

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

HER *Werewolf*



LISA ANDEL

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Her Werewolf

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HER WEREWOLF

Lisa Andel

Dedication

To Laura Bacchi: thanks for brainstorming with me. I owe you a martini.

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Prologue

Hey. I guess if I'm going to tell you my story, I should start at the beginning. Even if it is a bit dull. By the way, you can call me Kris.

I was born in Iowa City, Iowa, in 1964. My birth parents gave me up for adoption and I was adopted by a nice, middle-class couple named Anderson. I was raised in a normal middle-class way, in a quiet middle-class suburb of Chicago.

Pretty much the only remarkable events during the first forty years of my life were —

When I was fourteen I was trying out my friend Jenny Pierson's unicycle. I was paying more attention to keeping the damn thing upright than the VW Bug barreling down the street toward me. Next thing I knew, I was airborne. The unicycle was totaled. I walked away with a few bruises and scratches.

The second memorable event was losing my virginity at sixteen. Twice. Don't ask me how that happened. All I know is if I go for six months or so without sex, my hymen grows back. Frankly, I'd rather win the lottery.

And then there's the event that happened to me a year ago on my fortieth birthday. It was the night I should have died.

Since then my life has taken on some strange twists.

See, it happened this way...

Chapter One

"Happy birthday, Kris," my mother Millicent called at the crack of dawn to tell me. Well, okay it was nine a.m., but last night was two for one night at the pub and I was deranged because I was going to be forty years old the next day.

"Umph," I managed to grunt at my mother.

"Don't forget dinner at six," she said. *God*, how can anyone sound that cheerful in the morning?

I mumbled something incoherent at her and she hung up.

The next time I woke up it was going on noon and I felt almost human. I shuffled my way to the kitchen, drank three cans of Coke and ate a stack of microwave pancakes drenched in butter and syrup. Ahhhhhhhh. After a nice leisurely shower, I was ready to face the day.

What does one wear on their fortieth birthday? Special underwear. I'd treat myself and wear my black lace bra and panties. Then, seeing how I'm built, I decided over that, I'd wear dark blue jeans and my favorite sweater. I'm not fat, really, but I'm not built like a ten-year-old boy. The extra weight I carry just gives me a little padding and lots of curves, all in the right places. I like the curves, they make me feel feminine. The jeans were just snug enough—and blessed with enough spandex—that they set off those curves without strangling me when I sat. The sweater my father had actually picked out himself for me four years ago for my birthday. It was royal blue at the shoulder, darkened to purple at the waist, then lightened to magenta at the hem. It fell just to my hip bones and had a V-neck cut low enough to show some cleavage. It was snug enough to show off my natural C-cups and yet loose enough to hide that little roll of flesh that bulged up at the top of my jeans whenever I sat down.

I threw on some matching socks and a pair of black hiking boots to complete the outfit.

By the time I was dressed, my hair was dry. I've got this fine, light brown hair that can only be styled two ways. Let it dry naturally, which gives it a little body and curl, or spend an hour on it with a curling iron since it refuses to take the hint. It looks pretty good curled and I might take the effort to do it more often, but I'm too lazy and the hair ends up breaking off after getting fried a few times. So I did a fast style with my hair, then brushed on some mascara and lip gloss. I went with dark amethyst earrings, a plain gold necklace and my trusty Timex.

Now that I was set for the day, I took a look around my house. See, the problem started last night when I got to thinking about the big four-oh. I thanked god and whoever had provided my genetic material that I didn't look that damn old. Something, however, snapped in my brain and told me my life was racing to its end. I felt a

desperate need to live each day to its fullest. Last night it meant walking down to the pub and drinking margaritas 'til I couldn't remember how I got home. Today it meant cleaning up my house in case I found someone I wanted to bring home for some recreational sex. It had been almost a year since I broke up with Todd—a story that isn't worth the telling—and, dammit, that meant my hymen was back.

My new life promise to myself, "Lose the hymen and keep it lost."

Which reminded me to make sure I had a case or two of condoms on hand. Some extra-large ones—I'm an optimist.

I changed the sheets on my bed, then picked up and put away all the crap that seemed to magically appear around my house. I cleaned the bathrooms and kitchen. Did a quick dust and vacuum of the whole place and decided it was good enough.

I loved my house. I'd inherited it and an embarrassing amount of money from some eccentric aunt I'd never met.

The house was contemporary lodge, lots of stone and wood with every modern convenience, nestled on five wooded acres just outside of town. The first floor had a two-story living room with a wall of windows on one side and a wood burning stone fireplace on the opposite. The front door opened into this room, but no one ever came to the front door.

Straight back from the living room was a combination kitchen and dining area. To the left of the kitchen was a utility room with a pantry and doors that led both outside to the driveway and into the garage. The garage was big enough for three small cars.

The dining area held a huge round oak table that seated twelve. I'd never had enough people over to my house to fill up the chairs. By myself, I usually sat at the counter that separated the dining area from the kitchen. Sliding glass doors from the dining area led to a deck that ran the entire length of the back of the house.

A hall led off to the right of the living room. Down that hall, on the left was the master suite—sweet, really. My bedroom was huge. It had sliding glass doors to the deck, a walk-in closet and a bathroom that was almost as big as my first apartment.

On the other side of the hall was a half bath, a den—my cozy TV viewing room with big-screen TV and a surround-sound system—and a library/study room that I rarely stayed in but used for storing books and my computer.

At the end of the hall were stairs that led to the second story. The upstairs consisted of four bedrooms, two on the right and two on the left. Each pair of bedrooms shared a full bath. Beyond the bedrooms, the hallway turned to the right to the area over the dining, kitchen and utility rooms. The left side of the hallway was open to the living room below. The first room over the dining area and part of the kitchen I used as my studio. I make handcrafted jewelry and actually sell it. The wall toward the living room was half stone—the back of the fireplace—and half open to the room below. The wall opposite that had large windows and a sliding glass door onto a balcony that ran from the studio to the end of the bedrooms. Sliders from two of the bedrooms opened onto the balcony as well.

The additional room beyond the studio held a half bath and a mini kitchen with the rest of the space devoted to storage.

By the time I'd checked to make sure I had enough alcoholic beverages on hand it was time to leave for my parents'.

My driveway is about half a mile long and gated at the end since the pub sits directly beyond my property. Fortunately, the gate is electronic.

My parents live on the other side of town in a condominium. Never say "condo", my mother thinks that's the prophylactic. I'd just gotten out at their place when it occurred to me that I didn't have any condoms on me. What if we went back to his place? Okay so there was no "he" but I knew I was going out on the town after dinner and I wanted to be prepared.

I ran across the street to the pharmacy in this neo-quaint mini strip mall. As I was coming out of the pharmacy I locked eyes with possibly the sexiest man I'd ever seen.

He looked to be in his thirties, maybe a little older. He was six feet three inches tall, at a guess, with broad shoulders, narrow hips and long, lean legs. He had slightly unkempt dark brown hair, a little longer than the current fashion, and electric blue eyes. He looked fit enough to run from here to North Dakota without breaking a sweat. And he was looking at me. My brain stopped functioning and all the moisture in my mouth headed south.

I kept walking toward the street on autopilot, though parts of my body were encouraging me to glue myself to this stranger. As I stepped off the curb, I glanced back and swore to myself if he was still looking at me I'd turn around.

I heard the squeal of tires and turned back in time to get a face full of pickup truck grill. My left wrist was caught in the ornate scrollwork at the bottom of the grill so instead of flying over the truck I was dragged under it.

The truck didn't slow down, it picked up speed. It drove over curbs and shrubs. I was finally wrenched off the bottom of it when it mowed down a barberry bush.

As I lay stuck in the mangled shrub, it occurred to me that I should be dead. I also remembered why I hated barberry bushes so much. I was contemplating a strategy for extricating myself from the thorns when I was yanked to my feet.

Focusing on my rescuer, I realized it was the sexy guy who had been standing outside the pharmacy. About a million questions flooded my brain, not the least of which was "What's this guy yanking me out of a bush for when I could have been seriously hurt?" He smiled at me. One of those super sexy half smiles and I fainted.

When I came to, I was propped up against his chest, sitting in front of him on his motorcycle. He had one arm around me and I could feel his chest muscles and abs moving smooth and hard against my back. He pulled into the parking space next to my Explorer.

"Do you live here?" His voice was deep and lightly accented. What type of accent I didn't know, but I loved it. The fine hairs on my arms stood up as a shiver traveled through me. I was thinking about the way his muscles had moved as he'd spoken. I was

hoping he'd start exploring my body with the hand he had resting on my left hip. I was thinking about exploring the thighs that were pressed against the outside of mine. Strong thighs, roped with muscles I could see bunch and stretch as we rode. He gave a short laugh, then asked me again if I lived here.

"Uh," God I'm brilliant. "Uh, I..." Focus. I needed to focus on answering the question, but he had such fine legs. "My parents live here. It's my birthday dinner." Not eloquent, but not total gibberish.

"Great, I love birthday dinners."

Oh...my...God. The sexy guy had just invited himself to my birthday dinner. With my family!

I slid off his bike and tried to make a run for it. He easily caught up with me, slung an arm around my back and anchored me to his side with a hand around my waist. I could swear he was laughing. At me.

"Here," he handed me my purse and the bag from the pharmacy, "you dropped these."

Maybe he had a right to laugh.

I knocked at my parents' door then let us in. My mother came rushing from the kitchen.

"Kris, is that you? You're late." She stopped abruptly. She looked at me and then at the sexy guy latched onto me, then back at me again. I could see a blush creeping up into her face. Now what was that about?

"Hi, Mom, this is..." I trailed off because I had no idea who the sexy guy was. What was I supposed to say? "Hi, Mom, meet the sexy guy I met outside the pharmacy where I went to buy condoms"?

"Dade McClur, ma'am, it's a pleasure meeting you." Dade, huh. What kind of name was Dade?

"Call me Millie, Dade," Mom fairly cooed. Guess sexy guy had an effect on Mom too. "Dinner's ready so hurry up."

I stopped by the bathroom to wash my hands. Dade leaned against the doorjamb and watched me. Those long, lean legs of his slanted out in front of him, crossed at the ankle. I looked at myself in the mirror and suddenly realized why Mom had blushed. My hair was sticking out every-which-way and my face was flushed. My clothes were slightly askew and stained with dirt and grass. I looked like I'd just had sex in the yard. Well, I couldn't tell her what had really happened so she was going to have to keep thinking that. I glanced at Dade in the mirror. He was smiling at me. Just great.

I brushed out my hair.

Dade was still planted in the doorway when I tried to slip past him. He caught me with an arm around my waist. He slid his other hand around to the back of my head, pulled me tight against his hard, muscled body and kissed me. The whole maneuver

took only a matter of seconds, but it left me stunned. He turned to the sink and washed his hands.

Dinner with my family was usually a trial. My dad was okay. Sixty-seven years old, sitting at the head of the table, he'd learned the value of a stiff drink and how to tune the rest of us out. Mom was sixty-six. She always sat at the opposite end from Dad and closest to the kitchen. I think it's her planned escape route. She always treats me like I'm still twelve.

My brother Matt was sitting on my mother's left. He's forty-two but often acts like he's twelve. His wife Sara sat next to him. She hadn't reached her thirtieth birthday yet. She was one of those people who are too polite to ever say what they really think. About anything. Their four-year-old daughter Meg sat between her mother and my father. She was still a sweet kid but I figured it was only a matter of time.

Bruce, the three-year-old spawn of Satan, sat on my father's other side.

I wondered briefly which would be worse, having Dade sit next to the devil child or my mother. My mother solved my dilemma by patting the table next to her, inviting Dade to sit there. Dad rolled his eyes and began inspecting his silverware. Maybe he was looking for a weapon.

No one spoke except the devil child, while the roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, green bean casserole and rolls made the rounds. Bruce kept up a running litany of "What's that? What's that? What's that?" No one answered him.

"So Dade, how did you meet Kris?" my mother inquired.

He pressed his thigh against mine and lifted the corner of his mouth in a smile.

"I saw her in Meyers pharmacy," he replied, "and waited outside the store for her."

I had no idea what he had just said. I was distracted by an electric tingle on my leg where his was touching me. I shoved a forkful of something into my mouth.

"So how long have the two of you been dating?" Mom asked.

A slow fire was burning its way from the edge of my thigh to my crotch.

Dade grinned at my mother and told her, "About an hour now."

All the adults at the table looked at him in shock. Great, now they thought I'd had a quickie in the yard with a guy I'd just met. I shoveled something else in my mouth and continued to chew. Dade reached behind me and ran his fingers down the back of my neck. A jolt shot straight to my groin and I gasped. Then I choked on my partially chewed food and hacked out a wad of beans and potatoes onto the tablecloth. Everybody stared at the glob of food.

Bruce reached out a chubby little hand, grabbed the glob and popped it into his mouth. We all stared at Bruce until he'd swallowed.

Sara jumped up and ran toward the bathroom.

"Eeeeew," Meg summed up the situation.

My brother began telling us then about some meeting at his office. Apparently some guy at the meeting had a bad case of gas. Matt kept laughing at his own story.

The devil child offered me a wad of chewed food since I'd so kindly provided him with some earlier. It was the first time I'd ever had a warm feeling toward the kid.

The meal progressed in silence for a while after that. Dade had removed his hand from the back of my neck for which I was grateful. He'd pressed his thigh harder against me though and my crotch was threatening to ignite.

Mom and Sara and I cleared the dishes away for dessert. Bruce entertained his sister and the men with fart noises.

Sara poured Irish coffee while Mom brought out the cake. A random thought passed through my mind that I could light the candles with my crotch. I snorted, for no apparent reason to the others. Always an attractive thing to do in front of a man you're trying to impress.

I made my wish while I blew out the candles, "Please don't let Dade be a serial killer."

After the cake was consumed, the men stayed at the table while the womenfolk cleared the rest of the dishes. I caught Dade grinning at me so I shot him a dirty look.

Then it was time to open my gifts.

I opened my brother's first. He'd bought me the three latest books in a series I was reading and a couple from an author I hadn't read yet. Surprised the hell out of me.

I opened Sara's present next and almost choked again. Inside the box was a lacy, red, crotch-less teddy and a note written in letters big enough to see on the moon, "Maybe this will end your losing streak!"

I peeked at Dade. He was grinning at me. I peeked at my mother. Her mouth was hanging open as she stared at Dade. Matt was laughing. Sara had the courtesy to blush. My dad concentrated on his coffee.

"Pretty," my niece innocently stated.

"Very," Dade responded his voice low and sultry.

Dad shot him a glance then went back to studying his coffee.

There were three packages from my parents. Mom usually does all the shopping and I was hesitant to open any of them. Not only does she think I'm still twelve, she thinks I'm much larger than I really am.

The first package contained several pairs of brightly colored socks. Some with individual toes on them. Does anyone's shoes fit right with those?

The second package held half a dozen bras. The big, white, cotton, padded, reinforced, armor-plated kind. My brother snorted.

The last package was loaded with cotton fabric. I pulled on it and out came a handful of panties. Big, white cotton granny panties to go with the big white bras.

"You've got to be kidding me," my brother managed to blurt out while laughing.

"You can never have too many clean pairs of underthings," my mother told him sternly.

I jammed the panties back into the box. At least she didn't get me a girdle.

Once the panties and bras were out of sight everybody got up from the table.

The devil child started racing around the room shouting, "PeeEw, PeeEw, PeeEw," while his parents ignored him.

I was ready to make my escape so I thanked everyone for their gifts and my mother for dinner. I told them Dade and I had to be somewhere. I kissed or hugged everybody except Bruce, who I smacked upside the head. I'd often wanted to do that. I considered it my gift to myself.

"Hope to see more of you, Dade," my mother told him as we made our way out the door.

We walked in silence to my car. I threw my packages in the back and turned toward Dade. I was trying to decide if I should tell Dade he got what he deserved by inviting himself to dinner, or just thank him for yanking me out of the bush and run away. I was still debating when he slid his hands around my waist, pulled my hips tight against his and lowered his mouth to mine.

His lips were soft. The rest of him was not. He gently increased the pressure as he probed the top of my lower lip with his tongue, seeking entrance. I opened my mouth and let him in. He pressed me back against the tailgate of my Explorer, insinuated his thigh between my legs and deepened his kiss. His left hand slid up my side until his fingers cradled my breast. My nipples grew painfully hard. He brushed his thumb across a nipple. I groaned into his mouth and rubbed my crotch along his thigh. He ground his erection against my hip.

"Get a room," someone yelled at us.

Dade's mouth left mine, but the rest of him still held me firmly pressed against the car. I looked around his shoulder and saw my brother and his family walking past. My brother was shaking his head. His wife was smiling.

"I'll follow you," was all Dade said as he peeled himself off me and headed for his bike.

I shook myself and headed for the driver's door.

I barely remember the drive home. I couldn't stop thinking of how Dade's body felt pressed against mine. How a certain part of Dade's body felt long and thick and hard as it pressed into my hip.

I nearly rammed my gate before I realized I was there.

I shut the gate behind Dade then opened the garage door. Since I only own the one vehicle, Dade pulled inside the garage next to me.

I raced into the house, afraid I might attack him in the garage. Dade walked with me with a strength and grace that reminded me of a panther. It was an awesome thing to watch. I clipped the door frame between the utility room and the kitchen with my shoulder then lurched forward a few steps before I regained my balance. I was thinking

a glass of wine would be really good about now. I managed to make my way to the refrigerator without falling on my face.

"I've got beer or wine here, liquor is in the cabinet over there. Help yourself."

I poured myself a glass of white wine and drank it. I poured myself another then turned around to watch Dade.

He'd poured himself a couple of fingers of scotch in a rocks glass then came straight for me. I backed up against the fridge, my heart kicking up a notch. I was absurdly aware of how overwhelmingly masculine he was. His thighs brushed up against mine and I felt a sudden dampness between my legs. He looked me in the eyes with those blue, blue eyes of his.

"Ice?" was all he said.

When it finally penetrated the fog of lust in my brain I realized I was blocking the freezer door.

"Oh." I really must be wowing this guy with my witty intellect.

Once I gave myself some space from Dade I remembered there were questions I had to ask him.

He followed me out to my living room where I busied myself building a small fire in the fireplace.

He slouched on one end of the couch and I could barely keep from pouncing on him. His lips twitched when I sat in a chair instead of next to him.

"We've got to talk," I told him, trying to sound serious, though my eyes were glued to the bulge in his pants. He didn't answer, so I finally wrenched my eyes to his face. He just raised an eyebrow at me and waited.

"Okay," I took a gulp of wine for fortification, "outside the pharmacy, when I stepped off the curb?" I waited for his nod. "What did you see happen to me?"

He raised his other eyebrow at me then squinted at me like I was maybe mental or something.

"You were hit by a pickup and dragged several blocks while they tried to scrape you off on various shrubs. You ended up stuck to a barberry bush." He sat perfectly still, a curious look on his face.

"Yeah, that's what I remember happening." I kind of grimaced while I tried to figure out how to say the next part. "You yanked me out of the bush." He nodded. "How did you know it would be okay to do that? I could have had all kinds of broken bones or something."

He studied me for a long time after that. Then he smiled that wicked half smile of his. "You don't know." It was a statement.

"What don't I know?"

"Have you ever broken a bone?" he asked.

"No." I'd had several occasions in my life when I should have. I fell out of trees as a kid. I'd run into trees when I'd lost control of my bicycle. I'm especially good at falling down stairs. And of course there's the unicycle and now the pickup truck incidents.

"You don't break bones, you probably never get sick and you heal rapidly if you do get damaged." All true, but I couldn't figure out what he was trying to get me to understand.

"You're immortal." He said it casually, like he'd say "You're a brunette".

I would have laughed at him, but he looked entirely serious and I knew, even though I didn't want to know, that the pickup incident should have been fatal.

