"You've been with a woman," Fane said, anger roaring through him, mingling with The Hunger, The Heat, as he finally cleared the tangle of fallen furniture and pinned Cable underneath him, not bothering to limit himself to a human's strength as he usually did when they were playing. Wondering in that instant why he bothered to limit himself at all when it came to Cable.

Fuck! A woman. Her smell was all over Cable. Claiming him, taunting Fane with the knowledge that Cable had been with someone else. That he was going to lose Cable if he didn't act to keep him.

Fane struck. Driving his fangs into Cable's neck in a primitive instinct to take what he wanted. What his soul screamed he needed.

The hot rush of Cable's blood was a reward in itself. And he gorged. Taking so much that Cable's heart stuttered in warning before Fane stopped and ripped his own wrist, pressing the gushing vein to Cable's lips and forcing him to drink. Only the smallest part of Fane's sanity keeping him from fucking Cable, only the echo of Domino's words, *You can have Cable as well as a kadine if you handle it correctly*, keeping him from binding himself sexually to Cable.

"I could finish it now," Fane snarled, anger and hurt still churning inside of him. Joined by lust. He was rock hard. His erection pressed against Cable's. "One fuck is all it would take."

Cable jerked his mouth from Fane's wrist. "Christ! Get off me."

"How badly do you want her?"

"Get off me and I'll tell you!"

Cable closed his eyes against the lust that was swamping him, burning through his veins like lava as his heart thundered in his chest. If Fane didn't get off him they were going to start fucking like minks. And it wouldn't end there. Two more nights. Two more blood exchanges and his life would be tied completely to Fane's.

Yesterday he would have welcomed it. But today...

Maybe you can still work it out with him. If I don't see you in Ashburg...

The image of Kiziah's soulful eyes and gentle smile gave him the strength to push Fane away. To sit up and ensure there was some distance between them. Fuck! Fane was a full vampire now. He'd been around enough of them to recognize when a dhampir had gone through The Transformation.

Cable rubbed the place where Fane had bitten, groaned when pleasure radiated from it, shooting down his chest and making his cock pulse and leak. Making heat curl in his balls and around his shaft so that his hand dropped to cover his erection.

A hiss from Fane warned him that they weren't out of danger yet. Fuck. He could hardly believe they'd stopped at all.

"Who is she?" Fane asked, his eyes flashing with wild emotion and Cable heard the hurt underneath the anger in Fane's voice.

Guilt cooled some of Cable's desire. Misgiving. But Fane would recognize Kiziah's scent as soon as they got to the psychic fair. "Her name's Kiziah. You'll like her."

"I'd better." Fane moved in, nostrils flared, closing the distance between them. "If you want her, Cable, then I'll make her my kadine." His lips pressed against Cable's in a firm, hard kiss before he added, "And I'll convert you at the same time. I don't have the luxury of waiting and the padralls will never sanction what I want."

Cable's heart jerked in his chest. Disbelief and hope warred inside him. His cock surged, arousal leaking from its tip as his earlier fantasy of having Kiziah snuggled between Fane and him returned in a rush. "It's never been done."

"You're wrong. One of Domino's ancestors had both a kadine and a male companion."

"Domino knows how his ancestor managed it?"

"The records of the Santori are in the possession of your order. I can hold out long enough for you to check them." His eyes met Cable's. "I can give you that much time. But now that we've made the first exchange, the herbs won't curb the need for long."

For an endless moment Cable's conscience tried to impose itself on him. A kiss, a touch, a show of willingness and Fane wouldn't wait. All it would take was one fuck now that they'd exchanged blood and Fane would be sexually bonded to him. Kiziah would be safe then, but he'd lose her. And Fane would lose the chance to father children.

Fuck! It was madness to consider it. It was insanity to refuse.

Christ! It was the completeness he'd longed for as he lay in Kiziah's arms. The very scene he'd imagined, Fane in bed with them, the three of them together.

Madame Helki's words rang through Cable's mind. *You have reached a turning point, a place with many possible outcomes and a chance for great happiness.* Had she guessed? Had she really seen this possibility in the future? Or was he just using the reading as an excuse to suppress his conscience and make a grab at happiness?

"I'll leave tonight," Cable said, rising to his feet and offering a hand to pull Fane up. "But we need to talk first."

* * * * *

Kiziah hitched the trailer to the Suburban, trying not to see it as anything other than a necessary preparation. Whether Cable returned or called to say that he and Fane had worked things out, she needed to be on the road tomorrow.

She rubbed her hand over her heart, trying to smooth away some of the ache there. She didn't regret a single moment spent with Cable, but she knew it would be a long time before she invited another man back to the Airstream, or went home with one.

The truth was that she wasn't cut out for casual sex. She couldn't separate her body from her heart and mind. And the night with Cable had made her realize how empty her life was now that her mother was gone, how she'd just kept on doing what she'd always done – traveling across the country – without ever stopping to consider whether or not it was the lifestyle she wanted as opposed to the only one she knew.

She thought about the dream that had sent her to Madame Helki's tent. About the card of her present, The Hermit. And she knew with a certainty that she was ready for change.

Maybe not with Cable, though her chest grew tight at the prospect of not seeing him again. But she couldn't hope that he and Fane were separating permanently – not when it was obvious how deeply Cable cared about Fane.

She'd been a chicken not to ask questions. She wished now that she had, that she knew what the breakup was about.

What if it was over women? Maybe Cable needing both a boyfriend and a girlfriend while Fane didn't.

Kiziah's face flushed with heat. Her body reacted, her imagination filling with images of sharing Cable with another man, of watching the two men together.

She laughed, a small sound of amusement tinged with sadness. Maybe it was a good thing she hadn't asked Cable what Fane looked like. Maybe it was better if she didn't know anything more about the two of them.

The loneliness she'd been escaping last night was already back, the hollow place larger, expanded by hope and the time she'd spent with Cable. She lightly traced the dreamcatcher necklace, its shape reminding her of the card representing her future. The Wheel of Fortune. *Very soon, an opportunity will present itself. A destiny not planned for, even by those who will draw you into their world.*

Kiziah allowed herself to fantasize that *their world* meant Fane and Cable's world, that *The Lovers* Cable had drawn when he visited Madame Helki's tent, overlaid on the card of *her* future, was a symbolic link, a mystical connection with roots in the dream that had sent her to the carnival in the first place.

Only reluctantly did she push the fantasies and hopes aside and reach for her cell phone, suddenly longing for a familiar voice. Surprised pleasure filling her when she learned that Margo and Walt, a witch and warlock she'd known all her life, were in town, delayed themselves because they'd been guests at an important coven meeting.

"Come and play cards with us," Margo said as soon as she learned where Kiziah was camped. "In fact, I insist! Walter is on his way to pick you up right now."

And Kiziah didn't protest. She gathered several dreamcatchers to give as gifts to the coven that was hosting her friends, then left the nearly abandoned campsite, glad the long hours until she heard from Cable would pass a little more quickly.

* * * * *

Fane paced the short length of the Airstream, emotion churning through him with each step. Cable's scent was everywhere. Mingling with Kiziah's. Overlaid with sex.

Even knowing what to expect, Fane had felt a surge of pain when he'd slipped into the trailer and was confronted by the lingering scent of passion, by the reality that Cable had truly been with someone else. In that instant he'd been tempted to leave, to prowls the campground for prey – The Hunger whispering in his ear that blood would soothe him, would fill the hollowed-out places in his soul.

He'd whirled and taken a step toward the door, his quick movement stirring the air in the small confines of the travel trailer and sending the dreamcatchers dancing in front of the windows. That's what had caught his attention at first, but then his gaze had lowered and he'd seen the photograph.

Now he was rock hard, unsure whether it was the lingering reminder of Cable's presence here or the prospect of claiming a bride that had his cock full, aching for release.

Kiziah. Cable hadn't lied when he'd said that she was beautiful. Honey-blond hair and dark, dark eyes. A tempting blend of sensuousness and softness, gentleness.

Fane picked up the photograph and studied it again, seeing the details as clearly in the moonlit trailer as most would see during the daylight. She was standing arm-in-arm with another woman, her mother, both of them smiling into the camera, at peace in the moment, neither of them knowing what was to come.

He ached for her. For himself. Cable had told him that the previous night marked the one-year anniversary of her mother's death. How well Fane knew that pain. Not just for a mother. But a father. A brother. The latter two nearly impossible to kill – though Fane knew that even if they'd known in the instant before the car they were in became an inferno, even if they'd had that split second to become mist, particles in the air, neither his father nor his brother would have abandoned his mother.

The need for revenge burned in Fane's gut. The thought of his family's last seconds, the image of the three of them together, debating the merits of a theater production as they were prone to do after a show, seared his heart and mind and soul.

Anger flashed through Fane. What was Cable thinking to allow Kiziah to remain in the travel trailer where a simple bomb or a spray from an automatic weapon could kill her? So what if he had called Domino? Though Domino liked to think he was invincible, he was only one dhampir.

The memory of Domino's amusement when Fane arrived at the campground only to learn that Kiziah was missing still rankled. His obvious enjoyment of Fane's fury and possessiveness—over a woman—made Fane hope that he was around to witness Domino's Transformation. To watch as Domino succumbed to The Heat and took a mate.

And yet, despite Domino's often abrasive humor, Fane would step forward in a heartbeat should Domino need his help. Just as he knew Domino would do for him—their parting conversation adding to the debt Fane owed.

Once she arrives, I will continue to stand guard while the two of you become...better acquainted. But I trust you won't want to remain here for long.

I can't believe that Cable left her here to begin with!

He should have brought her home, like a stray kitten? You would have welcomed her with open arms and an open fly?

I will take her back to the house as soon as possible.

Call me and I will help you. I have touched her mind before and though she emerged from my compulsion earlier than I intended, I can aid you in getting her to your house without her awareness. It would be best to take her car and trailer as well, to leave nothing of her behind for the Believers to find.

Fane put the photograph down and moved away from it, calming himself. The past had to be set aside, at least for tonight. He needed to be in control when he met his future kadine. He wouldn't risk exchanging blood with her tonight, nor would he tempt himself by feeding on her. Not until Cable returned with the results of his research.

He would fuck her though. He would claim her body and he wouldn't wait for Cable's arrival to do so. He would set the ground rules of his relationship with Kiziah tonight, mounting her until she was completely submissive, until she acknowledged who was the master—though it was much more complex than that simple word implied. With the third exchange of blood the three of them would become almost one. Kiziah's happiness would become their happiness. Her misery would be theirs as well. There was almost no separation between a vampire and his kadine—and in Fane's case, there would be almost no separation between him and Cable either—though he had little worry about *that* relationship.

It was different with Cable. The primitive instincts of Fane's ancient, alien ancestors flared up but were easily overcome—recognizing that Cable was not a means to the future, a means to a new generation. Until the approach of The Transformation, it had been easy enough to alternate who was the dominant partner—and with a little effort, a trust built over the last two years, Fane thought he could return to the place where they had been before, to a relationship of equals.

Love moved through Fane at the sacrifices Cable was willing to make in order to be with him. At the depth of Cable's caring and commitment.

Cable's father and brothers might well shun him for his choices. And in binding his life to Fane's, Cable might well be giving up the possibility of siring children of his own,

though perhaps the records of the Santori would say otherwise. Regardless, Kiziah's body would be altered by the blood exchanges, made as alien as it was human in order for Fane's seed to take root, for Fane's children to grow there.

Desire rushed into Fane's cock with the thought of those children. But just as quickly, the lust for sex turned into the lust for blood, his body tightening, preparing itself for attack as a car stopped in front of the trailer, its doors opening, two people exiting. A female who could only be Kiziah. A male who wasn't Cable.

Fangs emerged and primitive urges threatened to overwhelm Fane, to force him into acting without thought. Demanding that he destroy any competition, anything that might stand in the way of claiming a bride, a kadine, a mate.

Kiziah shivered as she neared the Airstream, her footsteps slowing, a sudden fear gripping her, the eerie presence of the supernatural making her reluctant to go inside her home.

"I don't like seeing you parked in a nearly empty campground like this," Walt said, his hand moving to rest on her shoulder. "The folks hosting Margo and me wouldn't mind one more rig in front of their house overnight. And if you come back, we could play another couple of rounds of cards."

Kiziah patted the hand. "I'll be fine, Walt. Honestly. You know Mom and I camped here plenty of times. And it's not completely deserted."

Walt's heavy eyebrows drew together as they halted in front of the door. "There's a presence here. Do you feel it, Kiz?"

She almost wished that Walt hadn't said anything, but she answered, "Yes."

"I've felt this one before," he surprised her by saying.

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

He took a long time answering. "I'm not sure. It happened last night, while the coven was gathered in a circle. I felt this presence just before a rush of incredible magic and power. I've never experienced anything like it, even during ceremonies where a sacrifice was made."

"I'll be fine," she repeated, "and I'll see you and Margo in Ashburg tomorrow."

Walt pulled Kiziah against him in a fierce hug. She returned the hug then watched him get in his car before unlocking the door and moving inside the Airstream.

Fane didn't allow her time to panic. To scream or run. He swamped her with the pheromones of his kind, a potent mix that rendered humans dazed, helpless, easy prey.

"Come to me," he commanded, seeing why Cable had fallen so completely under her spell. She was exquisite, sleek lines and gentle curves, soft in all the places they were hard.

Kiziah moved to him, her scent reaching him first, swirling around him, mixed with Cable's and reminding him that she was not prey to be used and forgotten. Reminding him that Cable would care not just how Fane took her, but about her willingness to be taken.

It was a good thing for all of them that the man who'd brought her home was just a friend. Otherwise Fane wouldn't have found the strength to control the alien instincts roaring through him. Wouldn't have been able to find that small illusory piece of him that remained human after The Transformation, a conscience sparked by the love he held for his once-human mother and the knowledge she would not approve of him taking a woman against her will, forcing his attention on one who hadn't offered herself to him.

"I'm Fane," he said, reducing the pheromones and letting Kiziah slowly surface from the enthrallment that held her.

Kiziah blinked, trying hard to overcome the confusion and lust swamping her. Had she invited him in? She couldn't remember doing it, and yet here he was. She glanced toward the bed, almost expecting to see Cable lounging there. "Where's Cable?" she asked, her heart beginning to race.

"He'll join us when he can."

She shivered, not sure she wanted to be alone with Fane. Wondering why he was here at all. There was something about him that frightened her, stirring up a primal instinct to flee in the presence of a deadly predator.

Kiziah tried to take a step backward but didn't, the thought leaving almost as quickly as it had arrived. The fear receding, pushed deep inside until it was caged and ignored in favor of the lust washing over her. Images of Fane thrusting his cock into her filled her mind, heating her face and tightening her nipples, sending blood rushing to her clit and labia.

Some part of her knew that what she was feeling didn't completely originate within her, and yet she didn't resist the powerful sensations. She remained mesmerized, lost as Fane stroked her cheek. But when his hand moved lower, to cup her neck so that her pulse beat against his palm, the fear surged wildly inside of her, trying to break through its restraints, pushing her heartbeat up until it thundered in her ears—becoming both a siren's song and a curse to Fane.

Fane only barely suppressed a hiss as he struggled to keep his fangs from extending. Fear was a heady aphrodisiac to his kind. The lure of it, the ease in which it became an addiction in itself was part of the reason why laws were put in place forbidding full vampires from killing their prey by draining them of life, from feeding on both their blood and their fear. They couldn't afford for their existence to become widely known, especially now, in a world with advanced technology. Their kind did not reproduce so quickly that they could afford the loss of their women and children. They were not as indestructible as they were once.

He'd come here angry and hurt even though he knew his losing control in the shower, first biting Cable, then telling him that he needed a kadine had been the catalyst for Cable ending up in Kiziah's bed. A part of Fane had wanted to strike out at her because she'd claimed a piece of Cable for her own. But as he looked at her, as his

cock urged him to hurry and take her, to know her in the same way Cable did, a sliver of guilt edged its way into his chest so that he found no satisfaction in her fear.

She had not asked to be pulled into his world. Had not been prepared for it.

Unlike his mother, who had been created for and raised to be his father's kadine, who had been given her future mate's blood at birth and during the confirmation ceremony so that when the time came, her body would burn with the change but accept it easily – Kiziah's own conversion would be nearly as painful as The Transformation had been for him. She *would* suffer, and he would witness it, helpless to do anything to spare her.

Be happy, Fane. His mother's gentle refrain eased some of the anger and hurt inside him.

Here was a chance to have both a kadine and Cable. Here was a chance at happiness.

She was beautiful and he trusted Cable's judgment when it came to women. And then there was the fact that his body responded to her. His cock had grown limp, unenthusiastic at the prospect of searching for a bride among the women who bear the kadines. But now it was hard and full, impatient for Fane's thoughts to catch up with his desires and accept what had been obvious to it from the moment Fane had stepped inside the travel trailer and inhaled her scent, seen the picture of her. She was his. His to fuck. His to breed. His to share with Cable.

Fane allowed the pheromones to swamp her once more, to force her fear back again so that her pulse was a smooth, steady beat against his palm. He pulled her body to his, burying his nose in her silky hair and breathing her in. "Don't be afraid," he found himself murmuring, allowing a moment of gentleness, offering reassurance. "You're safe from me." His lips suckled at her earlobe. His tongue traced the delicate shell of her ear. "Can you imagine us together?" he asked, letting her surface from the enthrallment though his voice was a dark seduction in and of itself. "You and me? Then with Cable joining us?"

"Yes," Kiziah whispered, trying to remember how she'd ended up in Fane's arms, her nipples tight and her cunt flushed, his erection pressed against her belly. She didn't even know him and yet she wanted him desperately. Couldn't imagine turning away from him.