I stared at the fire while I worked the idea around in my mind. Immortal. If I suspended my beliefs, it made sense. Either that or Dade was crazy. I really, really didn't want Dade to be crazy. I wanted him to be naked in my bed. In me.

"How could you tell?" I almost whispered.

"We recognize our own," he informed me.

"Our own?" I hoped he didn't mean he was my brother or something.

"Supernaturals," was his reply. "I'll tell you about it. Starting tomorrow. Tonight we're going to celebrate your birthday."

The look he gave me let me know exactly how we were going to celebrate.

"Now come here," he almost growled at me.

I moved over next to him on the couch. He reached over, took the glass from my hand and set it down on the end table. His pupils dilated. His eyelids drooped with desire. Beads of sweat popped out along my hairline and I was suddenly nervous as he moved in on me. I was having trouble breathing. He drew me to him. This time there was nothing gentle about his kiss. He devoured me with it, his hands roaming over my body.

He broke the kiss, pulled me off the couch by the hand and started heading for the other half of the house.

"Bedroom?" his voice was hoarse.

I pointed to my bedroom door and he dragged me into the room behind him. He picked me up and threw me onto the bed. He stalked after me. His lean body moving with a fluid animal grace. A predatory look in his eyes.

Then his lips were on mine, his hands tangled in my hair, his body pressing me down into the mattress. My body exploded with desire and I groaned. He growled in response, grabbed the hem of my sweater and pulled it off over my head.

I was tugging on his t-shirt but not having any luck with it. He removed my bra and pitched it off the bed, followed by his shirt. He pinned me down, his tongue driving into my mouth. I jammed my fingers into his hair and wrapped my legs around his hips. He rocked his erection against my crotch, causing his chest to rub against my nipples. They pebbled in response and began to ache.

Then his hands were on me, kneading my breasts, pinching my nipples. I groaned again and rubbed myself against the bulge in his jeans. He brushed his lips across the angle of my jaw then nipped his way down my neck. He traced a circle around my nipple with his tongue then sucked it into his mouth, lightly scraping it with his teeth. I moaned as my back arched off the bed. He sucked harder, his mouth hot and wet on my flesh. I felt my vaginal muscles clench as moisture washed over them.

"Take your pants off." Dade could barely talk.

He rolled off me and I shed my clothes, watching him as he undressed.

The man had the body of a god. He wasn't wearing any underpants and his penis practically burst from his jeans when he unzipped them. It looked huge. It stood angled toward the ceiling, long, straight and thick. A bead of moisture dotted the head and I salivated when I saw it. I reached out to touch him but Dade had other plans.

He pushed on my shoulders until he had me flat on my back, then he stroked a hand down my belly to the juncture of my thighs. He edged a leg between mine and nudged my legs apart with his knee. He slid one finger over my clit then down between the folds. He was looking me straight in the eyes, his breathing ragged, when he slipped his finger into me. I came. Just like that. Took us both by surprise. My hips shot off the bed, his penis twitched against my thigh. He stroked me through the orgasm, his palm pressed against my clit.

When I'd finished shuddering, he smiled at me and said, "Amazing." Then his mouth was on mine and as he slid his tongue in next to mine, he moved his body between my legs.

"Bring your knees up," he requested.

I grinned up at him, "There's a box of condoms in the nightstand."

"Don't need 'em."

I narrowed my eyes, "Of course we do."

"Honey, you're immortal, what do you think can happen to you?" He dragged the length of his cock along my slit.

"Pregnancy?" I felt my crotch warming with arousal as he continued to stroke.

"Can't happen," he ground his pelvis against mine, and my resolve slipped.

"Why not?" I ran my feet up the sides of his calves.

"Just trust me," he nuzzled the side of my neck and I was lost. If I was going to believe I was immortal, then I might as well believe this too.

Besides, if I didn't get him inside me soon I was going to explode.

So I pulled my knees up on either side of his waist while he reached between us. He stroked the head of his cock up and down my slit a couple of times, then a couple of times more. He was driving me crazy. He finally placed the head of his penis at the opening of my vagina. He wrapped his arms around my shoulders, his chest pressed against mine. He looked me in the eyes and thrust.

His eyes widened as he snapped my hymen and I flinched.

"You're a virgin?" He sounded shocked.

"No." I felt a blush coloring my face. "The damn thing keeps growing back."

He laughed as he eased himself further into me. He backed out about halfway then thrust all the way in. He held still for a moment and my muscles twitched around him. Then he started to move. Deep, hard thrusts that radiated pleasure outward toward my extremities.

I'd never had a man this big inside me before. His penis rubbed against all kinds of interesting spots. Stretched me until I thought I'd burst. He sucked on my neck and a pressure started building in my groin, my muscles began to contract.

He responded by driving harder and faster into me. I lost rational thought. All I could do was feel. He gazed into my eyes and saw them go opaque just before I blew apart beneath him. I cried out his name as bursts of light flashed in my head and my sheath convulsed around him.

He kept up the pace, seeking his own release. A second orgasm ripping through me just before he cried out and exploded deep inside.

He thrust a few hard times after that then collapsed on top of me. I wrapped my legs over his and hung on to him, waiting for my breath to come back, my heart to slow down.

"Incredible." I didn't realize I'd said it out loud until he looked at me and said, "Yes."

He rolled over with me then, keeping himself seated in my pussy. I noticed he was hard again.

"You're hard already?" I blurted.

"I'm a long way from being done with you." He wasn't kidding.

It was several hours later when he pulled my boneless, well-sated body against his chest. He draped a leg over my thigh as I fell into sleep.

* * * * *

He woke me the next morning by stroking his way into my body. He had his hands under my butt, my knees hooked over his arms. It was a good thing too, because I couldn't seem to move any part of my body on my own. Everything between my legs was wonderfully swollen and hypersensitive from being so well used the night before.

"My god you feel good," I managed to tell him.

"I'm thinking the same thing myself," he told me, then kissed me, his tongue sweeping into my mouth.

I felt my orgasm building and tried to thrust back against him but only managed to flop around a little like a beached fish.

"Come for me, Kris," he rumbled into my neck, his lips raising goose bumps along my flesh.

So I did. I came so hard I almost passed out.

"Dade!" I screamed so loudly, my parents on the other side of town probably heard me. He followed me over the edge with a roar.

When he'd recovered, he picked me up and carried me into the shower. He propped me up with one of his large hands and washed me slowly, teasing my nipples with the cloth. By the time he was finishing up with me I could control my body again.

I washed him thoroughly, lingering over the muscles in his chest and ass. Tight, wet muscles that flexed under my hands. I was afraid to wash his penis in case it aroused the thing. I tried to do it quickly while Dade laughed at me. I wasn't fast enough.

"How do you do that?" I just goggled at the beast standing stiff in front of my hands.

"I'm not human," he continued to laugh, "sex invigorates me." Then he picked me up by the waist and placed my back against the wall.

I wrapped my legs around him, afraid he might drop me. He held me there like I weighed nothing at all. He adjusted his grip under my butt then entered me.

"Let go," he told me as he drove himself deep.

I didn't think he meant for me to let go of him, so I had no idea what he was talking about. After that I couldn't think at all. My entire world became the feel of him sliding in and out of me, stretching me. I felt the familiar tension building in my groin and I let myself be swept away. I felt him throb in response as he unloaded himself into me.

Then he bit me.

We came again. Together.

"Mine," he growled.

I noticed his eyes were green.

The water in the shower began to cool so he put me down. We rinsed off then got out of the shower. I rubbed a towel over my hair then wrapped it around me. I caught sight of myself in the bathroom mirror and wondered if I looked any different. I noticed two puncture marks on my neck that were almost healed already.

I figured the time had come for Dade to do some explaining.

He pulled on his jeans while I rummaged through my underwear drawer.

"I could get your mother's gifts out of your car," he offered with a sly grin.

"You'd like that, would you?" I glanced back at him. His eyes were blue again.

I managed to get my underthings on even with Dade's help—he kept sticking his hands in my underpants and bra. I grabbed a soft denim dress out of my closet and pulled it on. My hair wasn't dry yet so I flipped my head down and shook it. I'd do my makeup later when my hair was dry.

Dade was rooting through the fridge when I got to the kitchen. He had eggs and bacon out. He added cheese, butter and milk to them. My stomach rumbled and I decided the questions could wait until after breakfast.

"Coffee?" I asked him.

He pulled me into his arms and kissed me. I could get used to this.

"Love some," he let me know and squeezed my butt.

I fixed up the coffee pot and got a mug out while he located the griddle and a frying pan.

I grabbed a Coke out of the fridge then took a seat at the counter so I could watch him while he cooked. I loved the way his muscles bunched and shifted as he moved. His movements were economical and graceful but packed with contained power. I thought about asking him to cook in the nude.

He also ate with an economy of motion and a fierce concentration that was fascinating to watch.

I was washing the griddle and frying pan after breakfast when the phone rang. Dade glanced at me with my hands in the soapy water and picked up the phone.

"Good morning, Millie," I heard him say. Oh crap, it's my mother.

What time is it? Ten a.m. Good. Not an automatic that Dade spent the night.

"Very good." He sounded extremely pleased when he said that.

"Excuse me?" Now what had Mom asked him?

"Don't worry, Millie, my father raised me right. I spent several hours pleasing your daughter before we slept. She seemed to enjoy it, I know I did."

Kill me now.

"My intentions? I intend to pleasure your daughter as often as possible." Dade gave the phone a curious look and held it out to me.

I took it with a sense of doom.

"Hi, Mom."

"Kris, what do you think you're doing?" Mom sounded kind of hysterical.

She kept screeching at me but I tuned her out. Dade got up and I thought he was heading for the coffee pot, but he came up behind me. He wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me up against his erection. He reached down to the hem of my dress and raised it above my hips, then trapped it there between our bodies.

Mom was still going full steam.

Dade's fingers traced the elastic waistband of my panties then dipped inside and cupped my mound.

A small moan escaped from me but thankfully, my mother didn't seem to notice as she lectured away.

Dade's lips brushed a path down my neck as he slid a finger inside of me. I bit my lip to keep from moaning out loud. Dade ground his hips against me as he sucked on the sensitive part of my neck. He withdrew his finger, traced around my clit then feathered his fingers over it. I shuddered.

He ripped my panties off, I heard the sound of his zipper, then he dove into me from behind. In a matter of strokes and caresses he had me crashing over the edge. He followed shortly.

I jerked back to reality when I realized I was still holding the phone. I vaguely remember screaming, "Oh god, Dade, yes!" My mother was ominously silent on the other end.

"Gotta go, Mom, bye." I hung up in a panic. Okay, okay, I can handle this. I'm forty years old for god's sake. I'd call her back later. In a few hours maybe. After she'd had time to calm down. Maybe I'd call her after dinner, or better yet, tomorrow. I'd call her tomorrow and act like nothing happened. Maybe she'd think she imagined the whole thing. There, I had a plan.

I got control of myself, grabbed a fresh Coke out of the fridge, filled Dade's coffee mug and then gestured him toward the living room. I followed behind him, watching the muscles in his butt move beneath the well-worn denim. He had the best ass I'd ever seen. Cute, with real definition that told you he worked out a lot, in the right way, to get that definition. He dropped down onto the couch, catching sight of where my eyes had been. His eyes darkened and he reached for me. I danced back a step.

"You bit me." Of all the things I wanted to ask him, I don't know why I started with that.

I turned to sit in the chair, but Dade leaned forward, grabbed my arm and pulled me down beside him on the couch.

"Let me start with the basics," Dade said, ignoring my statement. He dropped his arm around my shoulder and drew me up against his side. I rested my hand on his thigh.

"There are all kinds of supernatural beings that take on human form and live their lives among the humans, or that can take on human form but prefer to live within their families, packs or warrens." He glanced down at me.

"The most prevalent are the vampires, werewolves and magic users. There are, in fact, gods and goddesses, fairies and ghosts." I looked at him to see if he was kidding. He absently brushed a strand of hair out of my face. There was not a trace of humor in his eyes.

"Forget everything you've ever read or seen in the movies about these beings. Most of the information out there is just the product of the writers' imagination. Though it is true that most supernaturals are immortal, those that aren't have extremely long lives compared to humans.

"Being immortal does not mean that you can not die. You're just a whole lot harder to kill.

"When I look at you I see, for lack of a better word, an aura that tells me you are an immortal magic user.

"You undoubtedly see something when you look at me, you just don't know how to interpret it yet.

"I'd say that since your family is human and the fact you aren't tied by blood to any of them, you must have been adopted. That really bothers me because it simply isn't done. Most supes are raised by a supernatural parent or parents. It's virtually required to learn from birth about their heritage.

"So two things bother me about your circumstances. The first is the fact that your immortal mother gave you to a human family. So either she was in extreme danger, or you were.

"The second thing that bothers me is that incident yesterday. That pickup truck hit you intentionally. My guess is they thought you might be the being they were looking for. They run you over and you live. It proves you are the being they were looking for. Since they've found you now it won't be long before they come after you again." He was unconsciously rubbing his hand up and down my arm. It was a soothing gesture.

"Why didn't they take me when I was stuck in that bush? Or simply drag me with them, wherever they were going?" I was anxiously stroking his thigh.

He stilled my hand and when I looked down at it, I saw that he was pressing hard against the zipper of his jeans.

"Might be because I was following them."

"Okay, but I didn't see anyone lurking around outside my parents' house and there has to be almost sixty different families living in those condos. How are they going to know what my name is or where I live?"

"You're thinking like a human, babe. They might be or have pre-cogs who can tell them where you're going to be. They most assuredly have trackers that can pick up your scent off the pickup and follow you here. Most supes use scent as part of their daily lives. Werewolves have the keenest sense of scent, it makes them the best trackers."

"Since they probably know where I live by now, why are we still here?"

"We're working with a lot of unknowns. The best I can tell you is that I don't sense any danger yet. I'm also waiting for a friend of mine to contact me. If we move from this location right now they'll still be able to track your scent. My friend has vast resources and will definitely be interested in what's going on here." He paused and for the first time since I'd met him he looked uncomfortable. His hand stroked my arm almost compulsively now.

"And?" I prompted him.

"Okay, okay. I knew your scent needed to be changed before we left here." He ran his fingers through his hair.

"There are several ways, I'm sure, that that could be accomplished. I don't have the magic to change or disguise your scent that way. See, I'm a werewolf. Before you ask, yes, I change into a wolf. No, I don't kill humans. Not for food or fun anyway. I was half a mile away when your scent drew me to that pharmacy last night. There's something extremely arousing about your scent. Once I saw you, I knew I would have you." He took a moment to kiss me thoroughly.

"Like humans, weres have a lot of recreational sex. It revitalizes us and refreshes our magic. Unlike humans, supernaturals have no sexually transmitted diseases and they can only produce offspring with their mates, or the one they choose to impregnate." He shifted restlessly, crossed then uncrossed his legs.

"Another way to change your scent is a blood exchange." Rub, rub, rub, rub. His hand was picking up speed on my arm. He lowered his eyes and shifted in his seat.

"Christ. It's not like I'm a pup. I'm two hundred thirty-seven years old." Rubrubrubrub.

"Last night," at this he turned to look at me and his face relaxed into a smile. "Last night and this morning with you was unlike anything I've ever experienced." He quit rubbing my arm to stroke the side of my face.

"I've never taken a human lover before. You were so very soft and wet and incredibly responsive. The scent of your desire is intoxicating, addicting." He trailed his fingers through my hair and my body responded.

"When you bathed me, my god, the sheer selflessness of that act alone undid me, I was lost. I knew I could never let you do a blood exchange with another male. The wolf in me claimed you, marked you as mine. The blood exchange has begun."

He kissed me fiercely then, growling low in his throat.

"Uh, I think you need to explain that last part in greater detail," I told him when he let me up for air.

He flinched. Then he looked at me with determination.

"For supes, except for those that require blood for — sustenance, the blood exchange is part of the mating ritual. The first step of the ritual, I take your blood and claim you as my chosen mate. Your aura picks up my specific mark to it, that others can see. The closest I can come to describing it in human terms is that I've asked you to marry me and given you my ring. To complete the first step, you'll need to take my blood and acknowledge you are mine.

"The second step of the ritual mates us. We exchange our vows and we make the blood exchange with each other while I'm inside you." He shifted his legs again.

"The final step of the ritual, the bonding, binds us together for life. Or in our case, since you're immortal, it binds us forever. If one of us does die, the other dies too. This blood exchange can take place any time after the second step is completed.

"You can back out of the ritual only after the first step. The second step, the mating, is more complex an arrangement than your marriage ceremony, a much stronger, deeper commitment. As for the bonding, it is not required. You must ask yourself if you would want to live if your mate died."

"Will my scent be altered enough with completion of the first step to avoid my pursuers?"

"Probably not." He became still while I thought over everything he'd said.

Married forever to a guy I barely knew or face an unknown threat and probably death in the near future. And I thought my hymen was a problem.

"Albert may have another solution to the scent problem." I couldn't tell if he didn't really think his friend would have another solution, or if he just didn't want me to seek another solution.

"We might as well complete the first step while we're waiting for Albert." I didn't figure it would do any harm to go that far.

Dade looked so relieved I felt kind of guilty for not taking this whole ritual thing more seriously.

He grabbed me and led me off to the bedroom.

"Good, because I can't wait any longer to take you again," he told me as he peeled off his jeans.

I undressed and joined him on the bed.

He jumped me, kissed me hard then trailed kisses down my neck to my breasts. He sucked each nipple thoroughly, rolling them around in his mouth, tugging playfully on them with his teeth. Then he kissed and licked a path of fire down my stomach to my thighs.

He moved my legs apart with his hands then crouched between them. He spread my labia open with his fingers, took a moment to inhale my scent, then dove in. He laved me, tasted me with his tongue, his lips.

He growled and doubled his efforts, sucking my flesh, swirling his tongue around it. I was begging for completion when he took my clit into his mouth and suckled it, abruptly inserting two fingers inside me.

The orgasm rolled over me, built in intensity then shattered. He quickly replaced his fingers with his penis, pumping inside me while my muscles clenched and shuddered. I wrapped my legs around his waist so he could enter deeper. Dade whispered something in my ear. Words I could not understand. My canine teeth began to lengthen in my mouth. My pelvic muscles began to contract again.

"Bite me, drink from me," Dade directed, his eyes a brilliant green.

I leaned forward, touched his neck with my lips, then opened my mouth and bit him. He howled as he burst inside of me. I sucked on his wound and his blood entered my mouth, hot and spicy-sweet. My own release blasted through me. My fangs receded and I licked the spots of blood from his shoulder.

"I am yours," I heard myself saying as he held me close.

* * * * *

I was still lying on my back. Dade was on his side, pressed up against me. His hand absently stroked my body. He looked terribly pleased with himself as his gaze roamed over me, dark and possessive. His eyes met mine and he smiled. His eyes were blue again.

"How come your eyes are sometimes green?" I hadn't thought to ask him earlier.

"That's the wolf in me. I'm a dark brown timber with green eyes. Certain situations bring the wolf closer to the surface."

Made sense.

"And how did I get fangs?"

"I cast a spell." His fingers were playing between my legs now. He leaned forward to kiss me. His eyes flashed from blue to green just before his lips touched mine and he said, in a rough voice filled with possession, "Mine." Then I lost myself in his kiss.

I was sucking on his tongue, scraping my fingernails lightly down his back, when I felt his muscles go on full alert.

"Someone's here and it's not Albert," he breathed into my ear. His eyes glowed green. He stayed perfectly still while he used his senses to assess the situation.

Then he was a blur of movement as he dove off the bed, grabbed some articles of clothing, then took hold of my arm.

Chapter Two

I found myself standing naked in a strange kitchen. Dade was shoving my dress at me. I just stood there blinking at him.

"Long time, no see, Dade."

I spun around to find a wizened old woman standing in the doorway. I blinked at her.

Dade dropped my dress on the table and pulled on his own clothes. I blinked at the dress.

When he was clothed, he picked up my dress and started putting it on me like I was some life-size doll.

"Dade?" I felt like a doll, maybe he'd left my brain behind in my bedroom.

He finished buttoning the dress, then bent down to put on my shoes. When he stood up, he put his hands on my shoulders and searched my eyes. "You okay?"

"What happened?" I wanted to know.

He pushed me down in a chair at the kitchen table. Waited until the tiny old woman had taken a seat across from me then took the seat next to mine. He took hold of my hand, stroking my palm gently with his fingers.

"Nina, this is my lover, Kris," Dade introduced me, a wicked smile playing around the edges of his mouth.

Nina studied me with clear brown eyes. "I see." Nina said with such emphasis I blushed. "I'll let Albert know you're here while you answer your chosen's questions." Then she closed her eyes and it felt like she'd left the room.

"Do you have to tell everybody we're having sex?" I hissed at him.

Dade looked at me like I was mental, then he smiled that wicked smile at me. "Honey, supes know. It's a point of pride among us to have great sex, often. They can smell me on you and you on me. Your aura has taken on the brilliant sheen of a well-satisfied lover. And, if you recall, I've marked you as mine."

He reached over and fondled my breast. I glanced at Nina. He kept his hand where it was.

"Ah," he exclaimed as realization struck him, "I guess I said the wrong things to your mother this morning."

"In a huge way," I informed him while I pried his hand off me.

He didn't look the least repentant.

"So tell me how we got here."

"I scented four wolves converging on the house. When one of them climbed onto your back deck I knew it was time to get out of there. I brought us here because Nina is one of the most powerful magic users I know as well as a good friend of mine."

"Exactly how did you bring us here?" That part had me stumped.

"Magic," was all he said. Guess I really did have a lot to learn.

He tickled my palm and I looked at his hand. It was easily half again as large as mine. With long fingers, blunt nails and calloused palms. A hand that was well used. A hand that was gentle and skillful when he placed it on me.

"Albert will be here shortly," Nina's presence had returned. "So Dade, you've chosen a mate. And an interesting choice at that." Nina studied me with an intensity that disturbed me.

Dade took it as a compliment and beamed at me.

"How long before Albert arrives?" he asked. I swear he was thinking about having sex with me. I was fervently hoping he wouldn't take me in front of Nina.

"I'm already here, wolf," a deep voice boomed in the small room.

I jumped in my seat and turned to look at the speaker. He definitely did not fit my mental image of an Albert. This guy was nearly seven feet tall. He had to duck to enter the kitchen. He had long blond hair that touched his shoulders in front and tumbled down below his shoulder blades in back. White highlights sparkled throughout. His shoulders were as wide as the door frame. His chest, broad and muscular, tapered to a narrow waist and hips. His hands were as big as my head. His skin was a golden brown. His face looked chiseled out of marble, high cheekbones, Roman nose, generous mouth and large eyes. His eyes were a blue so dark they were almost black. He was wearing a snug white t-shirt and tight, black leather pants that showed every muscle, dip and bulge. A very impressive bulge at that. In fact a rather frightening bulge. When he smiled at me I was blasted with such raw sexuality I thought my flesh might melt off my bones.

Dade placed a proprietary arm around my shoulder.

Albert scanned what he could see of me above the table then started laughing. I briefly wondered what embarrassing information my aura was telling him.

"Your dad's gonna love this, Dade." Albert turned the chair around next to Nina and straddled it.

"Nina, it's always a pleasure seeing you." Albert nodded at her, his voice rumbling in his chest.

"Albert." Nina didn't seem very impressed with him.

He flicked his gaze at me then focused on Dade. "So tell me about your magic user."

Dade recounted the pickup truck incident outside the pharmacy, he told Albert that I had no idea I was either immortal, or a magic user. He finished up with the weres arriving at the house and our flight here.

"And your decision to mate her?" Albert inquired.

"I'd been thinking about how to disguise her scent," Dade began. "Have you ever had a human?"

Albert looked surprised by that question. "No."

"I can't even begin to describe the experience." Dade's pupils began to dilate. "After spending the night inside her, I didn't want another man touching her for the blood exchange."

I was staring at the tabletop, blushing furiously. It was going to take some getting used to, this openness about sex. I looked at Nina to see her reaction. She was nodding in understanding of Dade's sentiments. I couldn't bring myself to look at Albert but could feel his eyes on me.

"It was that good?" Albert sounded speculative.

"Better," Dade assured him.

Albert turned his entire attention to me then. His scrutiny so intense it was like a physical force. I finally couldn't take it anymore. I wrenched my eyes from the tabletop and looked at him. I was sucked into an inferno. Reflexively, I slapped up mental barriers against the conflagration. Relief was immediate. His gaze still burned at me, I was still aware of the immense power behind it, but I was no longer in danger of being consumed by it.

"I don't know what you are," Albert stated.

Nina gasped. Dade looked perplexed. Albert was lost in thought for a minute then came to his decision.

"There's obviously something very important about your magic user, Dade," Albert began, looking contemplatively at me again. "Since we don't know what her ultimate significance is we should proceed with caution."

"I understand the importance of changing her scent, but I think it's premature to bind her to you. Besides the fact that your father is sure to object." The corner of his mouth rose in a wicked smile.

"Instead of completing the three steps of the mating ritual with you, Dade, she will complete the first step with three others."

Dade jumped out of his seat, his face suffused with rage.

"Sit down, Dade, and hear me out."

Instead of sitting down, Dade began to stalk back and forth behind my chair. I could feel the anger radiating off of him.

"You're a were, one of the others should be a vampire, another should be a magic user and the last a hunter. With the blood from these four groups in her, her original scent will be altered beyond recognition. Also having these four bloods she will blend in no matter where she is. She will not stand out as a were among the vampires, so to speak."

"You know that's not done for a reason," Dade fumed at him. "How are you going to keep me from killing any man that tries to get near her?"

"I'm not," Albert responded. "You are. You are going to see that this is necessary for her survival. You know her safety is the primary concern for any mate."

Dade glared at him but didn't refute that point. He visibly made an effort to calm himself, then he sat again at the table.

"Besides," Albert continued, "when this is over, she cannot mate four men. She may still be yours."

Dade did not look comforted by that thought.

"Excuse me," I butted in, "I'm getting the impression that sex is involved in this blood exchange, I didn't think that was necessary."

Albert looked at Dade in confusion.

"Anyone who takes your blood gains insight on you, gains power over you. It's extremely intimate and it's always sexual. It's the most intimate penetration possible. It also causes both parties involved to climax. Always," Dade explained.

Without thinking I found myself stroking his thigh as he talked. He stopped my hand and squeezed it.

"Who exactly are you thinking of?" Dade's expression was grim.

"For the magic user, I'm thinking of Wayne, perhaps the darkover Max, instead of a vampire and myself."

Dade flinched when Albert included himself in the list.

"I've chosen men who enjoy their single status and are powerful enough in their own right to help against our enemy."

Dade thought this over and seemed to calm further. "Any idea who our enemy is?"

"Not yet," was Albert's reply.

"Do I get any say in this?" I was getting kind of pissed off at this point.

"No," both Dade and Albert responded.

I looked to Nina for help.

"Albert and I may not agree on many things, but in this I think he's right. You must remember that sex, to us, is a wonderful activity to be shared and enjoyed. We don't have hang-ups about it the way humans do. The more lovers the merrier, so to speak. Yes, the blood exchange is a bit more intimate to us, but I think your situation warrants it. It will not only alter your scent, it will gain you allies in the men you make the exchange with. Allies you might not have otherwise."

She made sense. Still, I was apprehensive of getting any closer to Albert. The guy scared me.

Albert asked Nina to contact Max and Wayne and ask them to join us.

I asked Dade what a darkover was.

"Vampires are made. Darkovers are born. Darkovers are basically living, breathing, beings with a beating heart and a soul. Vampires are dead. They trade their souls for immortality or are created by other vampires or darkovers. Their skin is cold, they do not breathe, they have no heartbeat. They both require blood from the living to survive."

Creepy.

"What is Albert?" I asked him.

"A hunter. Actually, he's the head of the hunter organization. Hunters police the supernaturals and deal with any that break our laws. Many hunters come from my pack. But being a were is not a requirement. Those that become hunters are granted extra powers. It's that change that sets them apart from others of their species." I squeezed Dade's hand as a thanks for answering my questions.

Nina got up and left the kitchen. A few moments later she returned, two men trailing behind her.

The first man who entered had a sleek build. Six feet tall with the classic broad shoulder, narrow hip build, though he carried less bulk than Dade. His smooth muscles moved with a fluid grace. His long auburn hair was pulled back in a loose ponytail. His green eyes tipped up at the outside corners. He had an expressive mouth and an infectious smile.

The second man was absolutely compelling. He was built like a Greek god. He stood about six feet two inches tall. Had a pale complexion and black hair. Black eyes. His hair fell to his collar, was parted on the side and styled, though a lock fell over his forehead. His strong jaw sported a five o'clock shadow. Confidence surrounded him like a cologne.

I studied them while Albert explained the situation to them.

Dade had moved over to the refrigerator and was removing bottles of beer for everyone.

I could tell when Albert had finished because the two men turned their attention to me.

"Wayne," Albert nodded to the auburn haired man, "Max," he nodded to the dark man, "meet Kris."

My mother had never taught me the etiquette for this situation so I just smiled and nodded at them.

"You both remember Dade?" Albert asked.

Dade paused in opening the bottles and nodded to each man. They nodded back. I wondered if the tension I felt in the room was because there were so many alpha males in attendance, or because of why there were so many alpha males in attendance.

Dade handed out the beers and we all drank while the men discussed how to proceed.

I kept trying to touch Dade, but he was keeping his distance from me.

"We'll be relocating to Coria," Albert began. "It's one of my properties, it's secure and there's more space there. Nina, I'd appreciate it if you would join us there, or at least remain available at a moment's notice."

Nina indicated she'd think about it.

"Kris, after we get settled at Coria, you and Wayne will be free to leave for the evening. The two of you will be expected back at Coria by noon the following day.

"That evening you will accompany Max to his home. Again we will expect you by noon the day after.

"I'll take care of you the third night."

Great, something to look forward to.

"We'll be calling in friends in the meantime to see if there is any word out there on what's going on. We'll also be trying to determine what you are. Anybody have any questions?" Albert looked around the table.

"Nina, will you be joining us?" He looked at Nina. Nina looked at me.

"Yes, I think I will." For some reason that made me feel better.

Everybody stood up and moved into the living room. I thought about making a run for it out the front door.

"You know the way?" Albert asked the others. When they had nodded, Albert took hold of my arm.

The next thing I knew I was standing in a different living room wondering if I'd ever get used to this mode of transportation.

The others appeared almost simultaneously and my heart jumped in my chest. I might have squeaked.

Albert attended to drinks. Nina took out a pad of paper and started jotting notes on it. I wandered around the room looking at the collection of knickknacks on the shelves, most of which I couldn't identify, and the art on the walls, landscapes predominantly. Wayne trailed after me.

I was passing the doorway to the kitchen when Wayne pulled me through it. He backed me up against a wall and leaned into me. He brought his lips close to mine, "Ever been taken by a magic user?" He breathed against my lips. The charge of his sexual energy raising the hair on my arms.

"No," I whispered and his mouth took mine.

It was a long, slow kiss. His tongue leisurely strolling through my mouth. His lips charged with his power. He broke the kiss and grinned at me. Then left me to return to the living room. I let my head clear then followed him.

Dade was sitting tensely, staring at his drink. I wanted to go to him but realized that would be a bad idea.

Albert motioned to Wayne and me, then told us to hit the road.

"Remember – noon tomorrow."

We assured him we'd remember, then Wayne touched my arm.

Chapter Three

Christ. I was in yet another living room.

"Welcome to my home." Wayne wrapped me in his arms and kissed me, his arousal washing over me, charging me.

With one arm still around me he led me up a flight of stairs to his bedroom.

I balked in the doorway. He raised an eyebrow at me. We stood looking at each other for several moments. Then he laughed and picked me up. He carried me to the bed and dropped me on it. I scooted away from him.

"Relax, you're going to enjoy this," he assured me.

In the blink of an eye, he'd magically removed our clothing. Still smiling, he crawled across the bed toward me. His excitement was radiating off him. He lay down beside me, placed a hand on my stomach and leaned over me for a kiss.

When our lips met, his energy field flowed over me. All my nerve endings came alive. His tongue stroked slowly inside my mouth. His hand traced circles on my stomach and then lower. I couldn't help but think of Dade. I tensed against him.

His tongue became demanding, he inserted two fingers inside my vagina then withdrew them to rub my clit. He'd alternate between the two, driving deeper, rubbing faster. His energy field intensified and thoughts of Dade faded away.

I focused on Wayne and the electricity surrounding us surged in power. I began moving my hips against his hand, I drove my tongue into his mouth. A fire coalesced between my legs then burst into flames. Wayne and I cried out together as I came.

I wanted more, needed more, needed it right then and I tried to shift myself under his body. He rolled between my legs, raised my left knee up to his waist and drove into me in one hard thrust. I moaned. He bent his head down beside mine and brushed my neck with his lips. He withdrew his penis almost all the way out of me then slammed it in again. And again. He got a rhythm going then increased his speed. Bursts of energy shot off us like sunspots. My skin tingled from it. My nipples sent jolts to my groin every time his chest rubbed against them.

"You are so fucking hot," Wayne groaned into my ear.

The muscles in my vagina clenched. His cock throbbed once in response and hardened further, causing a ripple throughout my nerve endings.

Fireworks exploded in my brain and sparks shot off us as we climaxed together, my vagina milking his penis dry.

As the pyrotechnics diminished I heard Wayne say, "Mine," and he bit my neck. We came again, our combined orgasm sending St. Elmo's fire dancing across the sheets.

As we lay clenched in each others arms I heard Wayne whisper, "I'll never be the same again."

* * * * *

What seemed an eternity later we roused ourselves.

The electricity was banked low around us. Wayne traced a path with his fingers around my breasts, my nipples, down my stomach then back again.

"You didn't bite me. You were supposed to do that." Wayne paused to cup his palm over my breast.

"I don't know how to make fangs," I told him.

His eyes sparkled as he laughed.

"It's easy, sweetheart." He brushed my lips with his then taught me the spell.

He sighed and shook his head, "I guess I'll have to force myself to make love to you again."

He grinned, then he eagerly slid between my legs. Flashes of light already studded the air around him.

A wave of electricity washed down my body. I raised my legs and wrapped them around his waist.

I smiled at him.

He grinned back then impaled me. He set up a pounding rhythm that was almost out of control. I matched him stroke for stroke. Energy swirled around us like a living thing. The muscles in my vagina clamped down on him. Hard. He groaned but didn't slow down.

I remembered to spell myself fangs and as the world exploded around us, I drew him close and bit him, he bit me in return, our orgasms creating a small nova in my mind.

"I am yours," I breathed out on a shudder.

I didn't get much sleep that night.

* * * * *

We ended up taking two showers the next morning because Wayne was helping me dress after the first shower. And not with his magic. Missed breakfast because of it.

He zapped us dried and dressed after the second shower so we wouldn't be late for our noon deadline.

He took my hand and we were back at Coria. I was happy no one was in the living room at the time.

Then Albert strode into the room. He looked first at Wayne, then at me.

"Wayne, why don't you go into the kitchen." It was more of an order than a suggestion.

Wayne hesitated a second, squeezed my hand, then walked off.

"I'll show you to your room. You'll find a change of clothes in there as well as other essentials." Albert turned and assumed I'd follow him.

The room he showed me to held heavy oak furniture with a four-poster bed that looked soft as a pillow.

"Food?" I asked when Albert turned to leave.

"I'll send something up." Then he was gone.

I stripped off my dress, kicked out of my shoes and burrowed beneath the covers on the bed. Just a short nap, I told myself.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, several newcomers were gathered around the banquet table. Dade slouched in his chair, trying for an air of indifference while Albert questioned Wayne about his evening.

"Albert," Wayne shook his head, repeating, "she's like nothing I've ever encountered before."

A few of the men at the table who didn't know Wayne laughed. Everyone in the room knew what Wayne and Kris had been doing the previous evening. They also knew the names of the four men who made up the core group and what the group sought to accomplish.

Albert paced back and forth at the head of the table. "That's not helping me, Wayne, tell me something we don't know about her yet."

"All I can tell you, Albert, is she blew me away." Wayne looked down at his hands. Dade growled then stormed out of the room.

Albert studied him for a moment then turned back to the others. "Where were we?"

A small brown mole of a man with dark round eyes halfway down the table made a motion with his hand.

"Urud?" Albert acknowledged him.

"As I was saying, there have been rumors around the warren the past couple of weeks about an increase in activity throughout that area. Seems several search parties have been seen coming and going from the old Bolus property." Urud swept his gaze around the table, nodding his head at the significance of this location.

A were on the other end of the table looked sharply at the little man. "I thought the problem at Bolus was taken care of."

"Apparently not well enough," Urud continued. "There's talk that He's back. The increase in traffic around the place would suggest it is possible." Several beings rumbled or growled at this speculation.

"It's not Bolderius that resides at Bolus now," Nina spoke up, "I'd know."

Several heads nodded that remembered the battle four decades ago and Nina's part in it.

"Perhaps 'who' doesn't matter as much as 'why'," one of the fairies proposed.

Albert scanned the gathering. "I was hoping one of you might have an answer to that question."

Warm fingers brushed the hair off my face.

"It's time," Max told me.

I found myself still in bed, just a different bed. I lay naked on top of the covers. Max took his time looking my body over then raised his dark eyes to mine. Hunger shone in them.

"Would you like something to drink?" Max's voice was a dark caress, I found myself leaning toward him as he spoke.

"Thank you, I would," I responded, then felt abandoned when he left to get us something.

I pulled the covers down on the bed, sat on the side and draped a sheet over my chest and lap.

Max returned with a tray that held two glasses of a dark red liquid and a dozen bite-sized sandwiches. He smiled when he saw me. His fangs already extended. He set the tray down on a nightstand then removed his clothes. Wow. He had a sprinkling of dark hair across a well-defined chest and stomach with a dark arrow of hair trailing down to his groin. He was clearly aroused.

My mouth went dry as I stared at him and wondered how something that thick could ever fit into me. He sat on the bed, leaning against the headboard. He handed me a glass and offered me the plate of sandwiches. I took one and tasted it. I took several more. Forgetting for the moment that I was with a kind of vampire, I took a gulp out of my glass, then was relieved to find it held wine.

Max patted the bed beside him and I scooted over there and sat back against the headboard next to him.

"I understand you are new to our society?" Max said.

"Yeah. Three days ago supernatural beings were a figment of the imagination."

Max offered me the plate of sandwiches again and I helped myself.

"So tell me, Max, if it's not too personal, do you feed off humans to survive?" What would a relationship with Max be like? Would I have to keep prying him off family members? Did the "food" have orgasms? Eeeeeew.

Max looked at me and licked his lips. "Yes and no. The taking of blood and sexual arousal are inseparable. I—need—fresh blood about once a month. I have no trouble finding willing donors. And no, I do not kill them."

Was it something about the way I looked at people that had them all assuring me they didn't kill humans?

I finished my wine, Max took the glass and set it on the night table. Then he took me in his arms and stared into my eyes. His eyes were clear dark pools. As he stared at me I felt various parts of my body coming to life. He leaned in close to kiss me. As he took my mouth with his, I felt him slipping into my mind. I jerked back from him.

He gaped at me. Then he held my gaze and focused his consciousness on me. I felt him breaching my mind again and I slammed down a barrier against him.

He was stunned. "How did you do that?"

"I don't know," I shrugged, "it's kind of a reflex."

"You will enjoy yourself more if you let me in," he said earnestly.

"Will you let me into your head?"

"I'm not sure that will enhance your experience. I've been around a long time, seen things you would never want to see." He stroked my cheek while he talked.

"Oh what the hell." I'm sleeping with the third man in as many nights and I'm being a prude about my brain?

Max kissed me again and this time when his mind touched mine, I let him in.