A whimper escaped when he let her go, stepping back, the expression on his face so carnal that she shivered in response. Her own need so great that she didn't hesitate when he commanded her to strip.

Her clothes fell with a soft rustle of fabric. Her gaze never leaving his, though her heart began thundering in her chest once again when his expression grew more possessive, when something primitive, alien flickered in his eyes.

There was no escape for any of them.

The sight of Kiziah standing in front of him, naked, vulnerable, her body primed for his had stirred up The Heat beyond anything Fane had ever known. Beyond anything he would have guessed he could feel for a woman.

In a heartbeat he understood why it was so often necessary to restrain a female in the early stages of the claiming and making of a kadine. One wrong move, one hint that she thought to resist or flee, and he would become little more than a beast intent on subduing and taming his mate.

With Cable he could suppress the urge to dominate. Not with Kiziah. It was a shout in every cell. A deep-seated need. A programming that couldn't be ignored.

"Get on the bed," he growled, tensing, a part of him wanting her to disobey – the saner part, the part connecting him to Cable, praying that she would do as he'd ordered.

She hesitated and his cock pulsed with anticipation, beaded with arousal, a lubrication that would aid him if he was forced to pounce and mount her roughly.

Fire burned through his veins, an inferno that filled his chest and abdomen, growing more intense when her head ducked in submission before she moved to the bed and crawled onto it.

He didn't remember closing the distance between them or stripping out of his clothing. In an instant the sight of her on her hands and knees, her slick, pink vulva peeking from between her thighs became the center of his awareness. The center of his existence.

He pinned her down, his chest against her back, his breath coming in heavy pants, his hand pushing between her legs so that his palm cupped and rubbed her mound, glorying in the smooth curves and tiny clit, the bare skin and soft strip of pubic down.

It was easy to see now why Cable had become entranced with her, enthralled. She was exquisite. Intoxicating.

Fane's gums ached with the need to allow his fangs to descend, to pierce her neck so that he could take her blood at the same time his cock surged into her and bathed in her sex. He forced himself to deny the first need, but there was no denying the second.

With a groan, he covered her fully, using his thighs to widen hers. His mouth going to her neck and shoulders, kissing, nipping, sucking, building the need in both of them until she shifted the angle of her pelvis just enough so that his cock slid in.

At the feel of her clamping down on his penis, slick and hot, lust roared through Fane, a wild rush that left little room for thought. His lips pulled back in a snarl of ecstasy as he thrust in and out of her, using the weight of his body to hold her down, not because she needed to be restrained but because the alien stamp of his ancestors was imprinted so thoroughly that there was no denying it.

He soaked the fevered heat of her skin in through his, drank her cries of pleasure and drowned in the scent of her arousal, knowing as he did it that no other woman would ever satisfy him now.

Chapter Seven

Cable contemplated parking the sports car at the gate of his father's estate and walking in but then thought better of it. That'd be even more suspicious than arriving long after everyone should be in bed and going directly to the vaults.

If he got lucky he could be gone within an hour, without anyone knowing he'd been there. Shit. He was still reeling. Riding a roller coaster of hope and disbelief. Almost unable to accept the possibility that he could have what he wanted most. Fane and Kiziah.

He touched his neck. Pleasure still radiated from the spot on his neck where Fane had bitten, this time marking Cable by leaving a bruise along with the barest hint of twin puncture wounds. It'd taken forever for the hard-on he'd had to go away.

Cable parked, moving quietly from the car into the house, slipping downstairs and tapping in the first of a sequence of codes allowing him access to the parts of his father's estate reserved for padrall use. The areas no woman routinely stepped foot in—though in his mother's case, he suspected she knew much of what happened in the order without ever visiting the secured rooms.

Guilt attacked Cable. The same sickening crush he'd experienced off and on since his discussion with Fane. But just as he'd done in the car, he pushed it away.

Kiziah was the perfect choice for them. She already knew about Fane and despite the fact that she hadn't been raised to become a kadine, she'd grown up among psychics and those who dabbled in the supernatural. She would be able to handle the knowledge that vampires and dhampirs existed. And once they were bound together, changed by the exchanges of blood, there would be almost no barrier between the three of them. They'd know each other more deeply, more thoroughly than was possible for a human. They'd be able to touch each others' thoughts and emotions at will.

Warmth filled Cable, flooding in with the memory of Kiziah's soft eyes and gentle smile. She'd forgive them for pulling her into their world. And they'd spend a lifetime making sure she was glad they'd done it.

Cable stopped in front of the door to the vault, the library where the records maintained over centuries were kept, keying in the last set of codes and hearing the click indicating that the lock had disengaged, moving inside and going to the book which indexed where each volume of history resided. Within minutes he had several heavy tomes in front of him, all detailing the Santori history and lineage. If only Domino could have come up with an ancestor name, even a reference to a period of time...

Cable sighed and reached for a book. While he'd been driving, he'd had plenty of time to contemplate how he was going to approach the task. He started in the early

years of Julius Caesar and moved forward, finding what he was looking for in the year Rome burned while under Nero's rule.

Domino's ancestor laid out what he'd done clearly, probably viewing the padrall who'd dutifully written down those since-translated words as little more than a scribe. Cable could barely contain his excitement as he read the account, so intent on what he was doing that he was unaware of his father's presence until a heavy sense of foreboding began to smother his exhilaration.

Fuck! He flinched when he saw his father in the doorway but tried to brazen it out, casually closing the book as he said, "You're up late."

"As are you. No one mentioned you'd come back. Is the matter with Matteo settled?"

"Yes. Sarael's completed the transformation to kadine. I verified it earlier in the evening. They're on their way back to Italy now."

"Good." His father moved to stand next to the desk, his glance taking in the tomes spread across the polished wood. "You're researching the Santori?"

Cable shrugged, worry tightening his stomach. There was no good reason for him to be here at this time of night. "Domino is on the scene. I thought I'd update the records, then became curious as to how close he was to the change and got sidetracked."

His father nodded, but something in his eyes only intensified the dread in Cable's gut. "And Fane? Has he been through The Transformation?"

Cable had no choice but to tell the truth. Fuck! Why hadn't he mentioned Kiziah as soon as he saw his father?

"Yes. I'll update the Mercier records as well since I'm here." He shifted in his seat, having to decide in a split second whether late was better than not at all. "I'd like to take some time off. I've met a woman. Someone I'm serious about." His father's eyebrows lifted in silent question and Cable continued, "Her name's Kiziah. I think you'll like her."

"I'm sure I will." His father moved to the door, pausing there. "When did Fane change?"

"Last night, when he was hunting with Domino."

"Domino gave him first blood?"

"Yes."

His father nodded once again. "I'll leave you to updating the records then."

Cable tried to feel relieved when his father left. Instead all he felt was a sense of impending doom. Fuck, he needed to get out of here, but now he had to delay long enough to write something in the records.

He rose and moved over to where the Mercier records were shelved. Going immediately to the volume chronicling Fane's history—or what was known of it. The ancient vampires had loved to provide information, seeing it as a testament to their

importance, their invincibility. The more modern ones were wary, aware of how dangerous information could be in a time when cyberspace was open to anyone.

The door opened just as Cable placed the tome on the desk. This time there was no way to maintain the illusion that everything was okay.

His father entered, along with his three older brothers. Any one of them was large enough and strong enough to prevent Cable from leaving the room, the three of them together were a wrecking crew.

"We can do this the easy way or the hard way, son. Take off your shirt."

Christ! Cable shut his eyes briefly. There was no defending himself, no point in saying a word or trying to avoid his father's edict. They'd never hear a thing he said and even if he was foolish enough to resist, they'd tear his clothing and beat him to a pulp if necessary if they thought they were saving him from disgrace and a centuries' long mistake.

He took off the jacket and shirt, draping them over the back of the chair and standing straight as his father prowled around him while his brothers continued to block the door. "Just the one exchange?" his father asked, knowing that the presence of the marking signified that blood had been shared.

Cable ground his teeth together. They'd force him to strip completely if they thought he was lying. "Yes, just the one." And because he knew what was coming and that Kiziah might be his only chance for escape, he added, "Fane's not sexually bonded to me. He lost control when he found out I'd been with Kiziah, but he regained it before it went any further."

His father reached down and gathered Cable's shirt and jacket, retrieving Cable's cell phone and putting it in his own pocket before picking up the volume of Mercier history. "You've been saying for years that we should enter all the records into the computer. Maybe revisiting the past as you input the data will open your eyes to what vampires are really like. You'll remain down here until I determine that it's appropriate to allow you to leave the estate."

Cable had expected as much. He scooped up the Santori chronicles since he had no way of knowing how much of their history his father was aware of, and he had no intention of letting him stumble on the very information that had brought him to the estate. A small measure of relief settled in Cable's chest when he was allowed to keep the books, his brothers escorting him, blocking any chance of escape as his father led the way to a rarely used room that was, in truth, a holding cell.

"Sleep, son. We'll talk more in the morning," his father said before closing the door, the sound of a deadbolt being keyed into place filling the silence left behind him.

* * * * *

Kiziah woke with the same disorientation, the same elongation of reality that she'd experienced the previous night when she'd left the carnival without being aware that

she'd done so. Only this time, instead of finding herself on the street, heading to her car, she found herself in a strange room, a strange bed, with a man she didn't remember meeting, though she knew who he was and what they'd done together in the Airstream.

"Where's Cable?" she asked, suddenly needing him to be with her, needing answers, needing...

Fane covered Kiziah's body with his own, swamping her with just enough pheromones to alleviate her anxiety and suppress her rising panic. "He'll be here soon," he said before pressing his lips to hers and demanding entry with his tongue.

He hated the necessity of enthralling her in order to control her fear, but there was no way he could allow her to escape or to remain in the travel trailer now that he'd started dreaming of the moment when she'd become his kadine. It still shocked him just how much he desired her. How his cock filled with blood and need just looking at her, how the scent of her, the softness of her skin and feminine curves were a potent lure.

The attraction would grow in intensity after the first blood exchange, after he and Cable had taken her at the same time, their cocks rubbing against each other in the depths of her body as they fucked. At the moment, the pheromones were reducing her fear and inhibitions, but Fane wanted to believe her responses weren't only the result of enthrallment. He wanted to believe that she found him as intoxicating as he found her.

"More," Kiziah whispered, embracing the dream-like fog that made it seem perfectly normal to be in bed with Fane. She'd fantasized about it, hadn't she? She'd wondered if the fortune-teller had seen a future that included both Fane and Cable.

She shifted restlessly underneath him. Wrapping her legs around his waist as she wound her arms around his neck and pulled his face down for a kiss, savoring the way he took control immediately, used his tongue to force her own into submission. Used the hardness and weight of his body to assert his dominance.

"I need more," she whispered when the kiss ended, tilting her pelvis in order to entice him to enter her again.

Fane shuddered as she drenched his cock with her arousal. The Heat raged through him, demanding that he give Kiziah what she was asking for—and then some. That he drive his fangs into her soft neck and feast on her as he fucked her.

With a groan he levered himself up so he straddled her, the rub of his cock and balls against her belly almost undoing him. Her whimpered protest making his penis jerk in protest.

He didn't trust himself to have his mouth anywhere near her, not if she was going to wrap him in her arms and legs, surround him with her scent and slick desire as she pleaded for more from him. He was too close to claiming her completely. One drop of blood and even his love for Cable wouldn't keep him from sexually bonding himself to Kiziah. The instincts of his alien ancestors, the drive to survive and procreate was too strong, too deeply programmed into Fane's cells.

He had to withstand the temptation she presented, at least until Cable returned. And then he would gorge himself on her. Would savor the incredible rush that came with an exchange of blood.

And yet he needed relief. His cock screamed to feel her wet heat.

"Please," she whispered, rising onto her elbows, and Fane's gaze focused on her mouth. On lips left swollen by his kisses.

He rose from the bed in a fluid motion, his hand going to his cock, his mind prepared to command her if necessary, but after a small whimpered protest at his leaving, she came to him on her own, came to him on hands and knees, the delicate line of her spine and the curve of her buttocks driving more blood to a cock that was already engorged to the point of pain, to balls that were already heavy and full.

"Yes!" he hissed, his fangs elongating at the first touch of her lips to his penis, his hands going to her head, his fingers spearing through her luxurious blonde hair, steadying her, holding her in position as one of her hands cupped his sac and the other encircled his shaft.

Her touch was different than Cable's, softer, gentler, and yet within seconds Fane knew that he'd forever crave the feel of her hands and mouth on his cock. She squeezed him, teased him, tormented him, refused to grant him the release he needed until he was draped over her, moaning in ecstasy, shivering under the lash of her tongue, crying out as she sucked him, as she manipulated his testicles and explored the sensitive skin behind them, the tip of her finger drawing close to his back entrance, making him crave Cable's presence, making him fantasize about having Cable penetrate him as Kiziah pleased him.

With a groan Fane tightened his grip on her hair, tried to drive himself deeper into her throat, wanting her to swallow him, to take everything and still plead for more. And yet she resisted, warning him with the press of her teeth against his swollen cock that she wouldn't be rushed, her small defiance driving him higher, taking him dangerously close to the point where he would lose control.

She ignored his commands until he was panting, his buttocks clenched, his fists curling and uncurling in her hair, his body straining. Until he was a breath away from savagery, a shiver away from simply overwhelming her with his physical strength. And then she relented, letting him thrust against the back of her throat as she swallowed. Her capitulation a command instead of a surrender. But he couldn't stop his body from obeying her, couldn't stop his seed from burning through his cock in a lava-hot rush that left him dizzy, momentarily weak, sated. Hers in a way that he had never belonged to any woman.

He actually cried out when her mouth left him, his hips thrusting, his cock beginning to fill, wanting to enjoy the sweet torment of her mouth again. She laughed, a husky sound of female power that reawakened his primitive instincts and brought the urge to dominate crashing through him, a beast let out of its cage though it remained leashed.

Fane fell on her then. His mouth covering hers, his tongue thrusting aggressively against hers, his hands pinning hers to the mattress.

He knew he should lash her wrists and ankles to the bed as a safeguard against his own hunger, but he wanted Kiziah to accept being tied without the calming effects of the pheromones. He wanted Cable present to share those first moments of absolute trust when she allowed herself to be rendered completely helpless.

He rode the edge of control, drinking in her cries of pleasure as his body held hers to the bed. Her whimpers and pleas feeding the primitive parts of his soul.

She was soft and slick, utterly mesmerizing. His. And the desire to mark her became unbearable.

He left her mouth, reveling in the way she arched upward, offering him her breasts as he tormented himself by kissing her neck before moving lower, licking and biting, sucking on nipples that were much different than his own or Cable's. He'd thought to bury his face between her thighs, but as she writhed against him, her body an inferno of need, he gave in to her pleas, driving her to orgasm again and again with his mouth and teeth on her nipples, his cock a hard ridge against her tiny clit.

Only when she was limp underneath him did he cover her body completely, pressing his cock into wet heat and feminine mystery, his own breathing coming in fast pants as he tried to go slow, to savor the feel of her. But it took only a whimper, a single "Please, Fane," and he was helpless to do anything else but yield, to thrust hard and fast, his own release ripped from him when she came, arching into him, driving him deeper, the tight fist of her inner muscles squeezing him mercilessly until his sac was completely empty of seed. And even then, he didn't want to leave the heaven of her body.

He collapsed, shifting their position so that his penis remained embedded in Kiziah's channel as she snuggled against him, a small sigh escaping her as she fell into an exhausted sleep. The Heat was still present, urging him to claim her completely. The Hunger echoed the desire. But with her relaxed in sleep and his thoughts filling with worry about Cable, Fane was able to resist the dual call of his ancestors. To resist the urge to exchange blood.

It was nearing dawn. He could feel The Sleep closing in on him.

Cable should have called by now, even if only to say that he hadn't yet found the information he was looking for. Cable *would* have called to ensure that Kiziah was okay, safe, and to satisfy his curiosity about Fane's reaction to her.

Fane smoothed his hand up her spine before tangling his fingers in her silky hair. His worry deepening. It was all too easy to guess the reason for Cable's delay.

No doubt Cable's father had seen the bite mark and restricted Cable's movements in order to make it impossible for the second and third exchanges to take place. If Cable weren't a padrall, then one exchange alone would be enough for Fane to assert his claim. But the relationship between vampire and servant was complex, made more so by the wealth and power, the knowledge that the padralls had gained over the

centuries. Fane doubted he would prevail in a challenge until after the third exchange had been made.

His stomach twisted with fury, despair, frustration. To be so close...

Kiziah made a distressed sound in her sleep, as if sensing the turmoil of his emotions, and Fane's heart experienced a jolt of warmth. He'd never thought there was much pleasure to be had with a woman, other than for a quick fuck, a release that didn't require an investment of time and emotion. But one night with her and he knew he would enjoy having a kadine, having *her* during the centuries that lay ahead, though it didn't lessen the desire for Cable.

Fane's hand slipped lower, smoothing up and down her spine, knowing that she was the key to Cable's freedom. And yet he couldn't compel her to act. He had only a vampire's ability to enthrall, to blur short-term memory in order to subdue prey and feed.

In frustration Fane concentrated on a black-handled knife lying on the dresser, using his mind to hurl it across the room and drive its sharp point into the wall. For once he wished he had Domino's ability to hypnotize and control instead of his own special affinity with knives.

Reluctantly he eased away from Kiziah, his cock protesting the loss of her warmth when he pulled it free. The familiar rage swamping him, at having gone through The Transformation before he was ready to give up the ability to move about during the day in a human form.