"Ahhh," he groaned. My nipples contracted with a corresponding twinge lower down. He grabbed my hips and yanked me flat on the bed. He continued kissing me, his tongue stroking seductively against mine while his hands roamed over my body. His mind whispered in and caressed mine.

He kissed and nipped his way down my neck, sending bursts of pleasure through me. He paused briefly at my breasts, sucking first one and then the other nipple into his mouth. Then he worked his way down my stomach.

He nudged my legs apart with his knees, spread me open and licked me lightly while he placed my legs over his shoulders.

Then he devoured me. He slid his tongue inside me then swirled it around my lips. He bathed my brain with his arousal. I let it take me higher then washed it back over him. He spiraled in on my clit, sucked it into his mouth then flicked it hard and fast with his tongue. My orgasm ripped through me, flooded him, then returned to me. He turned his head to the side and sank his fangs into the tender flesh on the inside of my thigh. I screamed his name while he drank from me, rocked by orgasms I thought might never stop.

Then he dropped my legs, grabbed my hips and slammed into me.

"Mine," he shouted as he drove himself to the hilt, his cock as hard as steel. I brought my legs up on either side of his body, amazed at the way he filled me. Merged with me. I lost track of where I ended and he began. His eyes reflected mine, reflecting

his. I thrummed with a pleasure so intense it was almost painful. I was aware of my muscles tensing again. He throbbed in response.

I murmured the spell. He lowered his upper body to me. We kissed each other's necks, then sank our fangs into each other at the same time. We came and continued to come, locked together.

"Mine" he spoke into my hair.

"I am yours," I told his shoulder.

Then he rolled us over and began the dance again. At dawn I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep, sprawled across his chest.

I heard the shower running when I woke up. I found my way to his bathroom and stepped into the shower behind him.

He turned and studied me, his expression unnerving me a bit. Then he gathered me in his arms and kissed me, hard. He backed me against the wall, hooked one of my legs over his arm and entered me. He started with long, slow strokes that soon built in speed and intensity.

He whispered words of love and arousal in my mind, his emotions, his sensations flooding into me. I focused them, refined them, added my own to them, then poured them back into him.

We dried off and dressed in time to head back to Coria.

Albert greeted us on our arrival. He handed me a mug of something which I slugged down on my way to my bedroom. I crawled under the covers and fell fast asleep.

* * * * *

There were still several people in the kitchen. Some had been there the whole time, some had returned, some were new faces. Many of them were staying at Coria now. Dade was slumped at one end of the table, eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. Hair unkempt, shirt untucked. He was staring at a cup of coffee, wishing for something stronger. Wayne sat next to him, eyes glazed, staring at nothing.

Albert walked into the kitchen with Max at his side.

"Before you ask," Max was saying, "I can't describe the experience. I have no idea why it's so incredibly powerful."

Dade slouched lower in his seat. Wayne flinched.

"I can tell you this though, she knew when I entered her mind and she blocked me."

Albert nodded, he already knew this about her.

"We talked about it and she agreed to drop her barriers to me." Max glanced at Albert but didn't continue.

"Well? What did you learn?" Albert glared at him.

"I lost track of myself at that point." Max's awe filled his voice. "I've never merged so completely with anyone."

"Huh" Albert dismissed him and returned to the table. He sat down at the head of it and slapped his hands down.

"What have you got for me, folks?"

People cleared their throats and looked around.

"Melton," Albert addressed the magic user.

"I have heard a number of rumors. No one has come up with any facts though," Melton replied.

"So tell us these rumors," Albert gestured to him impatiently.

"Something dark resides again at Bolus. It's gathering forces I hear. Rogue weres and vampires, witches that have dabbled in the black arts. I have sent a few scouts over there. Most are repelled before they are close enough to see or hear anything. One never returned." Melton was not pleased.

"Cardive," Albert motioned to the were, "get a contingent together to gather information from Bolus. Leave as soon as you are ready. I have business to attend to and must be leaving." Albert stood. "If you need the help of others, do not hesitate to ask. Whatever is lurking at Bolus will affect us all."

Cardive nodded. Albert turned and left.

* * * * *

I woke up feeling refreshed. Not a sore muscle to be felt. I guess the lore that vampire blood had the power to heal was actually true.

I looked in the closet for a change of clothes. I never did find any underwear, mine having been left on my bedroom floor. I almost longed for the gifts my mother had given me. Yeah, right. I found a soft rayon dress in navy with a silver design. It hung to mid-thigh when I put it on. Princess seams created a snug fit over my breasts. It flared out from there to the hemline. I checked myself out in the mirror and approved.

I brushed and spritzed my hair. Brushed on some mascara and tried out a cool, slightly citrus perfume I found on the bathroom counter. I found a pair of navy heels that fit reasonably well. I was all set. I was even getting used to the idea of sleeping with a different man every night.

I twirled in front of the mirror and made a mental note to myself not to do that again without underpants on. It was then I noticed Albert standing behind me. A glint in his eye.

"You are beautiful," he told me. "I take it you're ready to go?" He offered me his arm and I took it.

We appeared in a cozy living room with an overstuffed sofa and a stone fireplace. A fire was already burning. A small feast was set out on the coffee table. Albert led me over to the couch and sat next to me.

He poured the wine, then offered a toast when I had my glass.

"May this be a night to remember." We touched glasses and drank.

Alone with him like this I couldn't help but be aware of what a large man he was. I figured he could pick me up with one hand on top of my head like some guys picked up basketballs.

He fixed a plate for me and set it in front of me on the table, then prepared one for himself.

When he realized I hadn't moved, he turned to look at me. The sheer force behind his eyes took my breath away. He placed a hand on my breast, brushed his thumb across a nipple that was already as hard as a rock.

He smiled a wicked smile at me and said, "Relax, when I eat you, you will relish it."

I could feel the rumble of his voice in his hand.

Then I gawked at him when his words finally penetrated my nervousness. He laughed. Then finished his meal. He left my untouched plate but carried the rest of the food to the kitchen. It sounded like he was putting the leftovers away.

It finally occurred to me I should be helping him. I made it halfway across the living room when he returned.

He grabbed me by the shoulders, spun me to the side and pinned me against the wall. He jerked my dress over my hips, planted his hands on my ass and picked me up. I wrapped my legs around his waist to keep from falling. My heart was pounding wildly in my chest. Had I been standing, I would have run.

He leaned forward and smelled my neck, then ran his tongue along it.

"You smell like sex," he said, his voice gruff.

He brushed his lips across my cheek then took my mouth. He forced his tongue between my lips, leaned into me and kneaded my butt. I found myself wildly aroused. I clutched handfuls of his hair and plundered his mouth in return.

"I can smell your desire." He moved one hand forward and plunged his thumb into me. "Ahhh, so wet," he moaned against my mouth, then returned to kissing me.

He reached between us, undid his pants with one hand and shoved them down.

He positioned the head of his penis at my opening, placed his hands around my hips and thrust. He managed to get about an inch into me.

He backed out just a little then thrust again. Harder. I thought I was going to split in half. He kept working his way in, inch by inch. This time when he looked in my eyes I

saw only his desire. A rampant, burning desire that surged through me with a physical force.

"You're so tight I may die," he groaned on another thrust. And then he was in. He stood motionless, giving my body a chance to get used to his invasion. I squirmed against him, willing him to move.

"Look at me," he commanded. He held my gaze then began to move. Small strokes at first until his control began to slip and he started to tremble. I could feel my pleasure flowing off me and over him. He burst into a frenzy of activity then. Pounding into me, relentless, harder, deeper, faster. I was certain that the head of his cock was ramming into my heart. I felt a hard clench in my muscles and knew I was going to come soon. As the first contraction hit me, he cried out, "Mine," and bit my neck.

The resulting orgasm, for both of us, was extreme. It took more than a minute to complete.

He was leaning against me and the wall, his hands beneath me, when I came back to myself.

"I know who you are," he told me as he withdrew and set me down on the floor. "I know what you are." He backed away from me.

"Tell me," I took a step toward him, reached for him.

He backed farther away. Pulling his pants up with an impatient jerk.

"No, Albert, not like this. Talk to me." I reached for him again.

He looked at my hand as several emotions flitted across his face. He settled on anger.

"Fine," he said as he grabbed my hand, pulled me to him and threw me over his shoulder. He stalked down the hall with me then dropped me on his bed. "Take your clothes off," he commanded.

I complied as he shed his clothing.

He hovered over me, hard again.

"Lift—your—legs," he ground out at me through clenched teeth.

I did.

He knelt between my legs then speared me with his dick. Pinned me to the mattress. His anger beat against my senses. He stabbed me once, twice, again with brutal thrusts of his hips. Slamming against my cervix. I was drowning in his anger as he rammed and twisted into me. It was too much. I drew the anger into me, gathered it close and tamed it.

I breathed a sigh of relief when it was gone.

His hips rested against mine. His cock a silent length of hot steel in my vagina. He rested his weight against his forearms and touched his forehead to mine. He sighed.

"You are the daughter of the darkest, most evil woman that ever existed." He sighed. "I killed her myself, what must have been days after you were born. I drank of

her blood in victory as she lay dying. I will never forget her taste. Her blood runs through you."

He raised his head and looked at me, his eyes tortured.

"She was a dark witch, the darkest. A witch that killed and tainted the innocent without thought or remorse." He stroked his hips once and groaned.

"Your father was Bolderius. His dark power rivaled your mother's, in evil they were equals.

"Bolderius, never willing to bind himself to another, was able to dismember his first wife and fed her to his servants to free himself to marry your mother.

"Your mother, Alexandra, with Bolderius, decimated our peoples. There isn't a family, a house, a pack or a warren that didn't lose loved ones to those two." He quit talking for a minute and concentrated on sliding his penis in and out of me.

"In the end, it was a bloody battle. Nina was there, she was one of the magic users who defeated Bolderius. She's not been the same since. I guess none of us has."

He lost himself in the rhythm for a few minutes. I began to move against him. I opened myself to him and he groaned.

"I've never had a Valentia before, it is a truly awesome experience." Saying that, he swept me away.

Later, when he was lying beside me, holding me loosely, I asked him, "What is a Valentia?"

"That's what you are, love." He hugged me tighter. "You are the second Valentia I have ever met. Your power is substantial. You draw your power from everything, the earth, the trees, the sky. You can gather your power and store it for later use or use it for your own purposes. You can channel and amplify the power of others. You can bounce someone's power back at them. Or you can create a loop. You receive someone's power and emotions, their sensations, you combine them with your own, amplify them, then feed them back to that person. That's what you've been doing with your lovers, even though you haven't been aware of doing it."

"Am I evil?"

"Honestly, love," he pressed his lips against my forehead, "I don't know."

I closed my eyes and searched inside myself for the answer. I didn't think I was evil. I thought I was a slut. But if power corrupts was I doomed?

I opened my eyes and asked Albert, "Will you complete the first step with me?"

Albert didn't hesitate. He rolled so I was on top of him. I scooted down and straddled his hips, reached between us and inserted him. I sat up and lowered myself until he completely filled me.

"Yes," I breathed. I threw myself into the rhythm with a kind of desperation. I didn't want to be evil. He responded enthusiastically, rolled me under him and set up a blinding pace.

The magic started to pulse and spark around us. I felt the loop that connected us, flowed between us and around us. I spoke the spell, pulled his shoulder toward me and bit him. He roared as his cum spewed into me. I licked his shoulder, felt my orgasm expand and blast over him. He groaned as he came again.

"I am yours," I remembered to say.

He let me sleep for a few hours then woke me up by playing with my nipples. As soon as my eyes opened he kissed me. He was in a surprisingly playful mood.

"What's got you so happy?" I asked as he sucked on my neck.

He feathered his fingers across my pussy, grinned at me, then said, "You might not be as pleased as I am with this evening." He started sucking on my nipple. I punched him in the shoulder to get his attention and tried to squirm away from his hand.

"All right!" He moved his hand to my hip. "Look, I don't talk about this and I would prefer that no one know." He tried to look sternly at me.

"I'm not just a hunter, I'm a god."

I just looked at him blankly.

"You do know what a god is?" he asked.

"You're a god?" He had to be kidding me. "I'm having sex with a god?"

"Yes, I'm a god and I'm one of the few beings that has more power than you do."

"And that makes you happy," I guessed.

"Yes it does, love, but not as happy as your completing the first step with me." His grin was playful. And sexy.

"Well," I knew I was missing something important here, "I'm happy for you?"

"You gave yourself to me. Not just Albert the hunter, but also Talerion the god. When you give yourself to a god, love, you are bound to his will. So unless I will you to be evil, you can't be."

Theoretically.

Relief swept through me. Followed closely by apprehension.

"I'm not your slave now or something, am I?"

I could keep him from coming if he'd tricked me into becoming his slave.

"No," he laughed, then slid down the bed until his chin was level with my hip.

"I believe I mentioned something about eating you."

I spread my legs. "Please do," I enthused.

He moved between my legs. His broad shoulders opening me wide for his attentions.

He hadn't been lying to me either—I relished it.

* * * * *

The next morning, before Albert carried me off to the shower, he contacted Coria and informed them he had discovered my power and would be keeping me a day or two to explore the boundaries of it and begin my instruction.

"Cardive!" Nina raised her voice to be heard over the clutches of conversation around her. Cardive looked up from the map his group was working over.

"Albert won't be back today. He's discovered Kris' talent and says it will take him a day or two to explore it at length."

Some of the men in the room nudged each other, others snickered. Cardive roared with laughter.

"That's one way to put it."

"Her power, idiot," Nina huffed at him. She resumed working on her notes.

Three men at the end of the table scowled at each other.

"How are you holding up, wolf?" Max asked of Dade.

"How the hell do you think, bloodsucker?" Dade growled.

"Look, Dade, we're all in the same position here," Wayne said placatingly.

"He wants to see if I go insane," Dade snapped back.

"Are you?" Max goaded him.

"I'm having a hard enough time keeping myself from killing you. Don't push me." Dade rounded on Max. His fingers clenching and unclenching.

Max leaned forward and bared his fangs, "Go ahead, wolf, I'd be happy to remove your annoying presence."

Dade leapt out of his chair and hurled himself at Max. He never made it. Nina materialized between them and knocked them both back into their seats with a word.

"Am I going to have to separate you boys?" Nina glared at them, hands on her hips.

"He started it," Dade thrust a finger at Max.

"You were asking for it," Max retorted.

Nina slapped herself in the forehead. "I should have thought of this before. If I could, I'd send you out with Cardive's group so you could work off some of this aggression." She addressed all three of them. "As it is, you are too important to Kris' welfare to risk it. You do remember what will happen to her if one of you should die?"

Sheepish expressions assured Nina that the men had forgotten. While Kris wasn't fully mated to any of these men, the process had begun. Part of her soul was bound to each of them, part of theirs to her. Should one of these men perish, a part of Kris would die with them. Until that rift healed, she'd be more vulnerable to enemy attack and possession.

Nina passed a spell over each man, calming their anger, settling their tension.

She'd just finished with Max when Cardive spoke up.

"Tell Albert my men and I are heading out." He brushed his hands on the legs of his pants. "Melton?" he glanced at the magic user.

"Yes," Melton's reply was cool.

Cardive scuffed his boots on the kitchen floor. "I could use your help."

Melton's smile was grim but he stood and joined Cardive's group.

Cardive was in deep discussion with him as the group left the hall.

* * * * *

Albert and I were eating breakfast in the kitchen, in the nude. Watching him move between the fridge and the table, I marveled at how graceful he was.

I finished and placed my dishes in the sink. He caught me as I returned to the table, bent me over it, wrapped his hands around my hips and rubbed his penis between my buns. He reached between us and sank a finger into me to see if I was ready for him. He groaned when he found me hot and wet.

He slid the head of his dick down to my vagina, then stroked his way in. I moaned as he filled me.

He backed up then drove in deeper. We both groaned. The magic began to coalesce around us. My nerve endings came alive and I could feel the entire length and girth of him as he moved in me. I felt the energy pouring off him, the sensations and I drew them in. I felt energy radiating from the ground beneath us and I tapped into that as well. I blended these with the feeling of his flesh driving into mine until the power expanded and threatened to consume me.

Albert was moaning my name with each thrust of his hips. Deep, strong thrusts. As my muscles began to contract, I released the energy inside me, directed it through Albert, drew it back from him. The explosion started where our bodies were joined, blasting outward from there.

"Talerion!" I cried at the same moment he roared out, "Mine!"

He pounded into me with a fury. Still hard even after his orgasm. He withdrew briefly so he could pull me off the table and lay me down on the floor. I didn't notice the stone at my back as he resumed his pace. His mouth claimed mine, his tongue sweeping inside, probing. Then he was sucking my neck. I drew on the power around us again and brought us to an even more fevered pitch. He bit my neck and drank from me, my body slamming against his as I came.

Without thought, I spelled fangs and bit him back, drank from him. I felt his semen bursting hot and fast into me as he climaxed.

We lay panting on the floor, still locked together.

"It's a good thing I'm immortal," he said when he could speak again. "This would kill me otherwise."

He rolled onto his back, keeping us together.

"Whatever happens in the centuries to come, love, I will always remember this." He stroked my back as he spoke.

He made a great warm bed and in my afterglow I began to doze as I lay on top of him.

He kissed the top of my head. "None of that now, we have work to do."

I cracked an eye open and snuggled against him.

He laughed then withdrew from me. "As much as the idea appeals to me, we need to start working with your magic."

I rolled off him. He stood, then hauled me to my feet.

I shuffled off to the bathroom. I was covered in cum. He let me shower by myself. Then took his, while I brushed my teeth and scrounged in his medicine cabinet for mascara. I blinked at myself in the mirror when I realized my neck was covered with hickeys.

I sat down hard on the toilet lid as the last few days came into bizarre focus for me. Not that I could have done anything differently. I'd gone from a single, slightly reclusive, ordinary human who didn't believe in fairy tales to this. I was engaged to a werewolf, a magic user, a vampire (excuse me, a darkover) and a god. I'd drunk their blood, they'd drunk mine. I had my own powerful magic. I was the daughter of the evildest being ever to exist. And the god that had killed her had just given me hickeys.

A random thought hit me. "Hi, Mom, there is a god and he gives hickeys." Or how about, "Mom, Dad, I'd like you to meet my fiancés." These thoughts were just absurd enough to snap me out of my funk.

I found my dress folded over the arm of a chair in the bedroom and slipped it on. I went looking for Albert and finally found him in the yard.

I leaned up against his chest and he wrapped his arms around me.

"Everything okay, love?" he asked me softly.

So I told him.

"Are you really a god?" I asked.

"Yes, I really am a god. Not the kind of god you probably learned about at church, but what qualifies as a god among supernaturals. We're the top of the food chain, so to speak."

"Can I call you Talerion? I think it suits you better than Albert."

"I believe you've already called me that name in the throes of passion." He kissed the top of my head. "When it's just the two of us, you can call me whatever pleases you."

"How about Love Doodle?" I pulled back from him and gave him a wicked grin.

The look on his face was priceless. "Erk." He shook himself. "Let's get started with your lessons."

* * * * *

Cardive, Melton and Cardive's men crouched in the woods, still several miles from Bolus.

"How many men can you keep from detection at a time?" Cardive asked Melton.

"If they stay together, the entire group," Melton responded. "Separately, or in groups of two or three, about eight."

Cardive pointed to eight men, split them into pairs and pulled the map from his pocket. He flipped to the side that depicted Bolus and the area directly around it.

"How close can we get before you can't provide cover for us as well as the men we send in?"

Melton considered. "For the kind of protection they're going to need, the group won't be able to get much closer." He looked over the men surrounding him in the woods. "Can any of your men spell?"

Cardive scanned the group. "Ankers, Jenkins, come here." He turned to Melton. "These guys can cast some spells beyond the rudimentary ones."

Melton dug in his pocket and brought out a handful of charms. He picked through them and selected six, returning the rest to his pocket. "We can probably move to within a mile of Bolus, provided they don't have the area heavily guarded." He held up his hand to Cardive and showed him the charms. He picked the first one up. "This will confuse our image from the air." He picked up the next charm. "This will confuse our image from the ground." He picked up two more charms. "These will confuse our scent." He raised the fifth charm. "This will block our sounds." He lofted the last charm. "This one here keeps other magics from exposing and nullifying ours."

He turned to Ankers. "May I touch you and get a reading on your abilities?"

Ankers grimaced but gave a curt nod.

Melton placed his hands on the man's shoulders and closed his eyes. Then he turned to Jenkins with the same request. Jenkins submitted. He handed Jenkins the silence charm and the anti-magic charm, the rest he handed to Ankers. He explained to the men how to invoke the charms and how to maintain them.

"We're as ready as we can be," Melton informed Cardive.

Cardive motioned to the group to head out.

* * * * *

"The first thing I should explain to you is about using your power." Albert sat on top of the picnic table next to me. "You can feel the power, the life force, in everything around you. Think of it as blood. Life blood. It's not really the same, but the analogy applies.

"When you draw energy from anything, it's like taking blood from it. Draining someone's, or something's entire power may not kill, but it will cripple. Taking small

amounts of energy does no harm. Of course, you can take more energy from the earth, say, then from a tree, to the same effect."

He turned to me to make sure I was following him.

"You can draw from multiple sources at the same time so that you don't draw too much from a single source.

"One of the main differences between Dark and Light magic is the Dark magic user either prefers to or simply doesn't care about draining a single source of its power. A drained source, if it lives, will be severely crippled for several decades. They are never the same afterward. Often psychotic or diseased in their soul."

The sadness in his eyes told me he'd seen this happen too many times.

"The major difference between Dark and Light magic is that Dark always requires a death. It could be the death of a tree, a mouse, a human, a supe.

"You must always maintain an awareness of how much energy you are drawing from something.

"When you loop your power back through me you are replacing what you've drawn from me. Adding to it. You can do that with any source you draw from.

"I don't believe you need spoken spells or charms to aid your magic. Try giving yourself fangs without the spoken spell."

He turned to watch me. "Just think about fangs, envision yourself with fangs. Draw on the power within you."

I concentrated on my teeth. I squirmed around a little on the tabletop. I willed fangs to grow. I envisioned fangs in my mouth. Finally, I felt a stirring of power within me and my canines elongated. I showed them to Albert. He shifted where he sat as his jeans tightened in the crotch.

"It will become second nature, in time and with practice," he assured me.

A breeze blew up my skirt and I shivered.

"Warm yourself," he told me.

"How?" I asked.

"Raise the temperature of the air around you."

I concentrated on warm air surrounding me. Nothing happened but I felt my powers stirring. I concentrated on sunny beaches and suddenly found myself sitting in the sand, waves rolling in to shore beside me. Oh crap. Now what do I do?

I wondered how I would get myself back to Albert. A golden thread appeared in my mind. A thread that I knew instinctively tied me to him. I took hold of the thread and began following it. It was taking too long. I concentrated on my power. I gathered it together, compressed it, then willed myself along the thread to Albert.

I was back on the picnic table.

"Magic sucks," I told Albert.

He laughed.

"Try warming the air again. Leave off the beach vacation." He brushed sand off my thigh.

This time I gathered my power first. Then I focused on warm air surrounding me and nothing else. The air started warming around me. I grinned at Albert and quit thinking about the air. The air began to cool immediately. I frowned.

"I have to think about warm air the whole time? That's too much work," I complained. Okay I whined, but really, who can blame me.

"No, you just have to 'anchor' the thought."

He paused, evidently trying to figure out how to explain the process to me.

"Once you have the air around you the temperature you'd like..." He stopped again. "Different people use different methods to 'anchor' their spells. Some think of them as commands, like you'd give a dog. To anchor their spells they tell the spell to 'stay'. Others visualize their spells as something they can pick up, move and put down. When they've formed their spells, they imagine themselves 'sitting' the spell down. In the case of a spell they wish to move with them, they may use the command 'heel' or visualize them tucking the spell into their pocket. With your power you should be able to create the spell in the exact form you wish it to be. Such as 'keep the air temperature at 75 degrees around me, wherever I go, until I desire otherwise'. Try it."

I brought my power up and thought "keep the air temperature around me 75 degrees until I desire otherwise". The air warmed around me. I stood up and walked away from the table, the warm air moved with me. "Yes!" I did a little happy dance. I bounced back to the table.

"A word of warning," Albert made sure he had my attention, "any spell you cast using power stored within you drains you. You're 'bleeding' when you cast a spell. The warm air spell cost you about a drop of blood. Bigger spells will cost you more. Never drain enough energy from yourself to leave you vulnerable to others."

"Also," with this he turned the full force of his attention on me, "never and I mean under no circumstance whatsoever, bring the dead back to life. Even if they die right in front of you and have been dead only seconds.

"Only Dark magic can bring the dead back to life. And what's brought back is a horror of unthinking rage and hunger. Always."

He continued to enlighten me for the next few hours about the basics, with the occasional warning thrown in. How to teleport, fix meals without cooking, dress or undress. Never to mess with free will. How to "cloak" myself so I would not be detected by others. How to layer spells so I could protect myself from outside magics.

Never try to change the past.

Then he dragged me down to the grass and had his way with me.

* * * * *

Deep inside Bolus, Zidurn lurched restlessly back and forth across the chamber. His movements were becoming more erratic. The servant's body he had commandeered forty years ago had not held up well to his possession. Twisted and deformed, the deterioration increased daily.

He could possess a new body, of course, but his stockpile of energy wouldn't transfer with him. Besides, she was out there now. He knew it was only a matter of days before his searchers found her again.

He paused in his restless pacing as he thought about his half sister. He got a hard-on as he thought about the tremendous power she commanded.

Once he mated with her, he could have any body he desired.

He released his cock from his pants and stroked it. He brought up her image in his mind. He'd never laid eyes on her, but the weres in the pickup had. His hand moved faster on his cock. He imagined her kneeling in front of him. Him fucking her from behind, coming inside her pussy, her mouth, coming inside her ass. Biting the inside of her thigh and drinking from her. He wouldn't drain her dry, but he'd drink enough to make her do his will. Then her power would be his.

The thought of all that power took him over the edge and he ejaculated onto the cold dirt floor.

* * * * *

Albert helped me to my feet. I spelled my dress back on and he grinned at me.

"You're showing an incredible amount of control over your magic while we make love, try to transfer that control to all the spells you cast." Albert wrapped me in his arms and brushed his lips across mine.

"Perhaps I should try casting spells while we're making love."

Seemed like solid reasoning to me.

He kissed me. With tongue.

"I know that doesn't make sense somehow, but the answer is eluding me at the moment," he said as he traced my jaw with his lips, breathed on the sensitive spot behind my ear, then licked it.

I shivered.

"What were we talking about?" I had my hands up the back of his shirt and I was tracing his muscles with my fingers.

Albert didn't speak for a few minutes while his mouth was busy sucking on my neck.

"I love the way you taste." He ran his tongue down my throat, between my breasts.

"You haven't made love to me on the picnic table yet," I suggested hopefully, sending a spurt of power through him.

"It's not nice to tease a god." His eyes glittered at me.

"Who's teasing?" I opened myself wide to him and let him experience my desire.

He picked me up, carried me to the picnic table and set me down on top. He placed his hand on my knee then slowly brushed it up the inside of my thigh. He leaned close, his lips almost touching mine.

"Lover," he breathed on my mouth.

"Mmmm?" I licked my lips.

"It's time to get back to work." He slapped my thigh lightly and backed away from me.

"Ass," I said under my breath.

He heard me anyway and chuckled as he sat on the table next to me.

* * * * *

Cardive called the group to a halt at Melton's gesture. Melton motioned at Ankers and Jenkins to activate the charms. Once he'd made sure they were working effectively he told Cardive to advance farther.

"Stop," Melton said. "This is as close as we can get."

The group had managed to get to within three quarters of a mile from Bolus. Closer than anticipated.

"I don't like this," Cardive said to the men. "We haven't seen a sentry or passed a spell yet." He rubbed the stubble on his jaw.

"Peters," he motioned to the man, "run an electronics check of the area."

Peters nodded and dug a sensor out of his pack. He powered it on, then waited for the green "ready" light.

He spent several minutes taking readings in a circle around the group, starting at a point away from Bolus. He adjusted some dials then repeated the readings. He turned the dials again then swept a short arc in the direction of Bolus. He repeated the arc several times, then turned to Cardive.

"I'm registering an intermittent power surge in the direction of Bolus only. The frequency of the surge suggests the source is natural, rather than mechanical."

"Is there any pattern to the power surges?" Cardive inquired.

"It's not surging at regular intervals. If there's a pattern, I'm not seeing it."

"Okay," Cardive motioned to the men he'd selected for the scouting party. "Melton, let me know when you're ready for the men to move out."

Melton acknowledged, then began weaving his spells. When Melton was satisfied with his work he motioned to Cardive.

"Head out," Cardive ordered his men.

Four pairs of men took a step into the woods and vanished.

* * * * *

Albert was relentless that afternoon. I lost my temper more than once with him. He was making me cast a multi-layer protection spell for the ninetieth time when I decided I'd had enough. In a snit, I stormed off toward the house.

"Don't even think about it." Albert's voice was deadly calm.

I ignored him and kept walking.

He materialized in front of me and let me walk into his chest.

I bounced off him and went berserk.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" I started pushing on him. It was like pushing on a tree. "You've been grinding away at me for hours, no breaks, no food, just the same damn spells over and over and over again until I want to scream!" I screamed at him.

"Quit acting like a child." Still in that calm, infuriating voice.

"Get out of my way." I pushed on him harder.

He put his arms out to stop me and I swatted at them.

"Leave me alone. Who do you think you are? Don't you dare touch me!" All rational thought had fled.

He trapped me in his arms, his grip like a vise. He hefted me off my feet and brought my face close to his.

"Are you as turned on as I am?" His voice sounded strangled now.

"More," I breathed, then his lips crushed mine.

My hands were everywhere, tugging at his shirt, tangling in his hair as I tried to undress him and consume him at the same time.

Finally I realized I could spell the clothes off us and a heartbeat later we were naked.

I wrapped my legs around him, sucked his lower lip into my mouth and nipped it.

He gripped my ass and took me, standing in the yard. Just like that. A few hard thrusts and we both came. He was only getting started. He knelt with me, slapped me down on my back in the dirt, ground his lips against mine and slammed into me. He held me pinned while my blood hammered in my ears.

His voice rasped, "Bite me now," then he bit me.

Without thought I closed my mouth over his neck and bit him.

The climax broke over us. He didn't withdraw his fangs so I held my grip on him as well. He began to move. Long, hard strokes. I thrust back and heard the sharp slap as our flesh met. His blood, hot in my mouth. I drew power from his blood, from the earth, a river nearby, the sky. I drew in Albert's emotions and sensations, added mine, blended the forces together and let them expand.

His penis felt bigger, harder, hotter than it ever had before. My muscles rippled around his flesh. Tension built in me, in my groin, in my power. I let it explode, through me, through Albert, into the ground and the air around us. I exploded with it and kept on exploding. My orgasm spiraled out of control, I took Albert with me. His cock erupted endlessly inside of me. Machine gun bursts of wet heat. The ground beneath me trembled and heaved. He became all I knew. For a brief, hot moment, we merged. Mind, body and soul.

I came back to myself slowly. Albert was just withdrawing his fangs from my neck. I released mine from him.

My heart was beating sedately in my chest. I felt out of sync with reality. Awkward.

"What have I done?" I asked Albert, afraid of his answer.

"You transcended." He sounded awed by that.

"I don't feel right." He made a move to get off me and I locked my arms and legs around him. "Don't let me go."

He lay back down and stroked the side of my face. Kissed my temple.

"Transcendence can have that effect I'm told."

"I didn't," I had to swallow, "I didn't harm anything, did I?"

"No, love," Albert assured me.

My world realigned. I hadn't harmed anything and that was all that mattered. I allowed Albert to help me to my feet.

"So what is transcendence?"

Albert put his arm around my shoulder and led me toward the house.

"I'll explain it to you over dinner."

Chapter Four

Zidurn jerked awake. He had fallen asleep on the floor again. He was sleeping more and more. He got himself seated on his bed then spelled his manservant into the chamber.

“Bring me food,” he commanded, then spelled his manservant away.

He lay back on his bed and fell asleep again.

* * * * *

Ingmar and Sledge had been assigned the north-facing quadrant of Bolus. They were in sight of the building now and there was still no sign of activity.

They’d taken their time advancing, unable to believe the place wasn’t heavily protected. Dusk was settling over the area now, their enhanced eyesight still enabling them to proceed without flashlights.

They moved in a broken pattern, crouched low, first one and then the other would sweep forward.

Ingmar was making his sweep, left to right, when he suddenly disappeared from Sledge’s view.

Sledge held his position, scanned the area, waited. After five minutes, when there was still no sign of Ingmar, he removed a small box from his pack and switched it on. Ingmar’s identity tag glowed on the screen. A quick readout showed he was alive but unconscious. Sledge started his sweep, right to left, to intercept the path Ingmar had taken. He glanced frequently at the small box in his hand. He was still several feet from the last place he’d seen his partner when he froze and dropped in place. Ingmar’s tag was moving even though the man remained unconscious.

Sledge waited another fifteen minutes. Ingmar’s tag had stopped. There was no activity in the area. Even the animals that populated these woods were silent, absent.

Sledge crept forward, eyes sharp on the ground. He would never have seen it otherwise. Well disguised and nearly perfectly blended with the forest floor was a trap door. On closer inspection it proved to be spring loaded. Sledge suspected an animal over a certain weight would be needed to release the door.

He checked the box one final time. Ingmar still lived, but Sledge knew he was beyond any help he could provide right now. Then he turned around and began to work his way back to Cardive.

* * * * *

Albert had laid out another small feast for us and I realized I was starving.

Everything tasted wonderful. Full of flavors and textures I'd never noticed before.

Albert raised his wineglass in a silent toast to me. I clinked it and drank.

"I've got to tell you," he began, "that when I took on this project, I had no idea it would prove to be this extraordinary. You are an endlessly fascinating woman."

"Thanks."

"Amazing." He shook his head. "Where to start?"

He poured us each another glass of wine.

"All supernaturals, by the very nature of their beings, have a certain command of magic. Beyond that, there are varying levels of power. Those who have the ability to wield a certain, higher level of power are classified Magic Users.

"Having seen the destruction your mother was responsible for and having fought her myself, I knew she was one of the most powerful magic users I had ever confronted. Gods and goddesses excluded, of course.

"I had no idea of the true scope of that power. Every now and then an act of magic is so pure, so powerful, so all-encompassing that it shifts the very fabric of nature. Not a huge shift, not a shift that can be seen by the naked eye, but a shift nonetheless. A shift for the better. You, yourself, changed with this shift. You were a Valentia, you are now a Liander. As a Liander, you command more power and you have a closer relationship with nature. You'll find you wield that power with greater ease.

"I can't tell you much more than that, I have never seen anyone transcend before. Descend, yes. I have seen several people strive for descendance."

"I've got to wonder, Talerion, if I'm the one responsible for this transcendence. We were pretty much locked to each other when it happened."

He looked at me then took my hand. "I don't mean this to sound personal, Kris, but I'm a god. The power I wield is far beyond your understanding or imagination. I keep it safely blocked from you. Even as a Liander, you can not touch it. Tomorrow we need to return to Coria. Tonight, in honor of your achievements, I will give you a glimpse of those powers."

He pulled me over to sit in his lap.

"While I'm inside you, I think."

* * * * *

Zidurn's manservant had brought him a fine piece of flesh. He'd always had a fondness for werewolves and this one looked especially fit.

He spelled Ingmar upright, then spelled his clothes off him. He fondled the larger man's cock and balls. Yes, it had been awhile.

He maneuvered Ingmar over to the bed and laid him down on it. Then he joined him, found the pulse in his neck and began to drink.

Even unconscious, Ingmar climaxed.

Zidurn drank until he felt the big man's energy begin to fade. When he was confident he'd drained him enough, he spelled him into submission.

Feeling much stronger now, Zidurn decided to spell the man into enthusiasm as well. He stripped, then he roused the were to consciousness.

Zidurn ordered Ingmar to kneel, facing away from him. Then he positioned himself between the were's legs, poised to impale him. He would use the man well.

There was plenty of time to question him later.

* * * * *

Albert zapped us into bed. Naked. He moved over me, kissed my eyelids, then my mouth. I raised my knees in anticipation of his entry.

Lover, he brushed my mind with the word, a warm caress that blossomed into fire as he stroked his cock into my body.

With languorous strokes he fed the blaze in my mind. I felt another fire flare in my heart. Then lower.

There were words in his touch, but I couldn't understand them, didn't care. I felt glorious wrapped in that caress, penetrated by his thoughts as well as his flesh.

He burned within me now, fanning the flames by increasing the speed of his thrusts.

Then his power surged. One brief burst of it. A blue-white flame brighter than the sun blasted through me. I gasped at its intensity and came.

Each throb of his penis as he unloaded his seed into me, kept my climax going. I felt a deeper power then. A raw earthy power, an inferno of desire that took my climax higher, caused my body to shudder harder, my nerve endings to blaze.

When I came back into my body, Albert's weight was atop me, anchoring me to the mattress.

He shifted his weight to the side, a satisfied smile on his face.

I was stunned speechless.

He brushed the hair back from my face. "Thank you, love, for letting me share that with you."

He tucked me tight against his chest and fell asleep. I listened to his rhythmic breathing, felt his chest rising and falling against my back. I snuggled tighter to him and allowed myself to follow him.

* * * * *

Sledge arrived back at the group well after dark. Two other pairs had arrived before him. He listened in on their reports to Cardive.

"Pit traps and contact mines. We didn't see any activity. If there's search parties, they're either regrouping inside or far from here."

"Any sentries or sensors of any kind?"

"Didn't see or detect any, mechanical or magical."

"What kind of contact mines?" Cardive asked.

"From the energy they were radiating, I'd say dissolve mines."

Sledge shuddered. Basically that type of mine sprayed the unwary with a fine gel that proceeded to melt flesh, then bone. Not a nice way to go. He stepped up to Cardive.

"Sir," Sledge waited for Cardive to motion him to proceed. "Ingmar fell in a pit trap. When I checked his readings he was unconscious. He was then moved to another location beneath Bolus proper."

Cardive rubbed his jaw. "Anyone come out to see if he was alone?"

"No."

"Odd." Cardive squatted at the base of a tree, thinking, waiting for his last two men to return.

"Melton," he asked after a minute, "can you get a read on Ingmar?"

Melton nodded, then closed his eyes.

Cardive spent his time waiting, pondering the situation. No sentries, no perimeter alarms, no activity and only rudimentary passive defense. Either he was missing something, or nothing was going on here, rumors or not.

Melton sat down next to him. In a soft voice he reported, "I believe he is being held deep below ground. I can only pick up the faintest image of him. He's alive, but weak. I get nothing more."

"How deep? Can you give me a guess?"

"Three or four stories I would guess."

Cardive added this information to the rest.

Underground. It may explain the lack of surface activity and defense. Unless his other scouts brought back something they'd have to consider going in.

* * * * *

Albert and I arrived at Coria just before noon. I slipped off to my room for a shower and change of clothes before I had to see my other fiancés.

When I arrived in the kitchen there was a bustle of activity I hadn't been aware of these past few days.

Dade, Wayne and Max were stretching and yawning at one end of the table, like they'd just woken up. I was shocked at how disheveled the men looked.

Nina pulled me aside before I'd made it to the table.

"Albert has asked me to head the group now that he's—involved—with you." She steered me to the side of the room.

"Now that you've completed the first step of the ritual, you have a certain obligation to the men. For us, being 'engaged' is more than just an emotional commitment. You have established a physical bond, of sorts, with each man. It's been decided that you will rotate every twenty-four hours between men until the danger to you has passed.