He removed the knife from the wall, dropping it on the dresser as he paced. Misgiving swamping him as a plan formed in his mind. Uncertainty making his chest tighten.

The Sleep was pressing down on him and he couldn't see any other option but to present Kiziah with the choice of helping Cable and hope that she cared enough to do it. If she chose to run, then he would contact Domino when night fell. But until then, she was the key to Cable's freedom.

Fane stopped next to the bed, unable to resist tracing his finger over her eyebrows, her nose, across her lips. She was truly exquisite. He had to trust Cable's judgment when it came to her. He had to believe Cable wouldn't have fallen so quickly for Kiziah if she wasn't the right woman for both of them.

A small laugh escaped. And perhaps he had to trust the tarot cards, though it still amused him that Cable had sought a reading from the carnival fortune-teller. Fane leaned down, compelled by a strange tenderness to brush his lips against Kiziah's before leaving the room in order to prepare his message for her.

Kiziah woke and for all of a second she thought the previous night with Fane had been an intensely erotic dream. But as soon she stretched and felt the sheet slide across nipples that were sore, she knew it hadn't been. And then when she opened her eyes

and saw a bedroom instead of the interior of the Airstream, she accepted that all of it had happened—despite the dream-like quality of her time with him.

She slipped from the bed and moved to the window, opening the heavy drapes and flooding the room with sunlight. A smile escaped when she saw clothing scattered about and knew that this was the bedroom Cable and Fane shared.

A part of her still couldn't believe she was here, a part of her remained troubled that she couldn't remember being brought here. But none of her was sorry for what had happened.

Kiziah laughed, thinking about The Hermit. She'd decided she was ready for change, she'd fantasized that the tarot reading meant she would be with Cable and Fane, but she hadn't allowed herself to truly believe it would happen.

She showered, selecting one of their shirts from the closet until she could retrieve her own clothing from the travel trailer, then went in search of them. Her happiness fading, replaced by uneasiness when they couldn't be found. By a deep pool of worry when she saw the tarot cards on the kitchen counter.

The High Priestess, The Hermit, The Wheel of Fortune, and on top of the Wheel, The Lovers, held down by an ornate ring and resting on a folded piece of paper.

The note was written in bold strokes. *Cable has not called or returned from his parents' estate, which can only mean he isn't free to do so. The ring is a betrothal ring. It will gain you access to his family estate and hopefully to him. Today the choice is yours whether or not to help him. Fane.*

Chapter Eight

The estate was like something out of a fairy tale. Gleaming towers rising out of mist-enshrouded lands. Imposing and majestic. A place of wealth and privilege and quiet luxury.

Kiziah rubbed her left hand against her thigh, hyperaware of the ring Fane claimed would gain her access to the estate, to Cable. Looking at the scene in front of her, she could believe it was a place of secrets, a place where Cable's family held him prisoner.

Despite the subtle threat contained in Fane's note, it was the message in the tarot that made the decision to come here easy for Kiziah. The belief that her mother's spirit had sent the dream directing her to Madame Helki's tent, where their lives had first touched, their futures linked by the cards.

She rubbed her hand against her thigh again, ridding it of moisture as she gathered her courage, parking the car on the long circular driveway and walking to the front door. The loud sound of chimes announcing her presence as soon as she pressed the doorbell.

A butler answered. His black suit and haughty manner purposefully intimidating.

"I'm here to see Cable," she said, hating that her voice held a tremor of nervousness.

"Wait here," he said, leaving her standing in the foyer, a subtle rebuke for arriving unannounced.

Kiziah stayed put, not giving in to temptation and moving to take a closer look at the artwork on the walls, priceless pieces done by long-dead masters. She shoved her hands into her jacket pockets, huddled against the old wealth surrounding her until the sound of footsteps approaching made her heart leap and race.

Anticipation filled her, only to be smothered when an older man entered the foyer, followed by two others who had to be Cable's brothers. "You're here to see my son?"

"Yes." She wiped the nervousness from her hands before pulling them from her pockets, offering her right one to Cable's father though his eyes appeared riveted to the ring on her left hand. "I'm Kiziah Stillwell."

He took her hand, clasping it between his instead of shaking it. His gaze finally lifting from the ring to Kiziah's face. "Cable spoke of you."

A thrill of pleasure pierced her heart despite the aura of foreboding pressing down on her. "Can I see him?"

"Let's discuss it elsewhere."

He left her little choice other than to fight to reclaim her hand or to follow where he led. A third son joining the other two a minute later, making her feel more like a

prisoner being escorted to the gallows than a guest visiting one of their family members.

They moved through art-rich hallways, passing through several doors that required a code to unlock, until finally entering a spacious den, a masculine haunt furnished in leather and wood.

Cable's father released her hand, pausing momentarily before saying, "I'm sorry that this is necessary, but you'll need to take off your clothing before you'll be allowed to see my son."

Heat poured into Kiziah's face. Shock and disbelief rushed through her mind. "Excuse me?"

He didn't flinch. "If you want to see Cable, then you must disrobe first."

She could see that he was serious. She could also see that it wasn't a lewd request.

One of Cable's brothers spoke. "Do you want me to bring Mom down? She could..."

"No." His father's tone was brusque. "I told you earlier, I don't want her to know Cable is here. Not yet. She worries enough, and she's soft, especially when it comes to him."

"I'm not carrying a weapon if that's what you're worried about," Kiziah said, surprised they couldn't hear her heart thundering in her chest. "If you want to pat me down instead of..."

Cable's father looked at his sons, then at Kiziah. This time he took her left hand in his, rubbing his thumb over the ring, but he didn't relent. "I'm sorry. This has to be done, with witnesses. If you want to do it in stages, that's fine. It can be done quickly, but it must be done."

She thought about the doors they'd passed through, each with a keypad, each requiring a code to unlock it. "I'm not carrying a listening device or anything else to spy on you."

Something flickered in his eyes. He smiled slightly. "If you'd prefer to leave, one of Cable's brothers will escort you out."

"Can you at least tell me why?"

His thumb grazed the betrothal ring again. "Once you're fully committed to Cable, he'll provide an explanation."

The answer was more ominous than the setting, sending a shiver along Kiziah's spine as she pulled her hand from Cable's father's hand.

She tried to close her mind, to concentrate on Cable as she removed her jacket. Her fingers were trembling so badly that it took several attempts to unbutton her blouse and shed it.

The four men moved closer, staring intently at bared flesh. Flooding her with discomfort.

"Now the bra." It was a gruff command and she obeyed, grateful that there was no passion, no undertones of arousal in the older man's voice.

Once again she felt their eyes on her body, looking for something, the father's clinical, almost embarrassed when he saw her love-bruised nipples, the brother's appreciative and yet not lustful as color flushed over her breasts and into her face, making her ask, "Can I put my clothes back on?"

"Yes."

She hurried to cover her upper body. Then without being told, she released the hooks on her long skirt and let it fall to the ground, widening her stance, praying that they wouldn't ask her to remove the barely-there panties that afforded her a small measure of modesty.

"Good," Cable's father said, the single word signaling she could gather her skirt and refasten it as he shifted his attention to his sons. "Bring Cable in."

They left without a word, the thought that it took three of them to ensure Cable's compliance filled Kiziah with anxiousness and foreboding, so that his arrival only a few moments later had her rushing into his arms, clinging to him.

He hugged her to him, his lips covering hers in a long sharing of breath and existence. A welcoming of two souls already connected, already finding a home in each other.

"It seems like we've been apart forever," Cable whispered when their mouths finally separated.

He wanted to ask her a hundred questions but couldn't. He wanted to get the hell off the estate but knew it wouldn't be as easy as Kiziah showing up—her presence the proof his father desperately wanted to believe, that Cable was returning to the heterosexual fold.

Anger moved through him. They would have made her strip before they brought him out. They would have made sure she hadn't been bitten, wasn't somehow in Fane's control. He tightened his grip on her, kissing her again, this time in apology for what she'd suffered on his behalf. What she was yet to suffer.

Part of him wanted to be noble. To tell her to leave. To spare her. She hadn't asked to be pulled into his world. Into Fane's. But now there was no escaping it. And so he once again promised himself that he would spend a lifetime ensuring her happiness.

"Christ, I missed you," he said, trailing his hand down her arm, pulling it from his waist so that he could make a show of kissing the ring on her finger, though he doubted Fane had discussed the full implications of wearing it. That once a woman entered their world, the only escape from it was death.

He kissed her again, his cock hard against her abdomen, his tongue more insistent this time, his hands moving over her body, touching her in ways he knew would arouse her. His own body becoming more feverish as hers softened and molded against his, as she followed his lead, whimpering in need, clinging to him, uncaring about their audience.

She jerked when his father's voice intruded, a gruff, "Escort them to the bedroom," and Cable let her take a step backward, grimacing when the other men in his family quickly checked to make sure the front of his trousers indicated that Kiziah had aroused him. He squeezed her hand in reassurance and continued to hold it as they moved back in the direction of the room serving as his prison.

Kiziah tensed when she saw the deadbolt on the door and noticed that there were no windows in the bedroom, but she allowed Cable to lead her inside. "It'll be okay," he said, hugging her as the door closed behind them, both of them listening for the sound of a lock being keyed into place and relaxing slightly when it didn't come. "It'll be okay," Cable repeated, smoothing over her hair, rubbing his cheek against hers.

"That's really your father? Those are really your brothers?"

Cable laughed, a sound that managed to contain a hint of amusement. "We've been having a little disagreement," he said, kissing her forehead before leading her to the bed and sitting, pulling her down next to him. "Believe it or not, most of the time we get along."

Their eyes met, she opened her mouth to ask if the disagreement centered on Fane. He gave a slight shake of his head and brushed his thumb across her mouth to keep her from speaking, then eased her onto her back, positioning himself along her side.

"You're okay?" he asked, leaning over her, this expression telling her he knew she'd been forced to strip. The tone of his voice telling her how guilty he felt.

"A little nervous," she whispered, the warmth in her face echoing the more important warmth in her heart. "It's better now."

"Zia, I'm sorry..."

This time Kiziah brushed her thumb across his mouth to silence him. "It's okay. As long as you tell me we're going to be able to leave—together."

Cable sighed, tracing her eyebrow, her nose, smoothing over her cheek with his knuckles before picking up her left hand and kissing the ring. The guilt resurfacing.

She was here, which meant Fane had sent her. She was in the room with him, which meant Fane hadn't bitten her. And yet he couldn't imagine Fane hadn't been with her, hadn't fucked her. Didn't want her as his kadine.

Christ! What insanity. She might be his only hope of escaping the compound, but at the same time he couldn't stomach the thought of trapping her—not if Fane had decided to let her go.

Cable released her hand, his fingers going to the front of her blouse, his gaze locked on hers as he slowly undid the buttons, fire surging into his cock when her eyes widened slightly with arousal, when she shivered in anticipation. Fuck! He wasn't sure *he* could let her go. She filled empty, needy places in his soul, places he hadn't even been aware of before she came along.

She whimpered when he pushed the fabric of the blouse aside and opened the front clasp of her bra, brushing the material away and exposing taut, well-loved nipples. His

cock pulsed and leaked at the sight, satisfaction roared through him with the knowledge that Fane had been with her.

There was a flicker of guilt in her face, trepidation when he shifted his focus from her nipples and met her eyes. He leaned down and kissed her, his palm covering her breast, massaging the hardened, bruised tips. "Are you okay with this?" he asked, praying Fane's jealousy and hurt hadn't mixed with The Heat and Hunger in such a way that he'd taken her when she wasn't willing.

"Yes." It was a soft whisper but it sounded as loud as a shout in Cable's heart.

"I'm glad." He kissed her again, long and deep, languid, as though they had all the time in the world though he knew they didn't. He hadn't found the cameras or microphones, hadn't bothered looking, but he knew the room contained them. He knew his fathers and brothers were watching, listening, waiting to see if he'd fuck her, and after he did, they'd return with the padrall chaplain for a shotgun wedding—orchestrated by the groom's family instead of the bride's. They knew him too well, knew he'd never stray from Kiziah if he married her.

He had to hope she wouldn't balk, that the presence of the ring on her finger would prepare her to play it out so they'd be allowed to leave. He could only be grateful his fathers and brothers hadn't read the Santori histories or stumbled on the knowledge that a vampire could have both a kadine and a companion.

A chill moved through him. A doubt.

If they had, then this would serve their purpose just as easily. They could hold the two of them on the estate until Kiziah was pregnant with a son.

Even though he'd exchanged blood with Fane, the conversion process wouldn't begin without sex. He was still fully human, as was Kiziah, and there were rules even the vampires must abide by. Fane would be considered rogue—marked for extermination—if he converted Kiziah and a padrall fetus died as a result.

Fane would never risk it. *He'd* never risk it. None of them could afford to gamble with such high stakes. Their lives would be forfeit along with Fane's.

Christ! When had his life become such a mix of heaven and hell?

But there was no way to alter the course they were on. No other choice but to gamble a future that suddenly seemed perilous.

He kissed Kiziah again. Her gentleness and acceptance a balm for his soul. The twining of her tongue with his making him suddenly desperate to feel her wet sheath fisting around his cock, holding him inside her.

Cable shifted, trailing kisses down her neck, over the slopes of her breasts, then lower, licking and suckling the tender, bruised nipples, his ministrations making her arch into him as her fingers speared through his hair, holding him to her.

Sensation surged through Kiziah, a blend of pleasure and pain she was starting to crave. There was still a dream-like quality to the time she'd spent with Fane, but this was real, intense. She moved restlessly against Cable, wanting him to bury his face

between her legs and give her clit the same attention he was giving her nipples. She wanted him to slide his tongue in and out of her hungry channel, to devour her.

She cried out when he bit her nipple, her hands clenching and unclenching in his hair, a tortured "Please" jerked from her as she rubbed her clothing-covered mound against his erection.

Cable groaned and lifted his head from her breast, shifting just enough so that he could pull her skirt up and push her panties down, the wanton display making her blush even as her cunt lips flushed with pleasure and slickened with arousal.

"You're so beautiful," he murmured, gliding his fingers along her slit, coating the bare skin of her labia with her own juices.

"Please, Cable," she whispered and he laughed, a warm husky sound that was music to her heart, a stroke to her feminine pride.

"Please what?" he teased, unzipping his jeans, jerking when she immediately encircled his cock with her hand, groaning when her thumb rubbed the swollen, sensitive head, wetting his heated flesh with the arousal she found there.

This time it was Kiziah who laughed, rising up to press her mouth to his. "Please make love to me. I need you."

He didn't bother to remove any more of their clothing. Didn't bother with additional words other than a single command, a request she found it easy to grant. "Put me inside you," he whispered, and she guided him home, both of them shivering as his unprotected cock pushed into her for the first time, a throbbing hard presence in a hot, tight channel. A coming together as they were meant to be, with nothing separating them.

Cable sealed her mouth with his and began thrusting, the feel of her so exquisite that he knew it'd be over too soon. Christ, it was impossible to care about anything else when he was with her.

The narrow bed shook with the violence of their passion. The room filled with the sounds and smells of sex, ending in a crescendo of swallowed moans and whimpers as their tongues and mouths touched, fused together by shared need and desire.

They were still joined, struggling for breath, hugging each other in the aftermath of pleasure when the door opened and one of Cable's brothers stepped into the room.

"Go away, Levant," Cable said.

"Get cleaned up. Marshall is on his way here. Dad's explaining the situation to Mom."

Even though he'd expected it, Cable's gut still tightened. "Can we have a little privacy here?"

His brother hesitated, knowing Cable was referring to the hidden cameras and microphones and not his presence. His gaze flickered to Kiziah and then back to Cable. "Fair enough. You've only got a few minutes."

He ducked out of the room and Kiziah asked, "What's going on?" Fear moving in again, edging toward terror. There were so many undercurrents swirling around her. With Fane. With Cable's father and brothers. She shivered, picturing the lock on the opposite side of the door, a deadbolt meant to keep occupants in rather than out.

Once again Cable picked up her left hand, kissing the ring, knowing there was no way to break it to her gently. "Marshall's the chaplain who serves my family."

It took Kiziah a few seconds before she understood what he was really saying. Shock coursed through her. Uncertainty. Confusion. "They expect us to get married? Now?"

Cable squeezed her hand. "You can say no. You can say you planned on a long engagement. They'll let you leave. Maybe even let you come back. They'll watch you to see if you're pregnant or not. But you'll be safe."

"And you'll be here."

"Yeah. I'll be here."

"And if I go through with the ceremony?"

He hesitated, but in the end he had to be honest with her. To allow her a solitary chance to escape. "Even then, there aren't any guarantees they'll let us leave, Zia." He rubbed his thumb over her knuckles. "They may still keep me here, they may keep us both."

"Why?"

Cable shook his head slightly, not willing to risk mentioning Fane despite Levant's agreement to allow them privacy. His brother's intentions would yield quickly to their father's command. "I can't tell you. Not now." He cupped her breast, playing with the nipple Fane had loved so thoroughly. "I know it happened fast, Zia, but I can't imagine not having you in my life." His gaze met hers. "We could be happy together. Happier than we'd be separately."

Kiziah's cunt clenched, the emphasis on *we* and the way he was toying with her nipple a confirmation that their relationship would include Fane. She shivered and he leaned over her, kissing her, a tender joining as his hand glided over her abdomen. "I can't tell you the things I think you should know before we get hauled out of here for my father's version of a shotgun wedding. But I can tell you that if you say yes, I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make you happy."