"I should warn you, whenever you are in a room with any of them, they will seek to be near you. Inconvenient, but unavoidable at times.

"You'll start with Dade today, we'll call two o'clock in the afternoon the start time, then move on to Wayne tomorrow at two and so forth.

"You will keep this rotation going for as long as it takes."

I thought I'd feel awkward with Nina's arrangement, but I didn't. If I were to be honest, I was rather enjoying the four men.

She let me go over to the table then and say hi to the guys. They were so happy to see me I couldn't help feeling good.

Dade approached me, took my hand and led me out of the kitchen.

The minute he got me to his room he wrapped himself around me and kissed me until I nearly lost consciousness.

"God, I missed you." He held me at arms length and swept his eyes over me. Then he started tearing at my clothes, growling. His eyes were bright green. I let him tear the clothes off, rip his own off and then wrangle me over to the bed.

The first round was hard and fast, with a desperate edge to it, but no less satisfying than I remembered. I held a special fondness for Dade since he was my first. And because he had offered his life to me in order to protect me. None of the others had.

Besides, he was the sexiest of the four men.

He rolled me over and lifted me into a kneeling position, he covered me with his body, splaying one large hand across my abdomen, his breath hot against the side of my neck. He brushed his lips where his breath had raised goose bumps and impaled me. I arched back, beneath him.

"Dade."

He growled and took my flesh between his teeth and sucked on it. My nipples contracted further and I shuddered. He responded by increasing the speed of his thrusts.

I felt the magic whip through us, a wild, untamed feel to it as it drove us closer to release.

"Come for me, Kris. I love to feel you come around my cock."

I moaned and drew in the power of the earth beneath us, the air. I slammed my hips back to meet Dade's thrusts. His emotions blasted through me and my body froze, clenched like a fist with the depth of them. I screamed his name as my vagina

convulsed around his dick. The rush of fluids I released across him, driving him over the edge of his own release.

As his cock pumped out the last of its seed, he murmured something to me that I couldn't quite hear.

I collapsed to the bed, but Dade wasn't finished with me yet.

Werewolves really did need to refresh themselves with sex. Dade didn't stop until it was almost time for me to move on to my next fiancé.

As I shuffled into the kitchen in search of sustenance I thought, *Who needs an enemy, my lovers are going to kill me.*

Albert stood by the fridge. He handed me a mug, turned me around and shoved me toward Wayne.

Wayne's grin, when he saw me heading his way, even with my wet hair, wearing a robe two sizes too large, was so genuine I found the power within myself to reenergize for him.

So the rotation began. I was left with no time to think about my pursuers, or what they wanted with me.

* * * * *

Ingmar wasn't dead, but he was praying for it. Whenever he was in this cell he was restrained to a table, a shunt in his arm. Garuba endlessly running into his veins. Garuba, the liquid that both nourished and promoted accelerated blood production. He wondered if it affected his libido as well.

He'd been submitted to hours of humiliation and abuse. In his weakened state they had even spelled him to enthusiastically participate. It had to be a spell.

They hadn't even questioned him.

He didn't know who these men were, the staid, quiet one who seemed to be his keeper, or the disfigured one who was his tormentor, he didn't need to know who they were. He just knew they had to die.

Zidurn was feeling much more like his old self. The were was strong and virile, his blood especially rich and energized.

He turned his attention to his calendar, the search parties were due back in three days. Based on their information he would make his decision about the wolf. To keep him for use, or to take over his body.

Speaking of use, Zidurn's penis swelled. He stroked it while he contacted his manservant and requested that Ingmar be brought to him again.

* * * * *

The remaining members of Cardive's group had returned. They had much the same to report as the other groups. They had, however, encountered a party of fairies that were scouting Bolus for their own tribe. The fairies stated that five days ago the repel spells had been lifted and several search parties, made up primarily of weres, were seen leaving Bolus. They assumed there was an armed contingent that remained inside Bolus because several more supes had been reported to have entered the property than had been seen leaving it.

Cardive slapped his fist into his palm. He could not return to Coria with so little information. Especially since he'd lost a man.

He gathered the remaining men around him.

"We need a plan for entering Bolus. There's information to be had in there. Information that we need."

The men huddled around the map, updating it with the locations of the pit traps and dissolve mines.

"I'm thinking two small groups should go in. A group of three men through one of the side entrances on the main level, a group of five men to enter by way of the pit trap that Ingmar fell into."

He studied the map a moment longer then marked a side entrance nearest them and the pit trap on the north side.

"Ankers, Jenkins and Mason will take the side entrance. Ankers and Jenkins will use Melton's charms. Melton?" He raised an eyebrow at the magic user. "Would you provide assistance to the men entering the pit?"

Melton frowned. "I'd have to accompany them. I'm not familiar enough with any of these men to hold the spells from that kind of a distance."

Cardive gave him a grim look. He'd suspected this might be the case.

Melton looked over the gathered men. Men who devoted their lives to the protection of others.

"If you could have one of your men stand watch over me to prevent any physical intrusions while I cast, I'll go along."

"We'll take care of ourselves here, Melton, concentrate your efforts on the team you're going with."

Melton gave a short nod then went to join the team.

Cardive motioned another man over to that group to watch out for Melton.

Then he gathered the groups around him.

"I think we should wait until daylight to breach Bolus. There's no reason for you to risk running into a contact mine or falling into a pit trap in the dark."

No one questioned his reasoning.

He motioned to the men who would be staying behind.

"Split guard rotations between yourselves."

He gestured to Ankers, Jenkins and Mason.

"I don't think you'll be running into anyone on the upper levels of Bolus, but don't take unnecessary chances."

Then he addressed the group that would be entering the pit trap.

"It's possible that you will run into troops in the lower levels. If the odds are too great, back out. We'll get reinforcements and return. See if they're holding other prisoners, bring them out if you can."

"Are we authorized to use offensive force, or defensive only?" one of the men asked.

"Defensive only," Cardive responded. "We're on a fact-finding and rescue mission." He scratched behind his ear. "Of course, if you see any of our 'wanteds' in there, you're authorized to apprehend."

He looked around the group. "All right, men, get some sleep."

Cardive found a tree a short way from the men bedding down. He rested his back against it, still puzzling over the fact that there appeared to be so little activity at Bolus. He drifted off to sleep, no closer to any answers.

The night passed uneventfully.

Morning found the men checking their gear and munching rations.

They moved with a focused energy. This was the type of operation they lived for. They were hoping for opposition inside Bolus—a good fight was almost better than sex. Almost.

* * * * *

Zidurn was propped up against pillows in the bed. Ingmar had just brought him to completion with his mouth for the second time. Zidurn reached behind Ingmar's head and tangled his fingers in his hair. He kept his penis embedded in Ingmar's mouth, savoring the moist warmth of it.

Zidurn's manservant appeared beside the bed.

"I'm sorry to intrude, master, but several men have entered Bolus through the northern pit. I heard one of them mention the werewolf's name."

Zidurn thought furiously. Had his searchers found his sister, they would have reported by now. How the hell hard could it be to find one woman when they knew what she looked like and knew her scent? He didn't think he could afford to pass up this opportunity.

"Plant the decoys in the cells. I'll join you on that level shortly."

His manservant was off.

Zidurn stroked Ingmar's hair and started weaving his spells.

First he ensured his dominance over Ingmar.

While Ingmar's mouth and tongue stroked him hard again, he began to alter Ingmar's memories of his time in captivity. He set up a protected zone within Ingmar's mind, body and soul. He reinforced the boundaries of this zone so that Ingmar would be unaware of his presence there.

This time, when he climaxed, he allowed his essence, his discarnate being, to flow into Ingmar's mouth and down his throat with his semen. He ensconced himself in Ingmar's being and broke the connection with his old body.

The old body ceased to function and slumped over. Dead, already turning cold.

Hidden in his new body, he watched Ingmar's reaction. He felt Ingmar's shock, concern and then a fierce elation that the man who had performed so many lewd acts upon him was dead.

Zidurn laughed to himself as he rendered Ingmar unconscious, erased his memory of the recent event and returned his body to the table in his cell.

As he lay awaiting his rescue he removed from Ingmar's memory any hint of himself. Overlaid the blanks with memories of torture performed on him by his manservant Fregan. Questioned endlessly by him about why he had been spying on Bolus. Making Fregan appear, in Ingmar's mind, a much larger, much fiercer man.

He roused Ingmar slightly then awaited the men who had come after him. He concentrated on the next step of his plan. He had no doubt that Ingmar would be suspect, having spent so many hours in captivity. He would have to find a new host among his rescuers. He preferred to make the transfer sexually, but it was not required. Physical contact was all that was necessary. That was almost guaranteed given Ingmar's weakened condition.

The door to the cell rattled. There was a muffled boom, then the door swung open, trailing a puff of smoke. A burly man slipped into the room, eyes quickly scanning the interior with military awareness. Then his eyes settled on Ingmar.

Peters, Ingmar's mind provided the man's name for Zidurn as well as a flash of camaraderie, trust and relief.

Peters withdrew a device from his pack and pointed it at Ingmar, running it slowly from his head to his feet. Seemingly satisfied with what he saw in the metallic box, he finally approached them.

"Ingmar," Peters said as he bent over his comrade.

Ingmar blinked his eyes and tried to focus on Peters' face.

"Peters," he croaked, the word almost unrecognizable.

Peters began working on the straps binding Ingmar to the table.

With the door to the cell open, Zidurn could hear other men moving in the hall, working at rescuing the decoys, fighting with a token force of Zidurn's followers.

Peters moved to Ingmar's side. "Can you move?"

Ingmar struggled to sit. With Peters' assistance he finally managed, then swayed, Zidurn causing his eyes to roll slightly back in their sockets.

Peters held him firmly, momentarily stunned by the damage several hours in captivity could cause a man. "I'll give you a moment before we try to stand you up."

Zidurn busily wove his spells.

Peters looked toward the hall, counting the seconds off. Anxious to get moving, he tightened his grip on Ingmar.

"Okay, we need to get moving," Peters readjusted Ingmar's arm over his shoulder, flexed the arm he had around Ingmar's back, then helped him slide off the table.

Ingmar's knees threatened to buckle, then held firm. Zidurn created a spell to destroy any evidence of his habitation, to be triggered when he moved into Peters. God how he loved military men. They thought themselves impervious, self-contained, able to withstand any assault. They disciplined their physical strengths to perfection and left their souls unguarded.

Zidurn flowed down Ingmar's arm to where it rested on Peters' shoulder, through Ingmar's palm and into the secure place he'd constructed inside Peters.

Peters began walking slowly with Ingmar toward the door.

* * * * *

I was standing in the middle of the kitchen, oblivious to the bustle of activity around me. I'd forgotten what I was doing there. Nina came up to me, finally having noticed my glazed eyes and frozen stance.

I must have drifted off because I jerked to awareness with Nina's hand on my arm, shaking me.

"I think we need to give you every fifth day to recover," Nina repeated.

"Ungh," I responded, tilting toward her, thinking it would be nice if she'd just hold me upright.

Albert wandered over and held out a mug to me, thought better of it, wrapped his arm around me and half carried me to the table. Dade, Wayne and Max all jumped to their feet and rushed over to provide assistance. Albert held the mug to my lips and forced me to consume the nutrient-rich liquid.

Almost immediately I felt better. I took in my surroundings. The looks of concern on my lovers' faces struck me as funny and I had to choke back a laugh.

Nina came over, a formidable frown on her face, and informed the men of her decision to give me a day of rest.

Wayne looked crushed at first, since I was supposed to spend the day with him, then he colored slightly after realizing his selfishness.

A commotion in the living room drew everyone's attention. Cardive's group had returned.

Cardive, his men and Melton entered the kitchen and spread out around the table. Cardive gestured Albert over.

"We rescued several apparent hostages from Bolus. We've locked them into rooms over at the keep until you can get some magic users over there to check them. We've already done the electronic sweeps."

"How many?" Albert questioned him.

"Eleven. Some you know. Ingmar is one of them."

Albert raised a questioning look at Cardive but said, "You can give me a report after I get the magic users on their way."

Cardive nodded then took a seat at the table where someone had thoughtfully laid out food and drink already for the group.

Albert rounded up eleven magic users and sent them off with Ankers. As he turned back to the table to talk to Cardive, he noticed Nina shooing Dade, Wayne and Max out of the kitchen. He glanced at me and saw I was struggling to finish my meal without falling asleep in it. He sat down next to Cardive.

Nina returned to the table in time to save me from plopping face down in my plate.

"Why don't you get some sleep now, Kris." Nina fussed over me. "There will be food for you when you wake up."

It took me a minute to process what she'd said. Sleep sounded like a wonderful idea and I thought the floor right beside my chair would be a good spot for it. Then I thought of that big pillow of a bed in my room. I liked that even better. I lurched up from my seat, swayed a little then started off across the kitchen.

"G'nite," I told no one in particular.

One of the magic users that Albert had sent to the keep rushed into the kitchen, glanced quickly around then hurried over to where Albert and Cardive sat.

In a low voice he informed the men that a couple of the beings that had been rescued had escaped their confines at the keep.

Albert and Cardive were on their feet before the man had finished his statement.

The three men flashed out of the room.

Nobody in the kitchen paid any attention to Peters as he walked out of the kitchen.

Zidurn was in control of the body now. He'd made sure he'd taken a seat near where Kris would have to pass when she left. He'd gathered her scent then. Now he tracked her scent down the hallway to her room. As he stood outside her door, he glanced around to make sure no one else was near. Then he opened the door and slipped inside.

Zidurn moved swiftly to the side of her bed. He threw back the quilt so he could grab her and get out of there. This was it, his goal. He latched on to her wrist and transported them to his secret lair.

Chapter Five

Albert raced into the keep. His eyes scanned the area, quickly assessing the situation. The remainder of the magic users had reinforced the containing spells that held the rescued men within their rooms. One magic user sat on a chair at the far end of the hallway.

"Can you tell who, or what, escaped?" Albert asked the seated magic user, Stephen.

"Witches. And I'm getting reports from the others that most of those," he jerked his thumb toward one of the doors, "are probably working for the enemy."

"Anyone going after the two that left?" Albert unconsciously traced the emanations in the hallway, separating out the two that were foreign to him.

Suddenly he jerked. Kris. He knew by his bond that something had happened to her. Without saying a word, he jumped to her bedroom, his eyes flashed over the bed. He moved quickly to the bathroom. Not here. Dade, Wayne and Max burst through the door and looked wildly about.

"She's not here," Albert told them, meaning Coria, and they understood.

They all reached out through their bonds, seeking her.

And drew a blank.

"Tell Nina," Albert told the others, "I'll be right back." Albert blinked out of the room.

* * * * *

Zidurn eyed his prize hungrily.

He'd laid her on the bed of the special room he'd built in his secret home far below the woods northeast of Coria. He'd then injected her with a mixture of drugs, ensured to keep her drowsy and compliant.

One of his talents was being able to find empty pockets of space below the surface. To be able to visualize them precisely enough to transport himself to their location. He knew of no others who could do that. Jump to a location they, or someone they knew, had never been.

He shook himself out of his reverie. He had work to do. He had to build his trapping spells strong enough to hold her. He hoped he had enough power left over to cover the spells with a deep block.

He knew that being underground went a long way in hiding her from her bondmates, but it was not enough. He would need to feed soon, and often, to rebuild his powers. He focused on the task at hand and got to work.

* * * * *

Albert was back at the cabin he had shared with Kris. He'd needed the privacy when he drew on his additional powers. He sat on the picnic table and dropped his head in his hands.

Damn, Kris' disappearance was hitting him hard.

He took a deep breath and scrubbed his face with his hands. Then he started gathering his power. The air before him began to shimmer.

"Where are you, Kris?" His voice echoed with his anxiety.

The shimmer of air stretched and expanded. Vague shadows of shapes began to appear like images seen through a thick fog. Then the fog began to dissipate. Separate images sharpened slowly into trees. Albert forced his concentration deeper, tightened his hold on his bond with Kris.

The vision expanded like a hole stretching wider in fabric. Albert scanned the woods, searching for a landmark, a building, a sign of Kris. Something at the far left of the picture attracted his attention. Whatever it was, it was still obscured by a haze of fog. He redirected all his energies at it. The vision contracted and centered on that spot. The fog was blown away and he could clearly see a small waterfall on a silvery winding brook. He knew that place. He reined his power in and the vision snapped shut with a crackle and sparkling of air.

Then he flashed his way back to the others.

Zidurn tied off his final holding spell.

Drenched in sweat and trembling, he decided to get some nourishment and take a short break before he wove the blocking spells. He pondered the werewolf metabolism as he made his way to the kitchen. Seemed a were burned a lot more fuel than a human.

He would have to remember that.

Albert found the others gathered in the living room at Coria.

The look of anguish in Dade's eyes reflected the feelings of all present. He opened his mouth to speak then snapped it shut.

"I have a general idea where she has been taken." Albert's face was set in hard lines.

He projected the image to Nina as well as the other men. They glanced at each other then blinked out.

Immediately upon arrival in the woods, Dade turned his back to Albert's. Wayne and Max assumed a similar pose.

They kept Nina between the two groups.

After scanning the area both visually and magically, they relaxed their positions.

Wayne had picked up a flutter of something and motioned the group to follow him. After several paces through the trees and undergrowth, Wayne stopped. He searched the area then shook his head. Nina moved to his side and took his hand. Combining their power, they searched again. Just a ghost of a feeling shivered in the air. Then that too was gone.

"She's here," Nina whispered. Her eyes trying to strip the foliage from the trees and shrubs around her. Willing them to divulge Kris' location.

Nothing.

Albert touched her arm then her mind. "Distract the others," he asked of her so he could conduct his own search unobserved.

"No," Nina shot back at him. "They are her bondmates too, they deserve to know."

Albert felt frustration with Nina rise like a wave. "It's more than they need to know."

"You gods are so full of yourselves," Nina snapped back at him.

His frustration crested into fury at her impudence. He raised his hand toward Nina, intent on wiping the smugness off her face.

Abruptly, he saw the tiny old woman before him. Really saw her. Saw he'd been about to devastate an old lady. Laughter barked out of him as his fury fled. "Ah, Nina, I am an ass and I thank you for having the courage to point it out to me."

"Okay, men," Albert began as he sat on the leaf-strewn forest floor.

Max and the others sat in a loose circle around him.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd keep what you're about to see between yourselves." Albert concentrated his gaze to the center of the circle. He began intoning a spell beneath his breath. A ball of flame coalesced in the center of the circle, flared, contracted, then expanded. As the flames expanded they began to take shape. Soon the beginnings of a torso formed, then arms and legs, followed by a head. The flames writhed around the figure then solidified. Eyes of reddish fire opened in the face, blue flames flickered where the pupils should have been.

"*Ahkrad*," said the demon, eyes searing a look on Albert.

"*Ang Mak tu visu*," Albert replied. "Speak in common," he commanded.

The demon bowed and waited.

Albert impressed on the demon Kris' essence. "She is near here. Find her."

"As you wish, lord." The demon sank into the ground beneath its feet.

Max, Wayne and Dade all regarded Albert with wariness.

"He's a god, you dolts," Nina huffed at them.

The men regarded Nina, still skeptical, then looked to Albert.

"*Talerion*," Albert grumbled at them.

Max laughed and the others relaxed.

"This may take awhile," Albert informed them. Then he magicked a picnic table laden with food to occupy everyone during the wait.

* * * * *

Zidurn recovered quickly. Kris was still under the influence of the drugs. He cast a quick spell to filter her blood, then he took a moment to sink his fangs into her neck and consume some of her blood while he roughly fondled her breasts, rubbing his erection against her hip. Pressed for time, he allowed himself to come into his pants when her body shook with her own orgasm. Then he released his sister and began the blocking spells.

Having her here and under his control was decidedly distracting.