His words rang in her ears, joined by the fortune-teller's admonishment to grasp and hold what fate would offer her. The Wheel of Fortune had stopped spinning, revealing a path, presenting a choice, and she could say *no* but the opportunity might disappear completely.

The door opened again. This time a different brother entered the room. He shook his head and smiled slightly when he saw that they were still on the bed, their clothing still undone. "Time to go. Marshall's here." He folded his arms over his chest, his stance an indication that he intended to wait for them.

"Your choice," Cable said, brushing his lips against Kiziah's before shifting position and zipping his pants, then sitting, using his body to shield hers so she could reorganize her clothing before they both got off the bed.

They held hands as they moved through the estate, Cable's other two brothers joining them before they left the secured section of the house. Closing ranks as though they were afraid their prisoners were going to make a break for it when they stepped through the courtyard door and into the sunshine.

For a minute Cable was overwhelmed by emotion. Christ! A part of him had felt like a condemned prisoner, afraid there were going to be endless years of being trapped in the tiny room.

Kiziah squeezed his hand and he looked at her, his heart turning over when he saw the concern and understanding in her eyes. *You okay?* she mouthed and he stopped so suddenly that his brother crashed into him and cursed, even as Cable's mouth was covering Kiziah's, his tongue stroking against hers as he held her against him.

Shit! He was losing it. Unraveling when he needed to hold it together.

He knew his father and brothers acted out of love and he couldn't hate them for it. But he also knew they wouldn't relent, wouldn't let him out of the compound until they believed that he was unavailable to Fane, or Fane was unavailable to him.

He hadn't realized how deeply the loss of freedom had affected him until he stepped outside and breathed in the crisp smell of late fall, felt the warmth of the sun as it kissed him.

Christ, if Kiziah said no... He didn't think he could walk quietly back to his cell and calmly accept his fate.

Chapter Nine

Kiziah's eyes burned with unshed tears as she became aware of the tiny tremors going through Cable's body. His turmoil reached inside her, taking her heart in a painful grip and squeezing mercilessly. She tightened her arms around his waist, hugging him, trying to convey with the slide of her tongue against his that she wouldn't abandon him.

Only when their lungs began to burn from lack of oxygen did they separate, and even then, only enough to breathe. She rubbed her cheek against his, enjoying the rough feel of stubble. "They're waiting for us in the chapel. The sooner we get through the ceremony, the sooner we can leave and start our unplanned honeymoon."

Relief rushed through Cable. Joy. Blocking his throat for a minute so words were impossible. When he could speak again, he laughed, a rough, husky sound. "Oh yeah, I think I'm ready for a honeymoon." He kissed her, a quick press of his lips to hers, and they resumed walking, hand-in-hand, not stopping until they stood at the front of the chapel.

The ceremony was simple. The words standard—though the way the chaplain emphasized *until death do you part* unnerved Kiziah, making her grip Cable's hand tightly as undercurrents swirled around her, chilling her.

There was nothing romantic about what happened in the chapel, no smiling faces or congratulatory hugs, even Cable's mother seemed tense and unhappy, worried, her gaze flicking back and forth between Cable and Kiziah, her eyes telegraphing a message that she wished they could talk together, but her husband's constant presence and the hand he kept on her arm made it clear that such a thing was impossible. Kiziah's hand shook slightly as she signed her name underneath Cable's in an old leather-bound book recording their marriage. Her nerves stretched to the breaking point when she was led into a small office off the main chapel, photographed and fingerprinted as though she were being identified and incarcerated for life.

"Can we go now?" she asked when it was done, her voice strained.

Cable tensed, his gaze shifting from the chaplain to his father. "My *wife* has gone through enough for one day. I assume you've seen everything you need to see and you don't need to witness our wedding night. I'd prefer not to spend it here if it's all the same to you."

The chaplain was the one to answer, shooting Cable's father a look as he said, "Our marriage vows are sacred and permanent, our protection extending to those taken as wives. I see no reason why Cable and his bride can't embark on a honeymoon."

Cable's father nodded stiffly. His body posture revealing that he wasn't happy about granting them freedom. But Cable and Kiziah didn't hesitate to make their escape.

"What about your car?" Kiziah asked a few moments later, after they'd cleared the gates of the estate, Cable driving her Suburban, their hands clasped.

"It's safe where it is. And besides that, we'll need this one to move your travel trailer." He squeezed her hand. "You know it can't stay at the campground?"

Kiziah shivered, the events of the day finally catching up with her. Even now, in her own car, she felt nervous, paranoid, worried that something would go wrong and they'd end up back in the small room with the deadbolts on the outside of the door. "Is it safe to talk?" she asked, thinking of the obvious wealth of Cable's family, the hallways full of priceless artwork, the doors she'd seen, with their keypads and coded locks. It was easy to imagine listening devices in the car.

Cable laughed, but the sound held no humor. "Probably. But it would be smarter to save the serious discussion for later." He rubbed his thumb over her knuckles. "I'm sorry you had to meet my family this way. Believe it or not, they're not always so intense – well, not my brothers anyway."

"But your father is."

"Oh yeah." Cable sighed, a deep unhappy exhalation and Kiziah knew he was thinking about Fane. "I'm the youngest, so he blames himself for the way I turned out."

"The male lovers?"

"My father views sexuality as a choice and according to him there is only *one* correct choice. Heterosexuality." He risked a glance at Kiziah. "Does it bother you?"

"That you've been with men?" *That I'll see you and Fane together?*

"Among other things."

"No. I haven't had a conventional upbringing. Will it bother you to go to psychic fairs with me or to know that's where I am? Around people who dabble in the supernatural?"

Cable tensed. Christ! They were going to have a battle on their hands when she tried to do that. And he'd be in the middle, seeing her side as well as Fane's.

Fane would never allow her to be in a place where the Believers might target her or where she might be caught in the crossfire. And even if their enemy wasn't present, he'd still forbid her from being in a place where he couldn't guard her personally. Vampires and dhampirs might associate with individuals who possessed supernatural abilities, but they didn't willingly wade into a crowd of them and advertise their existence.

He forced the tension from his body and pulled her hand into his lap, rubbing the back of it against his shirt-covered abdomen. "I'm glad you had the upbringing you did," he said, evading her question about attending psychic fairs. "I'm glad you're open

to the possibility that there are..." He foundered, wondering if he should ask her if she believed in vampires. Wondering how much of her time with Fane she remembered.

He almost asked. He was desperate to bring the conversation fully out into the open. To hear her say she was willing to share a bed with Fane and him.

Would it turn her on to see Fane fucking him? To see him fucking Fane? Would she like having both of their cocks in her, knowing they enjoyed the feel of each other as much as they enjoyed being held in her hot depths?

Cable shifted their hands so that hers was pressed against his jeans-covered erection instead of his belly. Christ! He wanted to pull over and find a hotel room—or better yet, just pull over and fuck in the back of the Suburban.

"Zia," he warned when her hand wriggled away from his and went to his zipper.

She laughed, a husky sound that had him leaking, panting, grabbing his cock when the zipper slid down and his penis sprung free. "Put both hands on the steering wheel," she ordered, shocking herself with her sudden intention. *What was it about Cable that made her want to do things she'd never even fantasized about doing?*

"Fuck!"

But he obeyed. His abdomen becoming taut, his breathing ragged as she leaned over and touched her lips to his shaft. Nibbling along its length as he clenched his buttocks and pressed against her mouth.

She wanted to see Cable and Fane together, she wanted to have them both at the same time. The night with Fane might have seemed more like a dream than a reality, but it had fueled her fantasies. It had fueled something else too, the need to hold her own, to explore her own feminine power. To take as well as to give. To claim as well as to be claimed.

The car jerked and swerved, coming to a stop at the side of the road as Kiziah swirled her tongue around the sensitive tip of his penis, grasping his shaft in her hand before slowly allowing the head of his cock to push through firmed lips and enter her mouth. He shuddered as she began sucking him, laving him with her tongue. And she reveled in the way he cried out, in the way he panted and writhed, his groans becoming whispered pleas, filling her with wonder and pride that she could reduce him to begging. That she could give him so much pleasure.

Fire roared through Cable's shaft, hotter even than the vampire blood Fane had forced him to ingest. He wanted to spear his fingers into her hair and fuck in and out of her mouth, but his hands remained locked on the steering wheel, the fear that she'd stop what she was doing keeping them there.

"Christ, Zia!" he said, his spine arching, his head thrown back as he tried to drive his cock through her fist and into her throat. He wanted her to swallow him whole, to take everything he had to offer.

She responded by sucking harder, more aggressively, her moans joining his as she loosened her grip on his shaft and took him deeper.

Cable lost all control then, couldn't think beyond the wet heat of her mouth, the absolute ecstasy of what she was doing to him, his climax coming in a rush that left him dizzy and weak, hunched over the steering wheel with his eyes shut, his fingers still locked into position on the gray vinyl.

"Give me a minute and I'll take care of you," he managed, already imagining himself thrusting his tongue into her slit and feasting on her clit as mercilessly as she'd just taken his cock.

Kiziah cuddled against his side and put her head on his shoulder, laughing softly when she realized the Suburban's engine was still running. She traced her fingers over his abdomen, his sweat-slick shirt clinging to his skin. "It's almost dark. Let's wait until we get back to the house."

The words penetrated the thunder of Cable's heartbeat and the fog of pleasure in his mind. "House?"

She smiled against his shoulder. "I was there this morning, when I woke up—alone—and you weren't back yet."

Cable closed his eyes. Fuck. He wished he knew whether or not his brothers had planted a listening device in her car. He wanted to be able to talk to her without worrying about whether or not they were listening. He should have guessed that Fane wouldn't leave her at the campground—especially in a trailer that could be blown up or attacked.

"Is the Airstream parked at the house?"

"Yes."

He grimaced at the puzzlement he heard in her voice. Guessing that she didn't remember moving it.

She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder and sighed. "I need to get to Ashburg. My friends are probably starting to worry and my booth should already be set up. The psychic fair has started."

"I've got money to support us," he said, wanting to head off the confrontation he knew was coming.

She moved away so she could see his face, circling back to the very thing he wanted to avoid. Repeating her earlier question. "Will it bother you to go to psychic fairs with me?"

Cable zipped his pants, his cock protesting the confinement, willing to fill once again and offer Kiziah a different type of pleasure. He shifted the car into drive and pulled back onto the road, then reached for her hand. "We need to talk about that."

Now that they were married in the eyes of his order, he could share information with her without the risk of being sanctioned. Without worrying that it would put her in danger.

The vampires were merciless when it came to betrayal. The padralls were every bit as merciless when it came to maintaining secrecy. *Until death do us part* wasn't a figure

of speech but a literal interpretation of the vows that bound the wives who hadn't been born into their world to their husbands. Women didn't leave and take their padrall sons with them. Widows didn't stay widows for long unless they were elderly, their trustworthiness proven over the course of long marriages.

Cable rubbed her hand against his leg, the nervous gesture making him grimace. "I don't know how we're going to work the psychic fair thing out," he admitted. "Do you remember the guy at the carnival?"

"The one the police found dead?"

"Yeah. He followed you after you left Madame Helki's tent. But you were never at risk."

She stiffened but didn't pull her hand from his, hesitated before asking, "Do you believe that supernatural...things can exist?"

A startled laugh escaped before Cable could suppress it. She tried to pull her hand away. He tightened his grip. "Sorry, you surprised me. I was going to ask you the same thing." He risked a glance at her, cringing inwardly when he saw her disbelieving expression. "I mean it. Now tell me why you asked."

When she didn't answer he contemplated pulling to the side of the road and seducing her back into the easy companionship they'd been enjoying. Instead he pressed the back of her hand to his mouth, nibbling on it. "Please, Zia."

"You'll laugh again."

"No I won't. Promise." He squeezed her hand.

She sighed and admitted, "I don't remember leaving the carnival. I still don't remember it. There's just an impression of obsidian eyes. Then I was on a dark street and the man with the tattoo on his neck was following me. I started running. I felt...a presence...then it was gone and he was gone."

Cable rubbed the back of her hand against his cheek. "He was part of a secret society that kills people who aren't 'human' enough to suit them. They call themselves True Believers. Most of the American members seem to favor the crucifix tattoo on their neck." He risked another glance, saw Kiziah's wariness and added, "That's why I was going to ask you if you believed supernatural things could exist."

Her eyebrows drew together. "You said I was never at risk. You knew about the presence?"

"His name is Domino Santori. For better or worse, you'll probably end up meeting him."

The fortune-teller's reading came instantly to mind. And Kiziah could see now that it held so many different meanings. Not just accepting Fane and Cable as lovers, or dealing with the strange swirling undercurrents of Cable's family, but embracing the supernatural in a way that was more personal than anything she'd known.

Despite a childhood spent among psychics and witches, charlatans and true believers, she didn't consider herself blessed with any true power or ability. Even the

awareness of the supernatural she possessed, she attributed to having grown up accepting it rather than denying and blocking it.

But almost from the first moment her life had intersected Cable's, the instant she'd emerged from Madame Helki's tent as he was contemplating entering it, she'd come into contact with one supernatural force after another. The presence on the darkened street, Domino, what she'd felt when they visited Matteo and Sarael, and then last night – with Fane.

"Are you a warlock?" she asked and Cable choked back a startled laugh.

"No."

"What about..." She stopped before she said Fane. "What are you then?"

"Just a man, Zia. Your husband." He squeezed her hand. "I can't tell you anything more right now. But I meant what I said before they dragged us to the chapel. I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make you happy."

"I believe you," Kiziah said, snuggling against his side, pressing a kiss to his cheek.

They drove in silence after that, both of them aware of the rapidly darkening sky, but for different reasons.

Kiziah's thoughts were on the psychic fair, on the dreamcatchers she'd spent long hours creating in order to have them ready for this particular event, the friends she'd looked forward to seeing, on Margo and Walt who were expecting her and would start to worry if she didn't call them soon and tell them she was okay.

Cable's thoughts were on Fane. On what would happen when they got to the house.

His cock was hard and his conscience was in overdrive. He could rationalize not talking about Fane, not warning Kiziah. He could tell himself that he didn't dare say anything for fear that his brothers were following them, listening in to the conversation, prepared to swoop in. But it didn't ease the ache in his heart. The worry that she'd feel betrayed. That she'd be terrified in the moment when she realized what Fane was.

With the third exchange of blood the three of them would be able to touch each others' thoughts and memories, to communicate without words, to feel each others' emotions. She'd know the agony he'd experienced at each point where his decision brought her a step further into his world.

He wanted to believe she'd forgive him. He thought she would. But he found the prospect of her fear and pain intolerable.

"Do you believe in vampires?" he asked, the words tumbling out, pushed by conscience as the last turn before Fane's driveway came into sight.

Kiziah jerked in reaction. Her eyes meeting his in the mirror, and Cable eased the car to the side of the road so he could turn and face her. Knowing in that instant that this had to be her choice too.

"Is that what Domino is?" she asked, the steadiness of her voice giving him hope.

"Almost."

She frowned but let it pass. "Matteo and Sarael?"

"Matteo. Sarael's still partly human. She'll always be partly human." He leaned forward and rubbed his cheek against hers, a small measure of relief filling him at the unexpected opportunity to provide her with information. "Sarael can go out in the sunlight, she eats like she always has, but she needs Matteo's blood to survive. Just his. She's got a foot in both worlds. It's the only way vampires can reproduce. They're not humans who have died and risen from the grave, they're a different species altogether."

Kiziah closed her eyes and Cable grimaced. Christ. Hearing himself say it out loud made *him* sound crazy.

For a moment, a bubble of hysteria formed in Kiziah's chest. For a split second she wondered if she'd somehow stumbled down the rabbit hole into an alternate reality – or worse, that she'd reached such a desperate state of loneliness that she was willing to believe anything in order to share her life with a man.

But just as quickly as those thoughts rose, memories of the dream which had sent her to Madame Helki's tent in the first place pushed them away. Whether it was fate or her mother's hand, something had set her on this course and she *was* well suited for it – if she had the courage to continue.

Cable had stopped here to give her a choice. Just as he'd done on the way to the chapel. He hadn't intended for her to be pulled into his world. She was sure of that. She was equally sure that he was trying to do the right thing, his honor and integrity shining through.

She made an intuitive leap then, her heart racing as she replayed what he'd just said. *Sarael's still partly human... It's the only way vampires can reproduce.*

If she hadn't been with Fane already, she might have been angry, offended. Terrified at what lay ahead.

She took a deep breath, the movement making her aware of her love-bruised nipples and causing heat to curl in Kiziah's belly at the reminder of how thoroughly Fane had dominated her the previous night, how possessive his expression had been while he was doing it. He might have agreed to include her because he wanted children, but last night hadn't been about reproduction.

And yet she wanted to know she wasn't something to be used and then disposed of. "If Sarael has to have Matteo's blood in order to live, what happens if he grows tired of her?"

Cable's laugh held honest amusement, though the look in his eyes told Kiziah he understood what she was really asking. "A vampire and his kadine...his wife...are sexually bonded to one another. They're almost one person."

He hesitated and Kiziah thought he was going to say more. When he didn't she reached over and unbuttoned the first few buttons on Cable's shirt, opening it to expose the love bite on Cable's neck. Now that she was studying it closely, she could see the faint hint of fang marks.

Color rushed to her face along with the memory of being required to strip in front of Cable's father and brothers. Realization dawned. They were making sure she hadn't

been bitten by Fane as well. Perhaps wondering if she'd been sent to try and "break Cable out of prison".

Kiziah had to smile at the thought, though she shivered just thinking about the small room with the deadbolt lock on the outside. Her fingers went to the bite mark and Cable jerked, his body going tense, his breathing changing with a sharp inhalation that had Kiziah looking down at his lap.

A fierce rush of desire swamped her when she saw his hand gripping his jeans-covered erection. Blood pooled in her labia and she knew the time for questions was nearly over. She wanted him. She wanted Fane. She could guess what was going to happen when then got to the house, but she wanted to hear it confirmed.

"You said Sarael's still partly human. Does that mean she used to be completely human? Did it take three exchanges of blood to do it?" she asked, pinching the love bite between her fingers and growing hotter when she saw how it affected Cable. How his face went taut and his eyes closed, his tiny male nipples tightening into hard points as his hand squeezed his cock.

"Yes, and yes," he answered, nearly panting. His arousal fueling her own so that she leaned in and pressed her lips to his, the kiss becoming so carnal that within seconds her shirt and bra were open and his hand was on her breast, mercilessly driving her higher with his assault on her nipple.

When their mouths parted, it was Kiziah who whispered, "Let's get to the house so we can start our honeymoon."

Chapter Ten

Fane sensed that Cable was near and settled on the couch to wait, his cock protesting the position, but he was tired of prowling and stalking around the house. It did nothing to relieve the tension. In fact, it only seemed to escalate it, leaving him feeling like a caged beast.

He needed to fuck. He needed to feed.

And his body didn't particularly care which order he did it, though his mind knew it mattered. He had to maintain control, to wait long enough to find out what Cable had learned from the Santori histories.

And if Cable was alone? If Kiziah wasn't with him?

Fane hissed, erupting from the chair and going to the front door, only barely able to stop himself from flinging it open and waiting outside. Irritation moved through him. He didn't trust Cable's family. They might well have surveillance equipment in place, knowing that if such equipment was discovered they could claim it was done for Cable and Fane's protection. He couldn't risk advertising his presence, not tonight.

They'd be gone from this place tomorrow. Safely housed in a secluded rental near Ashburg.

Fane's cock pulsed in warning and he gripped it through his jeans. Wishing he knew how far away Cable was and whether Kiziah was with him. He wasn't surprised there'd been no call. He hadn't expected Cable to risk one, especially if it had been difficult escaping his father's estate. Still, Fane's resolve not to go outside, not to rush, was tested when he heard the sound of the Suburban's engine and guessed they were together.

It seemed to take forever for them to park and get out of the car, each moment of their delay increasing the hunger in Fane, the need. The anticipation of what was to come.

The smell of sex assaulted him as soon as Cable and Kiziah came into the house. The scent of it triggering primitive impulses which were impossible for Fane to control. He crowded them, his attention split for an instant between the two of them before he pressed Cable against the back of the door and fused their mouths together in a kiss that was part relief and part carnal intent.

It turned Kiziah on to witness it. It shocked her just how much she liked watching their hands roam and seeing how they ate hungrily at each other's mouths.

She was primed for this. Primed for them. Wet. Swollen. Achy from pleasuring Cable in the car but insisting they wait until they were back at the house before doing more.

With a groan Fane released Cable and turned, reaching for Kiziah and wrenching open her shirt and bra before pulling her against him, pausing long enough to allow Cable to move in behind her and gather her hair to the side, exposing her smooth neck. Fane captured her lips, one of his hands going to Cable's side while the other covered her breast.

White-hot need poured into Kiziah, sliding along her tongue and down her throat, blossoming from her nipples and streaking to her swollen cunt and engorged clit. Fane's kiss alone was enough to make her whimper, but the feel of Cable's mouth on her neck was sweet torture.

She shivered in anticipation when Cable released the catches on her skirt and it dropped to her ankles in a pool of color. Her breath caught in her throat when his hands moved around, forcing their way between Fane and her in order to unzip Fane's jeans. All three of them moaning when Fane's cock sprung free to be captured by one of Cable's hands while Cable's other slid into Kiziah's panties, his fingers brushing over her clit on their way to her opening.

Christ! It was hard for Cable to think about anything beyond somehow getting their clothes off and his cock inside of Kiziah while Fane did the same. He was about to come just from grinding against her buttocks, from pumping his hand up and down Fane's shaft while his fingers fucked in and out of Kiziah.

He lifted his mouth from her neck just as Fane's lips left hers, their eyes meeting, Fane's full of the same wildness Cable had seen on the night Fane forced him into the first exchange of blood. "Do it," Cable said. "It has to be done before we can go any further. Just don't come."

Fane's nostrils flared in reaction to the words. Savage victory filling his eyes. "It was in the histories?"

"Yeah."

Fane needed no further urging. He leaned forward and pressed a kiss to Cable's lips before returning to Kiziah's, thrusting his tongue against hers, every cell in his body screaming for him to allow his fangs to descend.

This time when the kiss ended he went to her neck, tempting himself with the siren call of her blood, the pounding, erratic beat of her pulse against his lips. His fangs slid free, but he didn't give in to the urge to sink them into her delicate neck. Her nipples lured him and he lowered his mouth to them, the change in position forcing him to take his own cock in hand, but it increased his excitement to have Cable's hand move to her breast, to cup it as Fane laved and sucked a nipple that still bore the marks of his attention the night before.

Kiziah's moans and the scent of her arousal tested Fane's control. The knowledge that her reactions were freely given, a result of what they were doing to her and not enthrallment was a powerful aphrodisiac.

With a groan, Fane forced his mouth away from her nipple. His cock was engorged past anything he'd ever known. His balls full and aching. He tightened his grip on his penis and closed his eyes against the rush of need pulsing through his shaft.

A tremor of fear moved through him. *Don't come*, Cable had said.

Fane knew it would take every ounce of control he possessed in order to avoid spewing his seed—both in the instant he sank his fangs into Kiziah and in the instant when he pressed her mouth to his chest and their fate was sealed with the first swallow.

He delayed by removing her shoes and stockings, mesmerized by the sight of Cable's hand disappearing into the feminine scrap of black material, The Heat burning hotter with the sounds of her soft gasps as Cable's palm grazed her clit and his fingers slipped in and out of her slit.

One again Fane took his cock in hand, tightening his grip to the point of pain. A reminder. A warning. He couldn't come. "Slide them down," he growled, The Heat roaring through him when Cable complied, sending her shirt and bra as well as her panties to the floor so that she stood naked between them.

It was more than Fane could bear. He leaned in, his mouth going to her wet folds, his tongue fucking into her channel, tasting Cable as well as Kiziah.

His! The single word reverberating through every cell in his body, along every nerve ending. With every heartbeat. His! Both of them were his!

It was a primitive chant. A thunderous demand.

A compulsion more powerful than even the strongest vampire's. To take. To dominate. To possess.

Kiziah writhed between them, bombarded by sensation. Reduced to a sensual being whose only reality was the pleasure her lovers were giving her.

Her whimpers turned to cries and then to a litany of pleas. She begged for release and Fane gave it to her. His mouth going to her clit, sucking the small organ, torturing it with his tongue until she climaxed, flooding his senses with her orgasm.

Fane pulled her leg over his shoulder then, his nostrils flaring at the arousal coating her inner thigh, his heart beating in the same wild rhythm as hers. She jerked when his fangs slid through skin, but she didn't fight him, and soon she was burying her fingers in his hair, holding him to her as he took her life's blood.

Fane consumed her, devoured her, lost himself for long moments as The Heat and The Hunger merged, becoming one in a way that only occurred with a bride, a kadine, a lover who would be bound to a vampire for centuries. It was a dark ecstasy like no other, to take from a willing partner until their heart stuttered in warning, to know the pleasure he gave them was so great that they'd trade their lives for his bite.

He very nearly killed her. But the touch of Cable's hand on his face, Cable's urgent, "Christ, Fane, stop!" pulled him from the darkness of his own primitive nature.

Fane ran his tongue over the bite, sealing it, though satisfaction rippled through him with the knowledge that the mark would remain until the claiming was finished.

He rose, his gaze taking in her closed eyes and pale features, her shallow breathing—Cable's angry, worried expression as he held Kiziah upright.

With a sharp mental command, Fane summoned a knife from a table in the living room, grasping it when it came to his command, using it to open a wound in his chest before pressing Kiziah's mouth to the opening. Both he and Cable coaxing her to drink with murmured words and soothing strokes, both of them filling with relief as she responded, taking from Fane as he'd taken from her.

When it was done, Cable swung Kiziah into his arms and carried her to the bedroom, gently placing her on the bed and coming down after her. "Okay?" he asked between kisses.

Kiziah laughed, joy filling her heart at the caring she saw on his face. "It wasn't horrifying at all."

"Good," Fane growled, dropping to her side, his expression fierce, though she saw a hint of worry in his eyes.

She smiled and brushed her fingertips across his lips. "How come I'm the only one naked?"

Something dark and feral moved through Fane's eyes and her body tightened in reaction, blood rushing to her labia, filling her cunt lips, making her restless to spread her legs. And as if scenting her renewed arousal, Fane's nostrils flared, his lips parted slightly, the hint of fangs causing her nipples to bead and her clit to stand erect, to throb against the rough texture of Cable's jeans.

She shivered when Fane's hand moved to Cable's back, tracing his spine and causing Cable to pump against her in reaction, to groan and say, "Christ, my cock is about to explode."

"Let's finish what we started then," Fane said, rolling from the bed and removing his clothing, his cock bobbing in greeting when Kiziah's gaze focused on it.

Kiziah sat up when Cable stood in order to strip, her hand going to Fane's cock, her thumb teasing over the flushed, full head as she drew him to her. He grabbed her wrist as though he was going to stop her then hissed as if the thought of losing her touch was more than he could stand.

Feminine satisfaction filled Kiziah and she leaned forward, intent on taking him into her mouth, but Cable stopped her, his laugh husky as he pulled her away, positioning her so that she was on top of him, his cock a hard, demanding presence against her mound. "He can't come until we're both inside you, Zia. That's why I was at my family's compound, to research how the three of us can be together."

Cable shifted, impaling her with a single thrust and making her cry out in pleasure. She shivered when his hands went to her buttocks, tensed when Fane positioned himself behind her. "Relax," Cable said, kissing her, luring her tongue into his mouth as Fane's hands went to her breasts, the two of them building the heat into an inferno of need so that Kiziah was once again writhing between them, pleading with her body for them to take her, to satisfy her, to claim her as theirs.

They commanded the pleasure and she went where they took her, loving the intimacy, the knowledge that they needed her just as much as she'd come to need them. She whimpered when Fane's penis slipped into her back entrance, cried when he was all the way in, the pain-pleasure of the dual penetration, the fullness, the feel of their cocks rubbing against each other while they fucked a dark enthrallment that she'd forever crave. The shared release a pinnacle beyond anything she'd ever dreamed was possible.

* * * * *

Kiziah woke between two warm male bodies and stretched, smiling when she realized that she wasn't sore even though she should have been. Oh yeah, she should have been. In the last couple of days she'd had more sex in more ways than she'd had over the rest of her life put together.

It was daytime. She knew it even though the windows were covered with heavy drapes.

Fane stirred and she turned on her side, running her hand over his chest, unconsciously looking for the place where he'd cut himself before pressing her lips to his skin. He stirred again and her gaze shifted lower, to his cock. Her hand followed and his eyes slitted open.

"You're awake," she said, sensing that she had the advantage for a change.

"The Sleep doesn't hold me completely yet." His face tightened as his cock pulsed against her fingers. "Straddle me, Kiziah."

She laughed. A husky sound of feminine power.

He hissed, flashing his fangs, but the sight of them only made her feel more reckless.

Kiziah slid her leg over him, pressed her mound against his erection and measured it with the rub of her clit along his engorged flesh. "I'm entitled to some answers. Can you go out in the sun?"

He jerked and hissed, but he answered her question. "Not in this form."

"What form then?"

"Mist. Particles in the air."

Lips brushed across Kiziah's shoulder. A hand reached around to cup her breast and tweak her nipple. Cable. "I'll answer your questions later, Zia. Hurry up and fuck him. I want my turn while The Sleep tames him."

The comment brought a dark look to Fane's face, a promise of retribution to his eyes that sent a gush of arousal from Kiziah's swollen pussy. She shifted, reaching down and guiding Fane's cock to her wet, ready entrance, teasing him until he surged upward and filled her completely, taking control, teaching her that *tame* wasn't a word she could apply to him.

He commanded her body and it obeyed him, he made her beg and she did it, but it was a sweet surrender that left her sated as she slipped to Fane's side, content to watch as Cable pinned Fane's wrists to the mattress before covering Fane's body with his own, the kiss they shared an aggressive duel, a struggle until a hidden accord was reached between the two of them and Fane spread his legs so that Cable's cock could lodge in his back entrance.

In a heartbeat, the need for release returned and Kiziah's hand went to her cunt, her fingers stroking her clit and plunging into her channel in time with Cable's thrusts. She whimpered as they moaned, her breath grew short, matching their pants, her body arching and straining for relief as their movements became violent. Until finally she cried out as they did, lost in a haze of satisfaction.

Kiziah closed her eyes and snuggled against Fane as Cable left the bed, and then against Cable when he returned from the bathroom, fresh from a shower and Fane rose, his movements echoing the lethargy Kiziah was starting to feel. The heavy need to sleep that was beginning to press down on her. Unnatural in its intensity.

She became aware of the burning in her veins and her heart rate jumped in response. A moment of alarm, a tremor of fear moved through her when it took every ounce of willpower she possessed to open her eyes and sit up.

As though sensing her distress, Cable rose and helped her to her feet, holding her against him. "It'll get easier, especially once you're out in the sun."

"This is The Sleep?"

"A diluted version of it."

A few minutes later, Fane stepped out of the bathroom, his skin still glistening, as though he'd only taken enough time to hastily dry himself. "We can't stay here," he said, his attention directed at Cable. "Domino's rented a place outside of Ashburg. I left the directions with the car keys. He's already there." Fane's lips quirked upward. "As is the carnival apparently."

"You'll sleep on the way there?" Cable asked. "We could tow the Airstream."

"Leave it. And check the car in case your family is monitoring your movements and conversations."

Cable grimaced and nodded. Kiziah started to say something about visiting her friends at the psychic fair but thought better of it when she remembered the conversation she'd had with Cable.

Though she'd only been with Fane and Cable a short time, of the two of them, she already knew Cable was the most reasonable, the one who was more likely to bend, to compromise. The one most likely to tell her what she needed to know in order to warn the people who were like family to her.

True, the people she'd grown up among were used to being careful, to dealing with those who didn't approve of their lifestyles and abilities. She'd never been to a psychic fair where hellfire-and-damnation protestors weren't gathered outside, chanting and

carrying placards. But if the danger this time was greater, the threat of physical harm more real, then she would do what she could to protect her friends.

A shiver moved down her spine. A realization.

Was this why the dream of Madame Helki's tent had been sent to her? Why she'd been set on this path?

"Hey, you still awake?" Cable teased, gently shaking Kiziah and making her aware of how completely she'd been lost in her thoughts.

"Just thinking." She glanced at Fane and tensed when she saw his expression. His dark eyes were boring into her, so focused that she had the fleeting impression he was trying to read her mind. "I think I'll take a shower," she said.

Cable pressed a quick kiss to her shoulder. "I'll scrounge up something to eat. See you in the kitchen."

The mention of food had Kiziah's gaze flicking back to Fane's face. The dark intensity had been replaced by the gleam of anticipation. "It will be difficult, but I can last until tonight," he said, making her womb flutter and her nipples tighten with his slow perusal of her body.

She escaped to the bathroom, laughing at herself when moments later she started wishing that Fane or Cable, or both, had followed her into the shower. Sex under steamy hot water had always been a fantasy of hers. But given the dimensions of the stall in the travel trailer, she wouldn't have even considered trying it there.

As the water cascaded over her, she inventoried what she wanted to take from the Airstream. She assumed they'd come back and get it later, but she could see the wisdom of not taking it with them.

Even under the hot blast of the shower, she felt chilled just thinking about her trip to Cable's family estate. It wasn't difficult to imagine them putting devices in the cars and continuing to watch until they were sure Fane wasn't around—or until it was too late to do anything about the situation.

Kiziah closed her eyes. Once again seeing the anticipation glittering in Fane's eyes. Hearing his words as his gaze traveled over her body, settling for an instant on the bruised bite he'd left on her inner thigh.

She'd had no idea just how intensely erotic it would be, how the place where his fangs had pierced would become an erogenous zone. If she stood under the shower much longer, allowing the hot water to strike the mark, she'd end up masturbating until she came and even then it wouldn't be enough. She'd end up back in bed all day and then all night. They couldn't afford for that to happen. They needed to get to Ashburg.

Kiziah forced herself to leave the shower, to dry off and return to the bedroom. A smile formed when she saw that Cable had gone out to the travel trailer and brought in a selection of clothing for her to choose from. She went for comfort—jeans, a blue flannel shirt, tennis shoes—then located Cable assembling sandwiches at the kitchen counter.

"Thanks for getting my clothes," she said, slipping her arms around his waist and hugging her front to his back.

"It was a sacrifice. I'd rather keep you naked."

She laughed and rubbed her cheek against his back. "Where's Fane?"

Cable pressed the top piece of bread to the sandwich he was making and then turned in her arms, a small, worried frown on his face. "Can't you feel him?"

And she did. Not in a location that could be pinpointed, but more in a general sense, a possessive presence that hovered around them. "He's in his other form?"

"Yeah, he can remain awake that way. Otherwise he'd be crashed on the bed. Some of the really, really old vampires can fight The Sleep in their human form and move around inside a dark house during the daytime." Cable grinned. "But Fane's just a babe."

Kiziah snickered. "You're a babe too."

Cable nibbled on her bottom lip. "I'm crazy about you, Zia. You know that, right?"