He stripped his clothes off, then idly stroked his penis while he worked.

He bound Kris' naked body spread-eagle to the bed. His cock throbbing in anticipation. He shook himself then resumed his weaving.

Once the blocks were set to his satisfaction he lowered himself between Kris' legs and lapped at her vagina. He inhaled her sweet scent then turned his head to drink from her thigh. He stabbed two fingers into her vagina while he drank. He shuddered as her sweetness flowed over his tongue, his cum spurting onto the bed.

She would have to wait, Zidurn thought as he removed his fingers from her pussy and sucked her taste from them. He needed sleep.

He licked the puncture marks on her thigh, then stretched out on the couch and dropped immediately into a deep, restorative sleep.

* * * * *

Darkness was gathering in the woods when the demon finally returned. Unspoken, the group formed a circle around it.

"*Ang Mak*," the demon spoke to Albert, unaware of the others around it. "She is somewhere below the surface in this general area. Beyond that, I can not tell. There are spells that protect her location. Dark spells I was unable to penetrate."

Albert raised an eyebrow at the demon then drew himself up to his full height.

"Unable?" Tension vibrated in his voice.

"*Ang Mak, vi entempler*." The demon shrank away from Talerion.

"Whose?" Albert demanded as energy sizzled and sparked around his head.

The demon shivered but was compelled to answer. "*Ik vang...*"

"In Common!" Albert shouted.

"It tasted of Bakiturian."

Albert eyed the demon, "And who else?"

The demon bared his fangs and hissed, "Zidurn."

Albert made a hand gesture at the demon and froze it in place.

"So the son survived," Nina expelled her breath.

"Who are we talking about?" Dade asked.

"Bolderius and his first wife had a son, Zidurn," Nina explained. "His body was accounted for after the battle. Evidently he had the power to possess a survivor."

"We never bothered to learn much about Zidurn since we thought he'd been taken care of," Albert continued.

"An oversight," Nina agreed.

"So Zidurn has aligned himself with Bakiturian." Albert raked his fingers through his hair. He peered at the demon and removed the lock on it. "Tell me where Zidurn is," Albert demanded.

The demon wagged its fiery head from side to side, opening and closing its mouth like a fish gasping for air. "He is —"

A screech blasted through the air. The demon stretched and narrowed then began twisting and writhing. Albert poured a blanket of power over the surrounding group just before the demon exploded outward in a white hot flash.

"Bakiturian!" Talerion yelled through the thundering noise.

Then all was quiet.

Bakiturian felt a disturbance in his power.

Interesting.

He followed the disturbance with his mind, located its source in a chamber below the surface in the Midwest. He flashed himself into the chamber and peered down at the sleeping Zidurn. He traced a pattern over the man, sending him deeper into sleep. Then he turned his attention to the woman bound spread-eagled on the bed. He studied her for a while then knelt between her legs. He brought his face close to her sex and drew a deep breath. He slid his long pointed tongue down her slit, up the length of her vagina, then into her anus.

He noticed, with a vague irritation, that he had an erection.

Removing his tongue from the woman, he stared thoughtfully at her. Among the tastes and scents there was one the demigod found interesting.

This woman has bonded with Talerion.

He traced the sleep pattern over Kris and departed to consider the meaning of this.

* * * * *

Albert paced the clearing, his brow furrowed in thought.

Dade leaned back against the tabletop and spoke to Nina, who was sitting next to him. "I thought gods could do pretty much anything?"

Nina set down her mug, glanced at Wayne who had stopped in the process of picking at a piece of chicken. She included Max in her gaze and he sat up straighter.

"Gods, like any of us, have varying degrees of power and different abilities." Nina turned to watch Albert. "I've been around long enough to have met a few. Talerion is the only one that ever took an interest in us lesser beings. I suspect he has either given up a great deal so he may live among us, or perhaps he expends a tremendous amount of energy protecting and watching over us." A great sadness passed over Nina's face.

"So what's your point, Nina?" Wayne pressed.

"There will be a price if Albert gathers more power to find Kris. A heavy price. Albert must decide if the life of one immortal is worth the cost."

Albert sat slumped against the base of a tree with his eyes closed.

"Is there nothing else we can do?" Max asked.

"That," Nina told the men, "is what we should be concentrating our efforts on."

* * * * *

Bakiturian relaxed on a chaise in his great hall at Umbar. The ghostly images of shades flitted about him awaiting his orders.

He had thought little of his minion Zidurn since the magic user had sworn fealty to him forty years ago. He remembered, briefly, the few times of late when Zidurn had dipped into Bakiturian's well. Pah, he never bothered himself over such trifles. But Talerion was another matter all together. What interest had the god in an insignificant immortal?

Evidently she wasn't so insignificant.

Bakiturian decided it might provide some entertainment to investigate this situation. He could never resist a little wicked entertainment no matter how many centuries he'd existed.

Rising to his feet, he concentrated on his memory of Talerion. The air around him shimmered. He turned to the reflecting wall and appraised his appearance.

Satisfied with his disguise, he returned to the chamber and Talerion's woman.

Bakiturian stood next to the bed near the woman's head. He breached her mind and gathered random memories of Talerion. Desire seemed to be the strongest emotion between the two. Bakiturian felt himself harden at the intensity of it.

Leaving her tied to the bed, he roused her partially from her drugged state.

Her eyes fluttered open on a low moan. She had difficulty focusing on him at first, then broke into a smile.

"Albert," he could feel her confusion.

Bakiturian slipped onto the bed and lay over the woman.

"I've missed you," he told her in Talerion's voice. Then he took her mouth and kissed her deeply. He felt her energies brush across his skin. He spelled his clothes away.

"Hey, how come I'm tied?" the woman asked, her voice slurred.

He gave her a wicked grin and shook his head. "I want you just like this." Then he kissed her again, parting her lips, plunging his tongue into her mouth.

Her response was immediate and passionate. He aimed his cock and, without thought for her readiness, thrust inside. She gasped, but he didn't care if it was in pleasure or in pain. He drove and withdrew, gaining access by degrees until he was fully seated within her. He ground his hips against her and was rewarded with a wash of moisture around his cock. He began pumping then, hard, sharp thrusts that jolted her against her bonds.

He slid his hands to her hips and pressed down on them, pinning her in place. He thrust harder into her, hitting her womb.

Then her energy coalesced and grew. He felt a wave of it wash over him, through him. It heightened his awareness of her, of his dick in her, of his own sensations as he slammed into her. He felt the power loop back through the woman and crash back through himself. This was what the god saw in this woman! He fed off it, no doubt.

He had heard tell of the Liander. Tales, he'd thought. He nearly laughed at himself as he pounded his cock into the very center of one. He sucked in her power, felt her drawing harder on the environment around them. Then he lost himself to the overwhelming sensation of his shaft plunging through the heated wetness of her sheath.

"No!" the woman beneath him yelled. "Stop. You're not Albert."

She was sobbing now as Bakiturian feasted on the energy pouring into him. He could feel her feeble attempts to rein in her powers. To sever the connection. He laughed at her attempts.

He rammed her harder as she stilled beneath him. He felt the imminence of his release and rushed to meet it.

Suddenly the power pouring into him doubled, tripled. He found himself in the midst of an explosive orgasm. More intense than anything he had ever experienced before. He threw back his head and roared.

A pure white light burst from his mouth and blasted its way upward.

Kris kept feeding the link, ignoring the cock that kept spurting inside her. The weight of the man who was not Albert was wrenching an orgasm out of her core even as she fought it.

With her last conscious thought, she spelled the energy beam to dissipate when it had achieved her goal.

* * * * *

Albert felt the power surge first and turned toward its location. The others at the table noticed he'd stopped pacing and looked up. The earth began to tremble beneath their feet. A section of rocks and leaves to the north heaved upward, then split as a searing white light shot from below, accompanied with a terrible roar.

As soon as the surface was breached, the energy collapsed and washed outward in an undulating wave, bathing everything in its path, the sound dissipating with it.

Dade and the others felt energized as it passed over them.

"Kris," Albert breathed. Then he slid, like a fluid, down the hole the beam had left behind.

He burst into the chamber, flashing power and fury. Bakiturian barely had time to register his entrance before he was blasted back to Umbar.

Albert made quick work of Zidurn after that. He wrested Zidurn's essence out of Peters and flung his shade to exile at Krakosta. Then he restored Peters to himself and transported him to the surface.

God though he might be, he was reluctant to face Kris.

As he looked down on her, his powers banked and dimmed. His fury died. He knelt beside the bed and touched her bonds, releasing her. She looked so pale and fragile lying there. He brushed his hand down the side of her face but received no response.

He moved beside her and pulled her into his embrace. Pressed close to his chest, he placed gentle kisses on her hair and sought her mind with his.

"Come back to me, Kris." He stroked her back and held her tighter. "I need you, Kris, we need you."

He felt the tentative brush of her mind. "Who?"

He almost wept with relief. "All of us, my love. Dade and Wayne, Nina and Max are above us waiting for you. You gave us quite a scare."

Kris opened her eyes and turned to look at him. He saw a bleakness in their depths that hadn't been there before.

"I can make you forget." He couldn't undo what had been done to her but he could cleanse her mind of it.

"No," she spoke aloud. "I'd rather learn by it and learn to live with it."

"Then let me cleanse your body. Remove the memory from your skin."

This she allowed him to do. When he'd removed all trace of the demigod from her he dressed her in jeans and a sweater. Then he brought her face to his and kissed her with all the reverence he felt for her.

"Ready?" he asked.

She took a deep breath then nodded.

Albert and Kris appeared next to the hole, which Albert sealed behind them.

Peters looked stunned while Nina examined him.

Max, Wayne and Dade rushed to Kris, each needing to touch her and satisfy themselves she was all right.

They gathered around the picnic table and Albert explained what had gone on down below.

He left nothing out.

One by one the group departed for Coria.

* * * * *

Back at Coria, Albert disbanded the people, another crisis averted.

Now only the core group remained. Albert had filled in all the blanks for me and now, I knew, it was time for me to make some decisions. Nina found me where I was sitting on the back patio.

"I'm heading home now," she informed me.

I got up and gave her a hug and promised to see her soon. Then she was gone.

I finally came to a decision and rounded up the men. We sat at the kitchen table while Albert and Dade grabbed us each a beer out of the fridge.

When he handed me mine, I raised it in a toast. "Well, guys, it's been a hell of a week!"

We all drank to that.

I looked at each man in turn, amazed that I felt so attached to them.

"I imagine you're all anxious to get back to your lives, so I won't keep you." I scanned the group again. "I can't thank you enough for your help." I took another slug of beer.

"What help? He found you anyway," Wayne muttered.

"Yeah, but you gave me the time to learn something about my magic. If I hadn't had that time, I might not be sitting here now." I looked at each man, until they relented.

Albert had told me in order to release them from their bonds to me I simply had to state my rejection.

"I've decided to release all of you from your bonds." I was happy to note that no one looked relieved at my statement. "If any of you would like to date me in the future, you know where I live." At that I projected both an external image of my house and a view of my living room.

"Albert," I took his hand and smiled at him, "I reject you." He laughed.

"Max," I placed my hand on his arm, "I reject you."

"Wayne," I got up and went to him, placed my hand on his head, "I reject you."

Then I got to Dade. This one was going to be harder. I kind of wanted to keep Dade. I had to remind myself he'd begun this whole thing strictly to save my life.

I took both of his hands in mine. "Dade," my breath caught in my throat, "I reject you."

I sucked down the rest of my beer. Gave the group one last look. "See you 'round." And I zapped myself home.

Chapter Six

Christ I was lonely. I took my sorry ass to my bedroom and plopped facedown on my bed. I tried wallowing in self-pity for a moment but couldn't work up the enthusiasm for it. Maybe I'd just sleep for a few days.

A hand brushed the back of my head. I jerked around, swinging my arms wildly. Strong hands grasped my wrists and I found myself staring into Dade's green eyes. I shook my arms free and wrapped them around his broad shoulders.

He laughed and pressed me back against the bed, nesting himself between my thighs.

"Is it too soon to ask you for that date?"

I shook my head and he kissed my eyelids, my cheeks, my jaw. His lips found my mouth, his tongue sweeping inside. Heat flooded my breasts and my groin. My nipples were so hard they ached. I was considering shoving Dade's head toward them when his hand stroked the underside of one, his thumb brushing across the nipple. I shuddered while a low groan escaped me. He took the nipple between his fingers, pinching and lightly twisting it. I wrapped my legs around his hips and rubbed against his cock.

He growled and began stripping my clothes off me, then stripped himself.

"Kneel," his voice was hoarse with lust.

I knelt in front of him. He ran his hands down my back then splayed them around my waist.

He bumped the head of his penis against my entrance then pressed inside in one slow push. He started with slow, strong thrusts, filling me completely, stretching the walls of my vagina. My nerve endings sparked as he picked up speed, leaned over me and grasped one of my breasts.

The energy loop between us pulsed and grew.

"Kris," Dade groaned as he rolled his hips, grinding his pelvis against my ass. "Damn, you feel good."

I moaned loudly when he resumed thrusting. He rotated his hips, angling his thrusts slightly side to side. His fingers tightened as he growled low in his throat. The muscles in my groin began to coil.

He teased my nipple then slid his hand down my belly to my crotch. His fingers traced a path around my clitoris.

I threw my hips back at him, he rubbed across my clit and I blew apart in his arms. The intensity of my orgasm drove Dade over the edge and I felt him throbbing as the heat of his cum shot deep inside me.

He collapsed on his side, taking me with him.

Dade woke me sometime later. Said something to me, gave me a quick, hard kiss and left. I rolled over and went back to sleep.

I was wonderfully refreshed after I woke and took a shower in my own bathroom. I shuffled out to the kitchen, got myself a Coke from the fridge and sat down at my counter. I contemplated the week I'd just been through.

I knew I had to call my mom soon, but what to tell her? That reminded me to check my answering machine.

Four messages from Mom. She'd called to invite me to dinner, then she'd called to lay the guilt on for not having called her back. Three times. Kind of made me want to tell her exactly what I'd been up to the last few days. Especially with Dade, Wayne, Max and Albert. In detail.

Oh who was I kidding, I'd have to come up with something else to tell her.

All set with my new fabrication, I dialed my mom's.

Wouldn't you know it, I got the answering machine.

I decided to go up to my studio and see how far behind I was on my commission work. I also had some new ideas I wanted to try out. I was halfway down the hall when the front doorbell rang. Nobody comes to my front door. Hardly anybody comes to my house uninvited anyway because of the gate at the end of my drive.

I stared at the door for a minute. It's a solid oak door. No peephole. There's glass sidelights, but the glass is glue chip and the best you can see are vague shapes and shadows. The doorbell rang again. I unlocked the door, the locks a bit stiff from disuse. Then swung it open.

Oh my. Super Hunk stood on the other side of my storm door flashing a thousand watt smile at me. I blinked at him for a while. He gestured toward the storm door. My brain began functioning again and I opened the door to him.

He took a step forward, extending his hand. "You must be Kris."

My hormones kicked into high gear as I shook his hand. "Uh huh."

"I'm Mick, Dade's brother."

"Oh," I stepped aside and motioned for him to enter.

He stepped past me into the living room, the top of my head about even with his chest.

He wandered around the room, checking it out. Then he turned back to me.

He held a package toward me that I hadn't noticed he was carrying.

"He asked me to give this to you."

I took the package.

"I'm sorry, would you like something to drink?"

"Too early for a beer?" His grin was mischievous and I wondered what it would have been like if I'd met Mick first.

"Come on," I couldn't help smiling back at him.

He slouched in a chair at my kitchen table while I got a fresh Coke for myself and a beer for him.

As I made my way back from the fridge I couldn't help but notice Mick giving me a thorough full-body scan.

I think my hair even blushed. And heated.

I handed him his beer, his fingers brushed mine, sending a jolt of awareness up my arm and straight to my nipples.

Realizing what an idiot I was, I glowered at him—I hoped it was a glower—and shook my head. He'd noticed my nipples though, hard as ball bearings poking through the fabric of my shirt. He grinned wider, his eyes darkening.

I backed up a step, intending to put some distance between us, when his hand shot out, grabbed me and he yanked me into his lap. Before I could sputter out a protest, he trapped the back of my head in his hand and pressed his lips to mine.

Without thinking, I responded to his kiss. His lips were warm and expressive, his tongue stroked seductively against mine. I suddenly realized I was kissing Dade's brother.

I pushed futilely against his chest, refusing to respond further to his kiss. To be honest, it took everything I had, especially since various parts of my body were responding enthusiastically. I kept repeating to myself, This is Dade's brother. Dade's brother. Dade's brother. Right before my resolve snapped, he released me.

I scrambled off his lap, telling myself, "Do not look at his crotch."

I looked. He had a huge, hard bulge in his pants. I quickly put a chair between us, sat down and tried to glare at him.

He laughed. "I see why Dade's so attracted to you." He sipped his beer while undressing me with his eyes.

I turned my attention to the package I had all but forgotten on the table. Inside was a silky red dress and some tiny, lacey panties in the same color.

I looked up from the panties to find Mick staring at them, slowly running his tongue along his lower lip.

Dade's brother. I admonished myself. I shoved the panties under the dress.

"Dade wasn't sure you were—awake enough when he left this morning," he paused and let me know with his eyes he knew exactly what Dade had been doing here. "He asked me to tell you he had some family business to take care of but he'd see you around seven. Wear the dress."

"Well, thanks for bringing it by." I got up and started for the front door, intending to get rid of the guy before I got myself into trouble with him.

"Actually," he came up close behind me, wrapped his arms around my waist and spread his hands across my stomach. He bent his head and kissed the side of my neck. "Dade thought now would be a good time for you to get to know some of his family better."

Hot breath raised goose bumps on my neck. His tongue brushed up to the sensitive spot behind my ear. My breathing deepened. His hands slid to my breasts, cupping them. He brushed his fingers across my nipples and I groaned. Then froze.

"That's it!" I whirled on him, surprise causing him to drop his arms. "I don't care what kind of customs you werewolves abide by, but I am *not* sleeping with you!" I was working myself up to a proper fit because I was scared that I'd do just that. "How many brothers does he have anyway?" I started flailing my arms as I lost control of myself.

"Seven." Mick stared at me with some fascination.

"Seven?" I practically screamed. "I'm supposed to sleep with seven of you guys?" Now I was screaming.

Mick retreated to his chair at the table and I stomped after him.

"Look, you," I poked him in the shoulder, the sight of the gleam in his eyes enraging me further, "I don't care how good the sex is with Dade, I am *not*," poke "*sleeping*," poke "with his *brothers* for it!" Poke.

Tears were leaking out of Mick's eyes now as he burst into laughter.

Totally thrown by his reaction, I slumped back into my chair.

Mick slapped the table with the flat of his hand a few times, trying to regain control of himself.

"Damn," he took a breath, "I can't remember the last time I laughed this hard." He wiped his face with his hands.

"You think this is funny?" I fumed at him.

"Quite." He finally got control of himself. "There's no custom," he nearly lost it again, "requiring you to sleep with Dade's brothers." He chuckled, got a grip, shook his head.

I gaped at him.

"Then why were you kissing me?"

The blinding smile was back. "You smell like sex." He leered at me. "And I have it on good authority that you're an exceptional lover."

"I took a shower!" I chose to ignore the last part of his comment.

He laughed again, at me. "You misunderstand, you don't smell like you've just had sex," his eyes, dark and gleaming, caused my breath to catch, "your scent, the scent that is uniquely you—is pure sex." The last part came out on a low growl.

Just great.

The doorbell rang and my surprise must have been evident on my face.

"Probably my brothers."

"All of them?" Panic rose within me.

"Three of them are mated, you'll meet them another time." Since I didn't make a move to answer the door, Mick got up and went to it.

I heard the rumble of male voices. I ran into the kitchen and busied myself getting beers out of the fridge. When I heard them laughing, I glanced toward the garage and thought about escaping.