"The feeling's mutual."

They ate and afterward Cable disappeared into the bedroom in order to pack clothing for himself and Fane. Kiziah took care of the few dishes they'd dirtied, then decided to get the Suburban packed with the clothes and dreamcatchers she wanted to take with her.

The first hint of trouble came when she stepped outside and the air around her began vibrating with menace. Her heart jerked, shooting adrenaline through her veins, and she actually turned to get back into the sanctuary of the house, but as she stepped through the doorway, she realized the source of her fear. Fane. Who apparently didn't want her to leave the house.

"I'm just going out to pack the car," she said, feeling self-conscious about talking to thin air.

The menace intensified as soon as she stepped back outside, an unseen presence that swirled angrily around her as she transferred everything she needed from the Airstream to the Suburban, coming across a package that had gotten relocated to the backseat when they abandoned Cable's car at his father's estate and drove away in hers. A package she'd promised to deliver to a shop in Waynesville when she passed through on the way to the psychic fair.

Kiziah looked up when Cable emerged from the house carrying a couple of suitcases, her heart spasming at the frown that immediately formed on his face when he saw her at the Suburban. "We're taking the sports car," he said, nodding to the much smaller black car—Fane's probably since they'd left Cable's behind.

"I don't want to be stranded, Cable. I'm sure there are going to be times when you need to be off doing errands." She wasn't about to bring up visiting the fair or the campground where many of her friends would be staying.

Cable grimaced and she imagined he was feeling the same lash of frustrated anger from Fane that she was. "I can understand that, Zia, but..."

She gave a slight shake of her head. Glad that if they were going to have a first fight, that it would be outside in the sunlight, where it would remain one-against-one instead of two-against-one.

She might be at a disadvantage, not understanding much about Fane and Cable's world, but she didn't intend to be made a prisoner of it. "We can stay within sight of each other. We can talk on the cell phones."

"Christ, Zia," he said and she could hear in his voice that he really did understand and that he wasn't going to try and force her into the sports car.

She left the protection of the heavy Suburban and went to him, putting her arms around his neck and pressing her lips to his. He dropped the suitcases and pulled her into a hug. "This is going to make things very intense tonight."

"I'll deal with tonight when it gets here."

"Easy for you say." His grip tightened momentarily. "It may get rough. Will you be able to handle that, Zia?"

She shivered, the images coming to her mind so erotic that her cunt and clit responded in a flash of heat and blood. "Will you?"

He laughed. Husky, masculine. "It's different for me."

"Then I'll deal with tonight when it gets here," she repeated before stepping away from him.

Chapter Eleven

They traveled to Waynesville without any sign of being followed, Kiziah and Cable talking on cell phones, laughing and teasing mostly, though Kiziah used some of the time to find out more about the world she was now a part of, about vampires and dhampirs, kadines and padralls – and especially about the Believers.

Her heart ached when Cable told her about the death of Fane's family. Her stomach tightened with fear for the safety of those attending the psychic fair and she almost suggested they forget about stopping to deliver the package, but she'd promised, and it would only take a few minutes to accomplish.

The small shop she needed to visit was in an old section of town, redone to attract tourists who came for the picturesque setting and the chance to marvel over the beauty of autumn. The street was lined with cars, though the sidewalks were empty save for a handful of elderly artists with their canvases lined up, each of them painting their interpretation a fountain turned green with time.

A burst of warmth blossomed in Kiziah's chest when Cable got out of the sports car and immediately jogged the block that separated them, pulling her into a hug and kissing her, Fane's irritable presence hovering around them. "You need help carrying anything?" Cable asked.

"No, thanks. I can manage it." She glanced at the coffee shop down the street. "But I wouldn't mind having a mocha." She gave him a teasing smile. "And take *him* with you. Please! I thought I was going to suffocate in the car."

Cable's gaze traveled the length of the street as the air around them thickened with Fane's dislike of the idea of them separating. "Or we could deliver your package and then go for coffee together."

"That's fine too."

Cable grimaced. "I have this overpowering compulsion not to let you out of my sight. And it's not my own."

"I know, but I don't think we were followed."

"We weren't."

"Then why don't we do the most efficient thing. You get us some coffee and I'll run into the shop. Whoever gets done first can meet the other one."

Cable sighed, knowing there were going to be consequences, most of them falling on Kiziah – for traveling in two cars, for stopping in Waynesville and for separating – all when Fane wanted them to go directly to Ashburg.

He'd been with Fane longer. He understood the nature of vampires better than Kiziah did. He'd downplayed it when he and Kiziah talked as they drove, but he knew

exactly how closely the three of them would be bonded once the third exchange of blood had taken place, just as he knew that with each exchange of blood, Fane's ability to command them would increase.

He also knew that Kiziah's freedom would soon be curtailed more than his own would ever be. Fane could turn off the dominant tendencies when it came to him, but with Kiziah, Fane was hard-wired not to relent. He was hard-wired to be possessive, protective. And the death of Fane's family, especially his mother, had only escalated the need in Fane.

Cable rubbed his cheek against Kiziah's hair. It was probably a mistake, but he wanted to give her a chance to go about life as though everything was normal—or as normal as it could be with the menacing presence of Fane hovering around them. "Meet you in the coffee shop or back here," he said, kissing her before traveling the half a block to a shop that reminded him of the one where he and Kiziah had met.

He placed his order and paid, then stepped aside, smiling as he thought about Madame Helki's reading and how it had led to Kiziah. How it had led to something he'd never even considered possible. Christ, he still couldn't believe she'd come into their lives, adapting and accepting not only Fane and him as lovers, but everything else as though she'd been born into it, created for it.

The coffee shop door opened and Cable looked up, fear rippling down his spine when he saw his two oldest brothers stepping inside. Fuck! He'd been sure they weren't being followed. He'd been thorough when he checked the cars.

"We can do this the easy way or the hard way," Levant said as he and Priest took up positions on either side of Cable. "We're going to make a quick trip to the bathroom together."

For a split second Cable considered throwing a punch and trying to escape, but worry for Kiziah kept him from doing it. His brothers had probably recognized her Suburban, but he didn't think they'd ever seen Fane's sports car. He couldn't be sure whether or not they knew Kiziah was here too, and down the street. If this was just about him, then he was safe. They wouldn't find additional bite marks on him. But one look at Kiziah's inner thigh...

"You're pushing the limits of brotherly love," Cable said, allowing himself to be guided into the bathroom, hoping that the sooner they saw he was "clean" the sooner they'd let him go.

"You know what we want," Levant said, following Cable into the small room and closing the door while Priest stood guard outside.

Cable stripped out of his shirt, turning without being told. "Why are you doing this?"

"To give Dad piece of mind."

"Wasn't the shotgun wedding enough for him?"

"Let's just get this over with. If your new wife is bite-free, the two of you can go about your business."

Cable's heart squeezed with panic. His stomach tightened. So they knew Kiziah was in town. "She's not stripping again in front of you."

"You're right. She's not. Deacon's collecting her. If you hurry then we'll take you to where she'll be so you can ease her through it while Deacon checks her."

Rage flashed through Cable and this time he did take a swing, his fist connecting solidly with Levant's stomach and making his brother grunt and curse before he returned the favor, his knuckles slamming into Cable's gut as he ducked a second punch.

The fight was over as soon as Priest waded in, making it two against one and forcing Cable to relent. His thoughts churning violently, swirling with the desire to get to Kiziah. He jerked his pants down, his breath heaving in and out of his chest as his body vibrated with tension. It took only a second for Levant to nod, acknowledging that they were done.

The three of them left the bathroom then, drawing a disgusted curse from a male customer and an embarrassed gasp from a woman. Another time, Cable might have found the reddening of Levant's face amusing, but not now, not when his thoughts centered on Kiziah.

Christ! He wanted to pound his brothers into the ground even though he knew they were just following his father's orders. "If Deacon scares her..." Cable said, a new fear forming when he realized how quickly the sky was darkening. How close they were to Fane being able to take his human shape.

"She's been through the routine before," Levant said and Cable's nostrils flared at the reminder of what had happened at the estate.

"Not too smart reminding him of that," Priest said, slowing to let Cable exit the coffee shop first, all three of them aware that Cable wouldn't try to escape if Deacon had Kiziah.

Kiziah knew she needed to make a run for it as soon as the bells over the entranceway of the shop signaled a new arrival and she looked up to see Cable's brother stepping inside. She didn't need the heavy pressure of Fane at her back to get her moving. Though she had the presence of mind to lean forward and whisper to the elderly woman on the other side of the counter, "Don't call the police. He's my brother-in-law," before bolting for the curtained doorway to the left of the counter and exiting through a back door she knew existed from her previous visits to the shop.

Footsteps sounded behind her. Cable's brother said, "Priest and Levant have Cable," but she didn't turn around.

Panic set in.

She was running as fast as she could but she knew that if she made it to the car she'd never get the door open and get in before he was on top of her. She couldn't afford to be caught and forced to strip. She didn't dare let them find Fane's bite.

Guilt filled Kiziah in a leap of intuition. They'd probably searched her car while it was parked in front of their family's estate. They would have found fliers about the psychic fair, fliers about the dreamcatchers she made. It wouldn't have taken a great leap to guess where she and Cable might go, or that they might stop in Waynesville to deliver the package that had been sitting in the passenger seat.

As she ran, her fear grew with the awareness of the rapidly approaching dusk. She could imagine what Fane's reaction would be when he took his human shape. His fury was already a tangible thing in the air around her, and despite everything, Kiziah knew that Cable loved his brothers.

She swerved into an alleyway, a tight narrow place not meant for anything other than trash cans and dumpsters. A cramp in her side made her gasp, and she knew she couldn't keep running.

Kiziah pulled her keys from her pocket, fisting her fingers around them before she stopped and doubled over, the hand containing the keys going to her knee while the other hand clutched her side. She didn't try to lessen the sound of her panting or keep the small whimpers of pain from escaping as Cable's brother rushed toward her.

At least there's only one of them. At least I have a chance.

One chance.

Within seconds he was next to her. His hand lightly grasping her shoulder as he moved around to stand in front of her, his legs slightly apart, his stance wide enough for her attack.

She struck without warning. The hand on her knee swinging upward, her fist striking his testicles with the precision of a boxer.

He dropped to his knees in an agonized moan and she fled, feeling guilty even as she rushed to the car and scrambled inside, shoving the keys into the ignition.

Shock jolted through Cable when he saw Kiziah run out of the alleyway and make it to the Suburban. A single thought formed and his body acted on it instantly. He ran, meeting Kiziah halfway down the street and sliding into the driver's seat while the car was still moving, the shift from her hands on the steering wheel to his, her foot on the pedal to his, smooth considering they weren't stunt doubles in an action movie.

"You okay?" he asked, feeling the tremor as her hand rested on his thigh.

"I am now."

Fane's energy hovered around them, a boiling mass of furious intent.

"Then let's get out of here," Cable said, covering her hand with his, squeezing it as they escaped the small town and raced for sanctuary in Ashburg.

Cable groaned when they got to the house and went inside, only to find Domino leaning against the wall in the hallway. Christ! Domino on a good day was enough to stir Fane's temper. And this day had gone rapidly downhill almost from the moment they'd left bed.

"This is Domino," Cable said and Kiziah shivered, looking at the man who'd been able to hypnotize her and compel her to leave the carnival, who'd made her bait for the Believer. She gasped when Fane shimmered into existence at her side. His body hard and firm. Naked. Aroused.

Domino straightened away from the wall, his gaze traveling over the three of them but coming to a rest on Fane, his eyebrows arching. "I see The Heat hasn't lessened its grip on you my friend, so I'll be quick—not that the sight of you fucking your kadine wouldn't be a tempting entertainment for me. She is beautiful." His teeth flashed. "And of course, Cable has his own charms, though they are outside my experience and inclinations."

"What do you want, Domino?" Fane asked.

"Only to tell you that the rest of us have managed to eliminate a large number of our enemy and will continue to hunt while you attend to other matters."

"And the one who calls himself The Apostle?"

The amusement left Domino's face. "Your revenge can wait until you've gained control of The Heat and The Hunger."

"You know where to find him?"

"Not yet."

"He's mine to destroy," Fane said.

"Understood. But you've only just gone through The Transformation. The temptation will be too great right now. You can no longer kill as a dhampir can." Domino's gaze shifted to encompass Cable and Kiziah. "The consequences of your actions don't fall solely to you any longer."

Fane hissed. A frustrated, angry sound. "You'll tell me when you find him?"

Domino took several long seconds before answering. "I'll tell you only after the third exchange has been made and the urges of our ancestors have been leashed by the taking of a kadine and a companion." Amusement once again flashed in obsidian eyes as Domino's gaze dropped to Fane's erection and his eyebrows went up. "As you're already primed for the task, I'll leave you to it."

"An excellent idea," Cable said, reaching around Kiziah and putting his hand on Fane's arm, his touch distracting Fane so that Domino was able to exit the house without incident.

Fane turned then and Kiziah took a step away from him when she saw the dark fury in his eyes. "You knew I wanted us to travel together," he said, crowding her until she was trapped between the wall and his hard body. "You knew I didn't want you to stop in Waynesville or to separate when you got there."

"I had a promise to keep," Kiziah said. "I have a life beyond you and Cable."

"Your life is mine," Fane said, flashing his fangs and sending a primitive fear along Kiziah's nerve endings.

He speared his fingers through her hair, holding her so that she couldn't look away from him, his expression so carnal, so possessive that she whimpered. His will already strong enough that she couldn't move or resist as he lowered his mouth to her neck, brushing his fangs against her skin, rubbing them against the wildly beating pulse of her jugular.

Fane struck without warning, the pain and shock of his fangs sliding through her skin rapidly transforming into ecstasy as he fed, his body aggressive, the hard line of his cock pressed against her belly. His thoughts pushing through her mental barriers, forging a pathway between them, insisting that she was his, that she would obey, that no one would take her from him or hurt her. His assault on her senses so intense that it became a struggle to think, to fight the waves of cloying darkness that began to press in on her.

With a hiss Fane lifted his mouth from her neck, his tongue swiping over her skin, and she became aware of the knife driven into the wall next to their faces, one of Cable's hands on its handle while the other pushed between them, circling Fane's cock as Cable's body pressed to Fane's back, his voice aroused and yet sounding a warning. "Stop, Fane. You've taken enough."

Fane turned his head slightly, his mouth only a breath away from Cable's. "I won't tolerate her disobedience. I *can't* tolerate it."

"And I won't let you make her a prisoner."

Fane's nostrils flared. His already dark eyes flashed with something primitive and alien. "You'll come to think as I do," he said, his voice a silky threat that made Kiziah shiver.

Cable took it in stride, his hand moving up and down on Fane's shaft, his head turning just enough to brush a kiss against Fane's shoulder. "Yeah, we'll see," he said, biting Fane lightly.

Fane shuddered. His body bucked against Kiziah's, heat moving through his eyes, a hunger that wouldn't be satisfied with blood alone.

"Yeah, we'll see," Fane said, echoing Cable's words but with deadly menace, his eyes boring into Kiziah's as he pulled Cable's hand from the knife's handle and pressed Cable's wrist to his mouth.

Cable grunted as Fane bit him, panted as Fane began sucking. And even without Fane's compulsion forcing her to watch as he fed from Cable, Kiziah couldn't have looked away.

Need filled her at the sight of it. Swelling her breasts and engorging her cunt lips. The desire intensifying at the look of pleasure on Cable's face. With the feel of his hand stroking Fane's cock, pumping up and down, brushing against her jeans, and making

her desperate to open them and expose her erect clit. To press it against Fane's penis and feel Cable's knuckles against it as he touched Fane.

Their heightened arousal fed her own, and Kiziah went to her knees, her eyes not leaving Fane's until her mouth sought his cock. Cable's hand stilling as she took everything above it into her mouth, her tongue immediately swirling over the plump, sensitive head of Fane's penis.

Fane jerked, struggled, tried to fuck through Cable's hand in order to drive himself deeper into Kiziah's mouth.

"Not too much, Zia. He can't come until the exchanges are made and we're both inside you," Cable warned.

The Heat and Hunger twined together inside Fane, inseparable, demanding that he claim what belonged to him. With a mental command the knife pulled free of the wall, coming to Fane's hand like a bird of prey to its master, the sight of it stopping the torment of Kiziah's mouth as her eyes widened with surprise.

Fane sliced his inner thigh, issuing another silent command, this one to Kiziah, his will alone forcing her to leave his cock and press her lips to the wound, to drink. The sensation so heady that his body tightened, his back arched and his cock burned with the need to come, a hiss escaping when Cable used his hand to prevent it, to stave off orgasm while Kiziah whimpered and cried, making the second exchange.

It was ecstasy beyond imagine, unparalleled pleasure, the intensity of it consuming Fane, enthralling him until Cable sagged against him, muttering, "Christ," though he made no effort to pull his wrist from Fane's grasp. Fane stopped them, licking over the puncture marks even as he eased Kiziah away from his thigh so that his skin could knit back together.

Satisfaction filled him when he looked down at her, seeing her pleasure, her acceptance. "You will obey me," he said, caressing her cheek with his fingers before shifting, moving from between Kiziah and Cable, anticipation spiking through him when she immediately leaned forward, her hands going to Cable's jeans, her fingers deftly freeing Cable's cock, her mouth following, making Cable groan.

Fane closed the distance between them, one of his hands going to Kiziah's hair, the other going to the back of Cable's neck, pulling him forward so that their lips met and their tongues mated, rubbing and twining, neither of them relenting as they dueled in wet, dark heat—Kiziah held between them.

They were both breathing hard when the kiss ended, their cocks full and their balls heavy with the need to couple, to find release—with each other, with Kiziah. Fane summoned the knife from where he'd dropped it on the floor, this time using it to open a place on his neck, a symbolic gesture of trust. And as Cable willingly completed the second exchange, Fane couldn't resist repeating his earlier comment, this time in Cable's mind. *You will come to think as I do when it comes to Kiziah.*

Chapter Twelve

The night was a blur of sex. Of ravenous need. Of bonding. Of a burning hunger that went beyond the blood flowing through Kiziah's veins, a consuming need that claimed her soul and her heart.

The images of Cable and Fane together, the memory of them taking her, at the same time and individually, were seared into her mind for all time, the craving to repeat the night branded on every cell in her body.

Cable had told her that after the second exchange, after they'd come together—Fane's cock shoved into her channel while Cable's lodged in her ass—they would be sexually bonded. Tied together. But his words—and even her own imagination—hadn't prepared her for the reality.

Your life is mine, Fane said and long before sleep claimed her, he had demonstrated that truth with his body, his mind, his will—repeatedly proving how powerless she was against him.

Kiziah laughed softly. Or so Fane thought.

More than once during the night it had been two against one, the balance of power shifting as she and Cable commanded Fane's body, driving him to orgasm. Controlling his pleasure.

She stretched and turned, smiling when she saw how Fane was curled around Cable's back in the same way Cable had been curled around her, Fane's hand shoved between Cable's thighs as Cable's had been shoved between hers.

They were gorgeous. All it took was the sight of them—singly or together—but especially like this, intimately posed, to make her cunt and breasts flush with arousal. She didn't think she'd ever get enough of them—though she tried her best not to think about the centuries they would have ahead of them after the third exchange of blood had been made.

Such a lifespan seemed unnatural to her, a mixed blessing she hadn't looked for. She was sure that Cable had only scratched the surface of the padrall history, but even so, she could understand why the very first of them had elected to serve the vampires for material rewards instead of nonmaterial ones.

Cable shifted, his hand moving to cover Fane's where it rested on his cock, his eyelids fluttering open. His smile when his eyes met hers like a stroke of pure love.

She leaned in and kissed him. Her fingers playing over the bite Fane had given him. "One more to go."

"Second thoughts?"

"Just thoughts."

"Any that would interest me?"

Kiziah laughed. "It depends on how interested you are in sex."

Cable's hand left Fane's and went around Kiziah's waist, pulling her to him so that their lips were only inches apart. "With you and Fane, I'm always interested." His face grew serious. "It's going to be a harder adjustment for you, Zia. You're used to coming and going as you please. Last night wasn't as rough as I was afraid it would be. But that doesn't mean it'll always go like that." He pressed a kiss to her lips. "We can put it off if you need more time. We don't have to finish it in three consecutive nights."

Kiziah's hand went to Fane's upper arm, her fingers curling around it, feeling the smooth skin over firm muscles. "That wouldn't go over too well with him."

"Yeah. Waiting was against his nature even when he was a dhampir. But he'd do it, Zia."

"And if your family caught us again?"

Cable sighed, a small puff of air. "Then we'd be in trouble."

"I'm willing to finish what we started." She pressed her lips to his in reassurance. "I think us being together was in the cards."

He laughed, rubbing his mouth against hers. "Madame Helki's tarot cards?"

"Yeah." She shifted her hand from Fane's arm to Cable's chest. "Will your family forgive you?"

"My mother will accept it. I think my brothers will come around. We've talked about it before, how the padralls are trapped in a medieval world, how we need to gain some freedom for those of us born into it."

"And your father?"

Real sadness settled in Cable's eyes. "I don't know, Zia. I'll keep the door open and hope he comes around. But I won't count on it. I knew from the start what Fane was, what he would eventually become, the choice it might lead to."

Cable's mouth covered hers, his tongue gently parting her lips and sliding against hers, a slow, languid rub of heat and emotion, comfort and security, solidarity.

"Tonight's okay with me," Kiziah whispered when the kiss ended.

"I'm glad." He rubbed his nose against hers. "Want to get up? We've slept most of the day already. Fane will be up in a little while."

Kiziah snickered. "When is he not *up*?"

"Good question. Vampires are very sexual beings, especially when it comes to their kadines and companions."

Kiziah rolled over and slid from the bed while Cable disentangled himself from Fane, grinning when he finally got to his feet and reached for his jeans. "Since meeting you I always seem to be short of clothes."

"Not my fault if you had to abandon both of the sports cars." Her eyes trailed over his naked torso and then Fane's. "Not that I mind seeing you two flash a lot of skin."

Cable pulled her to him. "Careful, we might insist that you stay naked when we're alone." He gave her a quick kiss. "Unfortunately we're not alone now, and I don't think either one of us wants to deal with Fane's possessive streak if Domino sees you without anything on."

"Domino?" But as soon as Kiziah said it, she realized that her senses had heightened to the point where she could hear movement in the kitchen and smell a hint of coffee even though the bedroom door was closed. When she concentrated, the awareness of a supernatural presence that she'd always possessed hummed through her, yielding more information than it ever had. She could sense the alien influence in Domino, so strong that it nearly masked the human. She remembered Cable's answer when he'd first brought up the subject of vampires and she'd asked if Domino was one. *Almost*. "Is he close to turning?"

Cable zipped his jeans and took Kiziah's hand. "Maybe."

Domino was leaning against the counter when they entered the kitchen. Obsidian eyes flashed with humor and Cable suppressed a groan.

"So Fane lets you escape when The Sleep rules?" Domino said. "I'm surprised he doesn't keep you tethered to the bed."

"Why are you here?" Cable asked. "You're a little early if you've come just to jerk Fane's chain."

Domino laughed. "Believe it or not, I came to offer my assistance and protection."

"Somehow I can't see Fane inviting you into the bedroom."

Domino grinned. "True enough and I have no desire to find myself in a dogfight in which the winner gains a permanent mate."

Cable laughed. "I'm with Fane, it's going to be pure pleasure to see The Heat put a leash on you once you've gone through The Transformation."

"It'll never happen." Domino lifted his coffee cup. "The bitter taste of the herbs is nothing compared to the loss of freedom a mate imposes."

"Which brings us back to my original question. Why are you here?"

Domino's face grew serious. "You know what to expect after the third exchange has been made?"

Cable looked away. Oh yeah. He knew what to expect. Pain as his cells altered. Fiery heat coursing through his veins and arteries until balance was achieved between the human and the alien. None of it would be as bad as what a dhampir experienced during The Transformation, but it would be excruciating. And Kiziah would experience the same. Long moments of agony as opposed to the wild Heat and Hunger a kadine who'd been given her future mate's blood at birth and during the confirmation ceremony experienced. "Yeah, I know what to expect," he said, thinking of Domino's offer of assistance. "But I still can't see Fane inviting you into the bedroom."

"What are you two talking about?" Kiziah asked, trying to contain a growing uneasiness.

Cable pulled her into his arms, Kiziah's back to his front. "The last part is painful, Zia."

Her heart rate spiked. "How painful?"

His sigh did nothing to reassure her. "I've only read about it."

"But it's bad."

"Yeah." He tightened his arms around her. "It doesn't last for long. And you only have to go through it once."

"Sarael went through it?"

Cable swallowed the urge to admit that what Kiziah would go through was much harsher than what Sarael had experienced. "Yeah, she went through it."

"Okay, I can handle it," Kiziah said, forcing some of the anxiety out in a shaky exhale, the connection to Fane warning her that he was struggling to wake and join them in the kitchen, to take control of the situation. She looked at Domino, prepared to ask him to explain his offer, but Cable beat her to it, saying, "You'd better tell us what you have in mind before Fane comes storming in. He hasn't been a vampire long enough yet to issue a command in his sleep—but he's trying. And he's not going to be happy to wake and find you here."

Domino laughed. "True enough, and a test of strength is a show for another day. What I suggest is simple. One of you stays here. One of you leaves with me. A phone call when the first has gone through the changes and the three of you can be reunited."

Cable shook his head, but even as he did it, sensing Fane's absolute fury at the thought of one of them leaving, he remembered the vivid descriptions he'd read in the Santori histories. How Domino's ancestor had confided to the padrall serving as a scribe that it had been a mistake to make the third exchange and convert both his kadine and his male companion at the same time.

"I think it's a good idea," Kiziah said, pulling out of Cable's arms and turning to face him. Her heart thundering in her ears as she felt Fane's increased struggle to wake, his rage and possessiveness. Still she managed a small laugh as she took Cable's hands in hers. "And I think you should be first."

"You want to leave me to suffer his wrath and take the edge off him before he gets to you?"

"Self-preservation," Kiziah joked, leaning forward, her eyes going soft as she brushed her lips against Cable's. "I want you to be there when it's my turn. I'm willing to be there for you. But you and Fane have been a couple, and I'm okay with it just being the two of you first."

Cable hugged her to him. "Christ, Zia. We don't deserve you."

She returned the hug. "Well, you're stuck with me. But I'd better leave *now*, or I won't be able to."

Cable let her go, returning to the bedroom and stripping before flopping down next to Fane. The bond with Kiziah already strong enough that he could sense her moving further and further away from the house, just as he could sense Fane waking.

Cable braced himself. Prepared himself for Fane's anger and it came in a fury of movement, an attack that sent the blood pounding through Cable's body in a primal reaction even though his heart and mind knew that the deadly predator pinning him to the bed wasn't going to kill him.

"You let her leave," Fane said, his nostrils flaring, his face savage. His fangs fully extended, close enough to rip Cable's throat out if he desired.

"You know why," Cable said. "And you know she'll be back." He shifted, rubbing his cock against Fane's, watching as some of the rage fled in the presence of lust.

"I don't like it."

"She'll be safe with Domino."

Fane hissed, The Heat and Hunger twisting inside him like a wild thing despite the fact that he trusted Domino completely. Not just because of Domino's connection to his past, his family, but because Domino had seen him through The Transformation, had given him first blood, and both were tantamount to a sacrament between vampires. "I won't allow her this kind of freedom after the third exchange is made." Furious eyes met Cable's. "I *can't* allow her to defy me. I can't allow her to go unpunished."

"You'll have to," Cable said, moving again, the rub of his cock against Fane's flooding Fane's mind with more immediate desires, the deeply imprinted needs of his alien ancestors battling against his sexual cravings for Cable.

"I won't let you interfere with her punishment," Fane said.

Cable laughed. "Imagine you being possessive of a woman. Even the thought of it would have soured your mood not too long ago." His smile turned knowing. "If you need to get it out of your system before you can make the third exchange, then give me her punishment. I can take it."

Lust rushed through Fane, a wave of heat that consumed his anger. That made his cock pulse and leak, his body tighten to the point where it was him moving, him rubbing his cock against Cable's. "I was going to tie her to the bed. You've never allowed that. You've never wanted it."

"Do it. I'm not afraid."

Fane's lips curled, exposing deadly fangs. Frustration raged inside of him along with lust—at being outmaneuvered by Cable, at his inability to control Kiziah, at the loss of his own freedom to move around in a human form during the day.

With a hiss he levered himself up, calling a knife from the nightstand and using it to slash bindings from the sheet. But even as he secured Cable's wrists and ankles to the bed posts, Fane forced his own need to dominate into submission.

He would tie Cable because it would soothe the desire to strike out, and they would both gain pleasure from it. But Cable was mistaken if he thought the matter of Kiziah was settled. She *would* learn to obey, if not tonight, then in the future.

Fane settled again on Cable, pressing his mouth to Cable's, pressing his thoughts into Cable's mind. Unable to go forward until he had the final say with respect to the woman they now shared. *This isn't the end of it.*

But Cable only laughed, parting his lips and teasing Fane's tongue into a mating dance, into a carnal exchange that left them both panting, both breathless, both anxious to finish what they'd begun.

Fane closed his eyes, savoring the sensation, feeding on the wealth of emotion racing through Cable, their bond already deep enough—even without a single exchange of blood—for them to know what the other felt. Love poured into him and for a moment he was tempted to abandon his plan, to untie Cable so he could feel Cable's arms around him. But just as quickly as the impulse arose, another followed, the desire to have Cable writhing underneath him, to give him unparalleled ecstasy—an apology for the pain to come.

Fane moved lower, his mouth going to Cable's neck, his fangs grazing the skin, rubbing over a pulse that raced with lust, pausing there in mock threat, before he kissed his way to Cable's nipples, licking them, biting, toying with them as he compared them to Kiziah's in his mind, and remembered the pleasure he'd experienced at her breasts.

"Christ," Cable said, bucking, driving his cock against Fane's belly, then gasping when Fane's assault moved downward, Fane's mouth traveling over Cable's abdomen, pausing there as his hand circled Cable's penis, his touch so much different than Kiziah's and yet equally devastating.

"Christ," Cable repeated and Fane laughed, all traces of his earlier fury gone as his mouth went to Cable's cock, his lips and tongue driving Cable into a frenzy made more intense by the restraints. Reducing Cable to a primitive creature who sought only pleasure, whose body jerked and fought in a struggle for orgasm, his shout of release filling the room as well as Fane's heart. Echoing in a second coming when Fane turned his head and drove his fangs into Cable's inner thigh. Feeding there until Cable's heart stuttered in warning.

Fane swiped his tongue over the wound, then untied Cable before settling on top of him again, lowering his face and pressing his lips to Cable's. Their kiss gentle, not the usual struggle they enjoyed before coupling. But a soft communion, a sharing, a give-and-take.

"I love you," Fane said when he lifted his face, his voice gruff with the admission.

"Yeah, I know," Cable said, smiling, thinking it was the first time Fane had ever actually said it.

"It'll hurt. Even if it's only half of what I experienced during The Transformation, it'll hurt."

"Yeah. I know that too. The padralls who've witnessed and recorded it have made a point of writing about how agonizing the conversion process is. Just do it."

It humbled him that Cable was willing to sacrifice so much to be with him, made it easier for Fane to treat Cable as an equal, to resist the urges to completely dominate and control that he experienced with Kiziah. "Only after I do you."

Cable laughed, one of his hands tangling in Fane's hair, pulling him into a kiss that went from gentle to heated.

Fane shivered when Cable's hands trailed over his shoulders and back, bucked when one of them wedged between their bodies and took his cock.

Lust poured through Fane. The desire to fuck. And he pumped through Cable's closed fist, his breathing coming in pants, his cock burning, his balls full and heavy. "Your choice," he managed, willing to take Cable any way he could have him, his hips jerking when Cable's thumb brushed over the tip of his penis, sending arousal beading to the surface. His heart swelling, his soul acknowledging how deeply he cared for the human underneath him. For the man who balanced him, made him a better person. Offered him so much. Accepted so much.

Fane shifted position so that his hand could take Cable's cock, gliding over the smooth surface, the engorged head, making Cable pant and swear. "Christ, you always cheat!"

They knew each other's bodies so well that within minutes they were both close to orgasm, struggling to delay it, to savor the buildup even though they knew they had to finish what they'd started, not just for the sake of release but so they could summon Kiziah and claim their third.

"Your choice," Fane said, groaning when Cable released his cock and pushed against his chest, signaling that he should put some distance between them. But Fane yielded and the lust roared through him, doubling in intensity when Cable went to his hands and knees, allowing Fane to cover his body, to forge into his back entrance from behind. To fuck. Fane's vampire strength enabling him to open the vein on one wrist and press it to Cable's mouth even as he plunged in and out of Cable's anus while his other hand pumped Cable's shaft. Driving them both to an orgasm that left them shuddering, weak, sated – until the fiery effects of the third exchange arrived, burning through Cable's blood, a warning in the seconds before he writhed in pain.

Chapter Thirteen

"I'd like to go to the psychic fair," Kiziah said as soon as she and Domino put some distance between themselves and Fane.

His laugh was immediate. "So you enjoy living dangerously. I doubt even Cable would have let you leave if he knew where you'd want to be taken."

"Last night you said you'd eliminated a lot of the Believers."

"True. All but four, and only one of those is a danger to you."

"The Apostle?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he is?"

"I will when the time comes to deliver him to Fane."

"Will you take me to the fair?"

"Yes. I'll take you." Domino glanced at her. Something in his eyes causing uneasiness to uncoil and spread through Kiziah. A sense of foreboding.

She turned and looked out the window, trying to gather her thoughts, her courage. Instead, her awareness of Domino increased—not as a gorgeous man but as a deadly predator.

In the close confines of the car, her sense of him was magnified far beyond what it had been in the house with Cable and Fane present. She'd asked if Domino was close to turning, and now the answer rubbed over every one of her nerve endings. *Oh yeah, Domino was very close to turning.* And underneath the human façade she could sense something as wild and driven by bloodlust as the alien cells which would turn him into a full-blooded vampire.

"Fear is an aphrodisiac to our kind. Doubly so for me," Domino said, the rough edge to his voice warning her that his body was reacting despite his intention to keep her safe.

"Because you're so close to changing?"

"That and because I already have a second form."

Kiziah turned away from the window. "You mean turning into mist?"

"That's a vampire's defense mechanism. A form I'll gain after The Transformation."

Her lips parted in surprise. "You're a shapeshifter? Like a werewolf?"

Some of the tension left his body. He laughed. "Not a werewolf, though I can take the form of a wolf."

Kiziah's thoughts whirled. Amusement and curiosity finding her when she remembered Domino's comment in the kitchen. *I have no desire to find myself in a dogfight in which the winner gains a permanent mate.* "Does Fane also change into a wolf?"

"No, he has only the vampire's second form. Have you seen his command of knives?"

"Yes."

"We're all born with at least one talent beyond those necessary for our survival. You've met Matteo?"

"Yes."

"Fire is his talent. Mine is the power to hypnotize and compel, more so than just a vampire or dhampir's ability to enthrall and confuse, to wipe out short-term memories and command during limited encounters."

Kiziah rubbed her palms over her jeans, vividly recalling her first encounter with Domino. The void that existed between leaving Madame Helki's tent and "waking" to find herself being stalked by the Believer. "I remembered your eyes."

"I wanted you to."

Her thoughts moved to the Believer who'd murdered Fane's family. "You said The Apostle is in the area. Has he been to the fair?"

"We're watching the entrances as well as the campgrounds and hotels. None of us have seen him, which is not surprising. Unlike many of the American recruits, he is not a hired thug or a social deviant. He's a true Believer. He wouldn't get too close to the psychics for the same reason we try to keep our distance." Domino shrugged. "The fair is very nearly over, it's possible that with so many of his brethren dead, he's decided to strike at another time."

Domino stopped the car near the front entrance, turning to look at Kiziah. "Be careful. You have enough of Fane's blood now to call humans to you, to mesmerize them. It can get out of hand if you don't control it."

"Control it how?" Kiziah asked, wanting to believe that he was just amusing himself at her expense but knowing that he wasn't.

"Our pheromones are triggered by strong emotion such as fear and lust, as well as by intent and hunger." He smiled, a flash of white teeth reflected in obsidian eyes. "You should be safe as long as you avoid imagining what Fane and Cable are doing."

No doubt just as Domino had intended, Kiziah immediately pictured Fane and Cable in bed, then became aware of changes within her own body, as if it was reaching out, calling, trying to draw others to it, even though she couldn't imagine intimacy with anyone other than Cable or Fane.

It was a confusing contradiction that Domino helped her to understand by saying, "For kadines the pheromones are intended as a defense mechanism. Once you've gone through the last of the changes, it will become second nature for you to control them, and you won't have to fear drawing humans to you accidentally." He glanced at the

entrance to the psychic fair. "You should go now if you intend to visit your friends. I'll wait outside. But you don't have much time before Fane and Cable will arrive."

Kiziah's eyebrows drew together. "You're not taking me back to the house?"

Domino laughed. "Fane has always been short of patience. He'll come to collect you himself and probably rage all the way back to the bedroom."

Kiziah laughed, knowing he was right and she would no doubt end up with another demonstration of who was in control—which in turn caused the pheromones to flare and Domino's eyebrows to rise in amusement.

She slipped from the sports car and went inside, feeling a strange mix of homesickness and alienation at the familiar sights and sounds. In a heartbeat she knew this part of her life was over. Even now she was drawing glances from many of the psychics, seeing puzzled frowns and curious expressions. Feeling the hum of their supernatural abilities against what she'd gained from Fane—recognizing traces of dark undercurrents, a willingness to take from her if a way could be found to do it. Her stomach tightened and she moved deeper into the building, consumed now with thoughts of finding Margo and Walt.

They'd gotten a good location for their booth and were doing a brisk business despite the fair being well into its final hour. "You're here!" Margo said, leaving her husband to handle their customers as she moved out of the booth and enfolded Kiziah in a fierce hug.

Kiziah returned the hug with equal fierceness. Had it only been three days since she'd played cards with them and come home to find Fane waiting for her in the Airstream? It seemed like a lifetime.

Margo put her hands on Kiziah's shoulders, keeping her less than an arm's length away as they drew apart. "You're much changed, just as your mother told me you'd be."

Pain and longing speared through Kiziah's heart. "You've seen her?"

A soft smile played over Margo's lips. "How your mother loved the tarot! She came to me in a dream. Standing in the center of the Wheel of Fortune. She told me you'd get here in time and I would see that you had found the path to your destiny. She left in an explosion of light that was bright enough to be The Sun."

Instead of being happy, fear coiled in Kiziah's stomach as she heard a different message in Margo's words. A warning about a bomb.

She told me you'd get here in time.

She left in an explosion.

Kiziah looked around, her mind jumping from thought to thought in a panic. The chaos ending when Margo asked, "Are you staying for the closing ceremony?"

Realization burst through Kiziah. Horror. "There's going to be one?"

"Yes."

And in that instant Kiziah guessed where the bomb would be. Somewhere outside. In a parked car maybe, or several of them. Close to where those attending the psychic fair would gather to chant and pray under the stars. The fairs didn't always end in a closing ceremony, it was a somewhat spontaneous event, a way of giving thanks and forming a connection with the townspeople.

She hugged Margo to her. Anguish making her chest so tight that she could hardly breathe. What if she was wrong? What if the bomb was inside? The Apostle could have had someone else bring it in. But would he have risked it if he was a true Believer? Would he have waited this long to detonate it?

"I've got to go. Please, please, try and get them to delay the ceremony. The dream was a warning. There may be a bomb outside."

Kiziah didn't wait until she got outside to tell Domino what she suspected, she called him, telling him about the ceremony. Grimacing when he began cursing violently. "Do you know what explosives smell like?" she asked, thinking about police and military dogs that were trained for the task though she guessed Domino wouldn't care to be equated to them.

"Yes." It was almost a growl.

"If you were to sniff around..."

"I'll give you the car. Get away from here. Call Fane or Cable, tell them you're going back to the house. They've already called me to say they were on their way." He paused. "Neither of them was pleased to learn that we were here."

Kiziah grimaced, emerging from the building and closing her cell phone as Domino got out of the car so that she could take the driver's seat. He tried to capture her gaze with his, but she avoided it by ducking her head and slipping into the car, closing the door so that only the window remained partly open. "There's not much time now."

He repeated his command, "Get away from here."

"I'm going," she said, feeling his will pressing against her but the lack of eye contact, the lack of a blood connection, as well as what she'd gained from Fane allowed her to resist without falling prey to his hypnosis, to drive away, not home but out of sight, so he would begin looking for any explosives while she began looking for The Apostle.

The thought of actually finding the Believer made her shiver with cold fear. But there was no way she could simply drive away and leave the people she'd grown up among to suffer or die at the hands of an enemy they didn't know existed. Not if she could do something to prevent it.

She told me you'd get here in time. Margo had said, and her words fed Kiziah's courage as she joined the crowd of protestors gathered outside the psychic fair and moved among them.

You have enough of Fane's blood now to call humans to you, to mesmerize them. Domino's warning provided her with a weapon she could use to delay The Apostle until Fane or Domino could deal with him.

She knew that Fane's blood had heightened all of her senses, but she had no reference point for what an explosive device would smell like. Fear and excitement were another matter though, the alien, predatory part of Fane that she carried inside her reacted to the fast beat of a pounding heart, the terror of prey, the smell of it.

Kiziah shivered again, her own heart jerking and racing, though she rushed to control her thoughts, her own fears, not wanting to release the pheromones as she searched among the protestors. She wished she knew what The Apostle looked like, wished now that she'd asked more questions, but the changes in her life had come so rapidly, and Cable's family had seemed a greater threat than the Believers.

She got to the last of the protestors and turned to look out at the parking lot. The Apostle would be there somewhere, to detonate the bomb, to see his handiwork firsthand. Didn't bombers feed on that?

The muscles in her stomach tightened when she saw the small restaurant across the street, the interior lit, indicating they were open. It would be the perfect place to watch, to wait.

No! Kiziah nearly stumbled as Fane and Cable's voices both ripped into her mind. The force of their combined will very nearly freezing her in place. They were very close now, and yet she couldn't afford to wait.

Even as she thought it, the protestors started chanting loudly as people began to emerge from the building housing the fair, their exit unhurried, an indication that Margo's warning about danger had gone unheeded.

I have to, Kiziah sent back, but the words felt as though they were trapped in wool, the connection that would allow her to speak mind-to-mind with Cable and Fane not yet fully in existence.

The possibility of it thrilled Kiziah, momentarily distracting her from her fear as she forced herself to hurry to the restaurant, telling herself as she opened the door and stepped inside that there was no reason for The Apostle to know who she was, to suspect that she knew what his intentions were.

"Seat yourself," a waitress called from behind the old-fashioned serving counter, her back turned to the entrance as she flirted with a muscled, apron-clad cook cubing chunks of beef with a heavy knife.

There were few customers but Kiziah knew immediately which one of them was The Apostle. He was seated at the window, looking out, his head turned so that she could see the red and black crucifix tattooed on his neck. Her gaze dropped to his hand, one bare, the smallest finger unnaturally short, one covered by a thin black glove, though the material didn't hide the fact that he was missing fingers, the trademark of a man who couldn't resist the lure of explosives.

Kiziah gathered her courage and moved toward him, the protective pheromones rising as a result of her own fear. "Okay if I join you?" she asked, sitting across from him, her presence drawing his attention away from the crowd gathered outside the psychic fair.

Their eyes met. Locked.

He blinked and tried to look away, as though some part of him knew what she was, what she intended to do, but his reaction only fed her fear, increasing the pheromones swirling around them.

Kiziah shivered as she saw his eyes glaze with lust. She nearly choked with nausea with the smell of it.

Sirens blared outside, distracting her. Causing her to glance out of the window, the release enough for his hand to go to his pocket. "No!" she said, reaching across the table, putting her hand on his arm, the touch filling her with revulsion, though it had the desired effect, stopping him, bringing his gaze to hers so that she could trap him again. The lust once again filling his eyes, the smell of it assaulting her, increasing her fear in a vicious cycle that had his tongue licking over his lips, his nostrils flaring.

Alarm moved through Kiziah as she sensed other customers moving toward the table. Drawn by the pheromones, their lust preceding them.

She jerked when the door to the restaurant opened in a rush of cold air and fury that confirmed what her awareness of the supernatural was already telling her. Fane and Cable had arrived.

"Get away from him," Fane said, the anger over her actions nothing compared to the hatred in his voice for The Apostle.

Kiziah hesitated, afraid to look away for fear that The Apostle would have time to reach into his pocket before Fane was close enough to stop him. She could hear Fane moving toward them, could sense another presence at her side. But before she could do anything, fingers closed around her arm, jerking her out of her chair, forcing her to turn and look into the face of a stranger unwittingly drawn to her, his eyes glazed, his skin flushed.

"I'll get her," Cable said as Fane's rage very nearly consumed him.

The Apostle's hand moved toward his pocket and Fane guessed his intent. There was no time to savor his revenge, no time to draw it out as he'd fantasized about.

With a mental command Fane wrenched the knife from the cook's fingers, hurling it at The Apostle, driving it through the bomber's throat with such force that his chair toppled, the blade's momentum carrying him backward and pinning his spasming, convulsing body to the floor as the detonation device tumbled from his pocket.

"A good use of your talent," Domino said, his appearance startling Kiziah. "Now I'll put mine to use and make a hero of the cook since you have arranged a perfect scenario and I have already located the devices and had an observant citizen report them to the police."

Kiziah's attention shifted to the cook and the waitress, to the other customers, all frozen in place, their eyes slightly glazed, probably a combination of shock and the heavy-duty pheromones in the air.

"Let's go," Cable said, taking Kiziah's arm as well as Fane's. "Domino can handle this."

The drive back to the house was made in silence—which surprised Kiziah given the intensity of emotion emanating from the two men in the car with her. Only when they'd gotten through the front door did Fane react in the manner she'd expected, crowding her, hissing and flashing his fangs as he stripped off her shirt and bra in a display that turned her on instead of terrorized her.

He pressed her backward against Cable, whose hands went immediately to the front of her jeans, unzipping them as his mouth found her neck, making her heart rush with excitement and her vulva swell when she felt the press of fangs against her skin.

She could tell that the two men were talking to each other, arguing mind-to-mind. She could guess the nature of what they were saying and decided to act before they reached a consensus.

Kiziah kicked off her shoes and wriggled out of her jeans, gasping when Cable's fingers slipped under the waistband of her panties and found her clit, circling, stroking, rubbing its head as though it was a tiny penis.

Fane cursed, he knew what Cable was doing, knew that Cable was using The Heat against him, and yet the sight of Cable's fingers toying with Kiziah's clit, the smell of her arousal, the feel of Cable's lust through the bond they now shared was overwhelming, compelling, a call to fuck that he couldn't resist.

You won't always win this way, Fane warned Cable, shedding his own clothing and kneeling in front of Kiziah, ripping her panties away so that he could see her pussy, could watch as Cable pleased her. His own need to punish her fading as she grew slick with arousal, as her cunt lips parted, inviting his kiss, compelling him to lean forward and thrust his tongue into her, to gather her juices and eat at her feminine flesh.

Within seconds Kiziah was on the edge of orgasm, barely able to form a coherent thought. Her hands buried in Fane's hair, her body writhing, reacting to Cable's touch and the hungry stab of Fane's tongue. She arched and cried out in release, sagged against them, but it was only the beginning.

Fane rose to his feet. His eyes full of feral lust. His body vibrating with the need to dominate.

Without a word he claimed her mouth, fucked into it as aggressively as he'd fucked into her slit, forcing her to taste herself even as his hands moved around her body, wrenching the front of Cable's jeans open.

Cable groaned against Kiziah's neck, his cock a hard ridge against her buttocks. His breathing coming in pants next to her ear. He was close to coming just from the lust radiating off Fane, from the feel of Kiziah's slippery folds and erect clit as his fingers tunneled into the place Fane had abandoned.

Fane lifted his mouth from hers and stepped back, pulling Kiziah with him and sending an image to Cable. A picture that had Cable stripping out of his clothing and grasping his cock, holding it as he took a step backward so the wall braced him.

Cable's breath caught when Fane turned Kiziah to face him, commanded that she bend over and take Cable's penis into her mouth. But he didn't protest. Could only watch as she obeyed, her hands going to the wall on either side of his hips as her lips found him, as her tongue rubbed against the sensitive head of his penis in sweet torment.

"Christ!" It was a curse and a plea uttered as Cable's hand cupped her face, his fingers spearing through her hair, his body jerking, hunching over as he tried to forge deeper, to press more of his cock into the hot depths of her mouth. The dual sensation, the pleasure of taking her mouth as Fane's cock tunneled into her channel very nearly driving Cable to his knees.

It was too much. Too intense. Beyond anything he could have imagined. The bond formed with the third exchange of blood overwhelming, so close that his pleasure was Fane's just as Fane's with his. And when Fane leaned forward, pressing his mouth to Kiziah's shoulder, piercing her with his fangs, Cable cried out in ecstasy, his mouth seeking Fane's shoulder, his fangs driving into masculine flesh so that they all spun out of control.

Kiziah was boneless in Fane's arms as he carried her to the bedroom. She was completely sated until he placed her on the bed, lying down next to her and pulling her on top of him, positioning her so that his cock was buried in her channel.

"Ummm, nice," she whispered, pressing her lips to his, heat flaring to life in her cunt, in her breasts. The flames growing hotter when Cable's body joined theirs, his cock lodged at her back entrance, pushing in so that it lay against Fane's, separated by only a thin barrier and surrounded by her heat, both of them seemingly content to remain still, to savor an intimacy unlike any other, the three of them almost one.

"Ready for the third exchange?" Cable asked, brushing a kiss against Kiziah's shoulder.

She shivered, opened her mouth to ask how painful it was then thought better of it. Cable had made it through the final changes. "I'm ready."

He kissed her shoulder again, brushed his fangs against her skin as he began thrusting, his cock rubbing against Fane's, distracting Kiziah with pleasure even though she was aware of Fane summoning a knife, aware of him cutting his chest and guiding her mouth to the opening.

And then there was nothing but the dark ecstasy of feeding, of feeling Cable's fangs slide into her shoulder in the place Fane had bitten, of having two cocks pumping in and out of her, two men fucking her as they fucked each other, the three of them soon writhing, sweating, straining for a release like no other, a union unattainable by most.

A sweet release that plunged Kiziah into a hell of pain. A burning, searing place where cells attacked each other savagely and forced a change. Torturous moments that

felt as though they lasted for hours, turning her into something neither wholly human nor completely alien, but the perfect balance of both.

"Almost there," Cable murmured against her ear as the agony subsided, only to be replaced by a consuming hunger, a savage need to draw blood. She fought then, a wild struggle to free herself from their grip, but Fane and Cable easily subdued her until the first rush of Heat and Hunger faded into a background hum, a need that only they could satisfy.

"I'm okay now," Kiziah whispered, dazed and yet strangely exhilarated, as though she stood on the threshold to a new world and only needed to take a single step to enter it.

Cable released her, but before she could move, Fane rolled her underneath him, filled her channel with his cock as he pinned her wrists to the bed. She whimpered in reaction, felt the heat coil in her belly as her canine teeth elongated. Cried out when he closed the distance between them, allowing her to drive her fangs into his neck, his pleasure blending with hers, merging with Cable's as he joined them, his penis sliding into Fane's back entrance.

Just as they'd done before the change, they stilled, savoring an intimacy unlike any other, three people very nearly one. *Feel it?* Cable asked.

Oh yeah, Kiziah said, retracting her fangs, the delight of being joined to Cable and Fane more heady even than the dark lure of vampire blood.

Cable's hand moved to tangle in Kiziah's hair. *It'll only get better.*

Especially when she learns to obey, Fane said, making both Cable and Kiziah smile as they began to move against him, to fuck, to demonstrate how capricious the Wheel of Fortune could be when linked to The Lovers, how easily the one with the most power could become the one with the least when pleasure was involved.

About the Author

Jory has been writing since childhood and has never outgrown being a daydreamer. When she's not hunched over her computer, lost in the muse and conjuring up new heroes and heroines, she can usually be found reading, riding her horses, or hiking with her dogs.

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