Mick walked back in, followed by three other hunks, the shortest of them still over six feet tall. All dark-haired, eyes either blue or green, built. Raw masculine power. They all gave me that familiar thorough full body scan, then grinned at me. I swear I had a hot flash. I set the beers on the table and retreated to the kitchen to get myself a large glass of wine.

One of the men came over and leaned on the counter.

"Name's Sean," he informed me, "nice meeting you, Kris."

"Sean." I nodded at him and returned the wine to the fridge.

When I turned around, Sean was standing uncomfortably close. He wrapped an arm around my back, pulled me tight against his body and whispered into my hair, "I agree with Mick, the pack should begin a new custom."

"That does it!" I shoved against Sean. "All you brothers just keep your hands to yourselves."

Sean laughed, the others joining in.

I took my seat at the table and learned the other two were called Chase and Mac.

Surprisingly, I found myself relaxing as they told me stories about their family. Dade and the rest of them growing up. They were obviously a close-knit family and appeared to be more normal than my own.

Mac and Sean had wandered out to my back deck, and Mac leaned back in, "Let's have a cookout."

I glanced at the box on the table. "I think Dade might have other plans."

Chase waved away that objection. "Don't worry about it, he can take you out some other time."

That seemed to settle the matter.

Mick borrowed the keys to my Explorer and motioned to Sean to go with him. He turned to me in the doorway to the utility room, "If I were you, I'd put that dress on anyway." He winked then walked out to the garage.

I thought, why not? As I picked up the box Dade had sent. I leaned out the door to the deck, "I'm just going to change." I waved the box at Chase and Mac.

"Want some help?" Chase asked me.

I grimaced at him and slipped back into the house.

I took a quick shower, careful not to get my hair wet. The dress was cool and soft against my skin. Cut dangerously low in the front, snug across the bodice, flaring out at the hips, falling mid-thigh.

I did my hair and makeup. Adjusted the scrap of fabric that posed as underwear. And declared myself ready.

The men had been busy in my absence. A fire burned in the fireplace and several candles were lit throughout the living room and kitchen. Contemporary music played on my stereo, loud enough to feel the beat but not so loud it would drown out conversation. Mick and Sean had returned, the smell of potatoes baking in my oven as evidence. I heard the murmur of voices drifting in from the deck where additional candles flickered.

I refilled my wineglass and headed for the deck.

I was facing the door when I felt Dade arrive behind me. My heart skipped a beat as I turned to set my glass on the table.

He was gorgeous. All wild hair and wilder eyes. He wore a charcoal gray sweater, black jeans and a smile that went straight to my groin. I set my glass on the table and walked into his arms.

He molded me against his body, one arm around my back, his hand low on my hip, his other arm tight against my shoulder blade, his fingers tangled in the hair at the back of my head. He kissed me like he'd been gone a month. I immediately drenched my panties.

"Your brothers are definitely wolves," I informed him.

He laughed, took my hand and dragged me over to the fridge. He helped himself to a beer.

"I see they invited themselves to dinner." His grin was infectious. "They must approve of you."

I grabbed my glass on our way out to the deck.

Dade's brothers were ranged around the cooker, either leaning on the railing or lounging at the table.

They all eyed me in my dress. Dade dropped his arm over my shoulder in a possessive gesture.

"You guys will use any excuse for a party," Dade greeted them.

I sat at the table. Dade moved a chair close to mine and sat next to me. I noticed Dade giving Sean a hard look, Mick an even harder one. Then he sat back and draped his arm across the back of my chair.

"Everything taken care of?" Chase asked Dade.

I assumed he was referring to whatever business Dade had with his family today.

Dade took a drink of his beer. "For the most part."

Several of them glanced at me, then away. Must not be any of my business.

Mac busied himself at the grill then recruited Mick to help him load platters with the meat.

"Let's eat," Mac announced and we headed for the kitchen.

Dade held me back, wrapped his arms around my back and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

"So you don't feel left out of the conversation," he began, "you've caused a bit of an uproar with my father."

"What?" I hadn't even met Dade's father.

"Dad's just upset because you're not a wolf."

His dad was a bigot? "Is there some law about that?"

Dade chuckled. "No," he pulled my hips tighter, "he knows we're lovers, he knows how attracted I am to you, he's afraid I'm going to want to mate you."

"We barely know each other, Dade. We're not likely to rush into that kind of commitment any time soon."

"He's leader of the pack, love." He ground his hips lightly against me. "I'm his oldest son. As such, I'll take over my father's position when the time comes. Not that he'd be pleased if any of my brothers took a non-were to mate, but for me, the idea is incomprehensible. It didn't help matters that he summoned me straight from your bed."

"I thought supes were open about sex and all."

"We are," he paused, "but not so open about love. He can tell I'm in love with you."

Holy shit. I didn't see that one coming.

Thank god he kissed me then so I didn't have to reply.

"Could you two pry yourselves apart long enough to eat some dinner?" Chase yelled out the door.

Dade broke off his kiss, his eyes glittering in the candlelight. Then he turned toward the door.

"You better have saved some for us," Dade growled as he pulled me to the table behind him.

It was a simple meal the brothers had provided. Steaks, baked potatoes and baked beans. I enjoyed every bite of it.

The conversation stayed casual. Mostly about people I didn't know. Dade touched me often. A hand on my arm, a brush down my thigh, the gestures an unconscious invitation to be part of this group, a constant reminder that I was included no matter what they were talking about.

Everyone pitched in with the dishes, making short work of the chore. They decided to have one last beer in the living room before calling it a night.

Dade tucked me up under his arm as we sat on the couch.

"You should bring Kris to the feast," Chase suggested to Dade.

"I'll think about it," was all Dade replied.

It was comfortable sitting here with Dade and his brothers and I was sorry when they began making ready to leave.

"I'm sure we'll see more of you," Mac told me. He and Chase blinked out before I had a chance to thank them.

Sean grabbed me by the hips and kissed my cheek.

"Thanks for dinner," I got out before he too was gone.

Mick pulled me into a full-body embrace and kissed me on the mouth. With tongue.

Dade clamped his hand on the back of Mick's neck and increased the pressure until his brother let go of me.

Mick shoved him in the chest. Dade's eyes turned green, he growled low in his throat. Mick growled back at him.

Before I could move between them, Dade had Mick flat on his back on the floor.

"She's mine, little brother. You would do well to remember that."

Mick just grinned at his brother and pulled himself up off the floor. He bent and whispered to Dade, but I caught what he said anyway, "Her scent is enough to drive any man insane."

They both looked at me and I gave them a what-did-I-do gesture.

"Christ," Dade muttered, "she can't even help it." They exchanged beleaguered looks.

"You ever get tired of this fat head," Mick gestured at his brother, "just give me a call."

Then he winked at me and was gone.

Dade gave me a slow body scan then smiled that wicked half smile of his. "It's time for dessert."

He reached me in two steps, threw me over his shoulder and carried me off to bed.

* * * * *

My life returned to normal. Well, except for my werewolf lover and the magic.

The magic, I was coming to find out, had its drawbacks.

Dade had told me to continue doing normal, everyday activities manually. Explaining to me how supes who chose to live among mortals needed to make these actions second nature. Said it wouldn't do to magically fill my empty glass in front of my mother.

I understood the concept well enough but there were just some things I quit doing manually anyway. Cleaning the toilets was one.

Some other drawbacks I found one day when I did everything using magic.

It saps your physical energy to use it.

Then you have to use more physical energy to replace it.

The other thing I found out was it took seconds to accomplish a week's worth of chores. Good, right? I thought so, at first. Then I found myself wandering around the house looking for something to do.

Dade was also teaching me how to read supes' "auras". I had a blast learning but was embarrassed by how much information you could pick up. He did omit teaching me what love looked like on an aura and other things, I'm sure, but I didn't pursue it. I couldn't see mine anyway. I wondered what Dade saw. Must have been okay because he kept coming around every day.

Three weeks had passed since I'd met Dade's brothers. I'd seen Chase a couple of times when he came to talk to Dade about family business. I'd also met one of his mated brothers, Leigh. I don't think Leigh liked me. He'd snarled at me and that kind of tipped me off.

Dade was back in my study, which he'd appropriated as his office, when it happened. Leigh and I were in the kitchen. I was setting out cold cuts and cheese for lunch.

"What do you think you're doing?" Leigh asked me.

"Fixing lunch." I thought that was evident by the platter in front of me.

"No," Leigh edged closer to me, "what are you doing to Dade?" His voice had taken on an edge.

"I'm not doing anything to Dade," I told him, backing away from him.

He closed the distance between us and loomed over me.

"I'm not blind, magic user." His voice now low and lethal.

I tried to put more space between us and found myself trapped against the counter.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," I managed to stammer out. My heart beating too fast.

Leigh planted his hands on either side of me on the counter. His eyes blazing green, his fangs extended, he lowered his face until it was a couple of inches from mine.

"You expect me to believe that scent you cover yourself in is not something you created?"

That's when he snarled.

I blinked and Dade was behind his brother.

"Get away from her, Leigh," he growled.

Leigh didn't move. "She's got a spell on you, brother," Leigh growled back.

"Get. Away. From. Her," Dade ground out, every muscle in his body tensing.

Leigh straightened and turned toward Dade. Dade's hand shot out, his fingers clamping around his brother's throat.

I was frozen in place.

They stood like that for several minutes. I could feel the tension between the two of them. It was so thick, a brief spark would ignite it into full-out aggression.

Then Leigh went limp. All the tension flushed out of him. Dade removed his hand.

Leigh glared at me, a touch of fear in his eyes.

Then he blinked out.

I took a deep, steadying breath and started shaking.

Dade wrapped me in his arms and kissed the top of my head.

"What," I could barely get the word out and had to try again, "what was that about?"

Dade sighed. He dragged me off to the bedroom, rolled onto the bed with me and stopped when he had me pinned beneath him.

He dipped his head to my neck and inhaled. "I love the way you smell," his erection testified to that. "Unfortunately, so does everyone else."

He braced himself on his forearms. "You're going to have to devise a spell to dilute your scent."

I raised an eyebrow at him.

"You've seen how my brothers react to you. Hell, Leigh's mated. Once we mate, we're never aroused by other females, only our mates. Until you.

"That's why Leigh thought you were using magic. Your scent affected him. Can you imagine the mayhem you'd cause if I took you to a pack function?"

At least he grinned at that thought.

"Save your scent for me. When you're around others, try to tone it down. A lot."

Then he kissed me and I forgot about everything else for the next hour.

Chapter Seven

Dade was lying on top of me, sweaty and spent, when someone yelled from the direction of the living room.

"Dade!"

Dade rolled off me. "I'll be there in a minute," he yelled back.

I figured I'd let Dade deal with the situation while I took a nap.

"Get dressed," Dade told me as he pulled on his jeans. "That's my father out there."

Oh man. I couldn't have created a more awkward situation in which to meet his father.

Dade waited until I was dressed, took my hand and led me out to the living room.

Christ. Even his father was a hunk. He'd been pacing in front of the fireplace but turned toward us when we entered the room.

He gave me the same full body scan I'd gotten from every other member of Dade's family. I noticed, without meaning to, the bulge pressing against the man's zipper.

Dade pulled me close and held me tightly to his side.

"Dad, this is Kris," he said by way of introduction.

Dad stepped closer to us and glared at me. Then he grabbed me by the upper arm and wrenched me away from Dade. He held me tightly against his chest, his erection pressing uncomfortably into my stomach. I stood as still as stone. He smelled me. Sniffed all around my head and shoulders.

I was silently begging Dade to rescue me. I couldn't figure out why he hadn't.

It had just occurred to me that I could probably spell up a knee to his crotch when he shoved me away from him.

I slammed into Dade's chest, bounced off and fell to the floor. Dade didn't even look at me.

"Leigh was right, she reeks," the sneer in Dad's voice started a slow burn in me.

I picked myself up off the floor.

"What do you pay her for sex?" Dad continued.

My anger flared, but I held it in check, waiting for Dade's reply.

He just stood there, jaw clenched, glaring at his father.

"Did she require your soul?" Venom dripped off his words.

I snapped. I stomped over to Dade's father, grabbed a handful of his shirt and yanked it for his attention.

In a voice surprisingly low and steady, I went off on him.

"That does it!" I began, "you bigoted, insensitive, bastard." I was off and running. I started gathering power from everything around me. "You should wonder if Dade's good enough for *me*!" The air sparked and shimmered around me as I gathered more energy. "Some of his family members aren't."

Dad finally looked at me. His eyes widened slightly at what he saw. I had no doubt my powers were washing over him by now, a backwash awaiting direction.

I leaned closer to him. "I'm in love with your son." Surprised myself when that came out. "With or without your blessing I intend to continue seeing him."

I started condensing the energies, preparing to direct them. To what purpose I didn't know yet. With the power coiled tightly around me, pulsing with intensity, I focused everything I had on the man before me. The air sizzled around us, my power writhing like a living thing.

I paused. Took a hard look at what I was about to do. Shook my head in disgust at myself. Peeled my fingers off Dad's shirt and dispersed the energies back to their sources.

I stood before Dade's father, just me, and looked at him with my ordinary, everyday face.

I noticed, but didn't mean to, the man no longer sported an erection.

Dade's father stared at me. I couldn't get a read on his emotions and his face gave no indication of his thoughts.

Dade hadn't moved at all.

Fuck it. "So do I call you Dad, or what?"

I broke the silence, no longer caring what kind of impression the man had of me. I crossed my arms over my chest and waited for his response.

His eyes narrowed. "You won't be addressing me at all, you unholy bitch," he spat at me. "You're coming home with me, Dade." He blinked out, taking Dade with him.

That went well.

* * * * *

I took a nice long shower, magicked all unsightly body hair off and then spelled it to stay gone. Now there's a practical use for magic. I toweled myself dry then plopped facedown on my bed.

Could I be any more of a screw-up? In meeting Dade's father I'd aroused him, threatened to incinerate him and then insulted him. Okay, the arousal part was not my fault.

With Dade's behavior in his father's presence, I knew I'd never see him again. Figures.

I slept. Some time later, I became aware of a presence next to the bed. I was still facedown, naked, on top of the sheets. I didn't care. I didn't even bother to move. Then I

realized it was Dade standing there. He was motionless beside me. I stayed motionless on the bed. My nerves started stretching tight and when I couldn't stand it anymore, I rolled onto my side and looked at him.

Christ. He looked like he'd been run through a blender. I flung myself off the bed. I undressed him slowly, examining his injuries. I called up my power and traced each cut, every bruise, healing them. I had him lie down on the bed and made sure there were no injuries I'd overlooked.

I gathered more power, kissed him and entered his mind. His mind was undamaged, but his emotions were a mess. I kissed his face, his neck, his chest, as I scanned for internal injuries. When I was satisfied I had done everything I could for him, I pressed myself against his side, drew the covers over us, laid my arm across his chest and my head on his shoulder. Then I wove spells about my house to keep visitors away.

We didn't talk. We didn't move. It was several hours before Dade fell asleep. I forced myself to sleep after that.

I woke up alone the next morning. I heard pots banging in the kitchen so I pulled on a robe and headed that direction.

I sat at the counter. Dade set a Coke in front of me and went back to frying a pan of bacon. He was wearing only his jeans, his hair still damp from the shower I never heard him take. His cuts were mostly healed, his bruises barely yellow blotches on his skin.

I drank my Coke, waiting for him to tell me what had happened.

I was still waiting when his bacon was done and he'd begun eating it, standing on the opposite side of the counter from me.

"Dad and I got into a disagreement over you," Dade finally told me, his attention focused on the counter.

"Your father did that to you?" I almost jumped off my stool.

"It's our way, love." Dade's lopsided grin looked sad. He finally met my eyes and the depth of sadness I saw in them almost undid me.

"I've been exiled from the pack." I felt his heart wrench when he said that.

"Oh Dade, no." I made some useless gestures with my hands, not knowing what else to do.

"He gave me an ultimatum. You or the pack." His hands twitched, his face hardening at the memory. "I didn't kill him, though it was my right to do so." His eyes dared me to question that statement. "He considered that action my final betrayal."

He ran his fingers through his hair.

"The judgment of exile renders me nonexistent to my family, my pack."

"I'm so sorry, Dade." Tears filled my eyes. He must hate me for this.

He smiled at me. A genuine, heartfelt smile.

"He could change his mind. Exile doesn't have to be permanent. I know my brothers will give him a hard time over it. And, if nothing else, when Chase takes over the pack he's sure to lift it."

Chase? The pack leader? That could be years from now anyway.

"Look, Dade. I'll understand if you don't want to see me anymore." I did understand. I just didn't want him to agree.

He set down the piece of bacon he was holding and took my hands in his.

"I probably won't say this right, but there are more things wrong between my father and myself than just my relationship with you. You were just the last straw."

"I think the 'unholy bitch' comment tipped me off to that."

Dade laughed and I felt muscles relaxing I didn't realize were clenched.

"Glad you think it was funny," I said, a little pissed off.

"Guess you'd have to know Dad better to see the humor." Dade squeezed my hands then released them. "Actually I was thinking about your question to him before he lost his temper. Not many women I know, weres included, would have had the nerve to ask a pack leader that."

I thought again about how much I didn't know about the society the supernaturals lived in.

Dade finished his bacon, then came around the counter, picked me up and carried me to the sofa in the living room.

He sat down, trapping me on his lap. He kissed me thoroughly, rubbing the inside of my thigh while he did so.

"Whatever happens between us," he told me sincerely, "I will never regret my decision to be with you."

And I'd thought I'd loved him before.

"I've got a spell on the house," I remembered. "I've blocked anyone from visiting."

"You can lift it now, except for Dad. Not that he'll try to visit, but it will be awhile before I want to talk to him again."

I adjusted the spell.

"Doesn't anybody use a phone?" It occurred to me none of the supes that had visited had ever called me. Never even asked for my phone number.

"It's easier to drop in if you want to see someone." Dade took it as a given.

"About damn time," Chase grouched as he popped into the living room. "I've been trying to get a hold of you for hours." He slouched into a chair, stretching his long legs out in front of him.

"Good to see you too, Chase," I smiled at him even though I wasn't feeling all that happy to see him.

"Your un-holiness." He nodded at me.

I bristled until I saw the gleam of amusement in his eyes.

I removed myself from Dade's lap, "If you gentlemen will excuse me, I need to work on reducing my stench."

Chase barked out a laugh. Dade drew me down to his face for a kiss. "Remember to make it something you can lift whenever we're alone together."

I wandered up to my studio then out on the balcony. I spent the time thinking of exactly what I wanted to accomplish. I wanted to greatly reduce my scent whenever I was in the presence of any supes, or with mortals. I worked out the spell and cast it. I wouldn't know if it was effective until I was in the presence of others.

Wanting to give the brothers more time alone, I sat down at my work table and began selecting beads for a new project.

"I've got to wonder, Dade, if you shouldn't have gone through with it last night," Chase began.

"I wasn't about to kill him over a woman," Dade responded.

"It's more than that and you know it." Chase shook his head. "Dad hasn't been the same since Mom died and he's gotten worse lately."

"So call a convocation," Dade suggested.

"I'd want you there," Chase told him.

"I'd have to be summoned by the pack," Dade stated.

"Is he blocked from coming here?"

"Yes."

"Good, expect the family for dinner," Chase informed him.

Before Dade could object, Chase departed.

Dade found me working in my studio.

"I'm going into town for some supplies, seems the family is coming here for dinner tonight."

I dropped a handful of beads. Dade hugged me.

"Don't worry about it. I'll back you up if any of them give you any trouble." I jabbed him in the ribs.

"Anything you need from the store?"

"Wine, make sure I have lots of wine. And Coke. I'll need the Coke for the hangover I plan to have in the morning."

Dade chuckled, kissed me lightly on the lips and set off. At least one of us was pleased about this turn of events.

Dade had joined me in the shower and now I was running late. I stared hopelessly into my closet, wondering what I should wear.

Dade came to see what was taking me so long.

"You're wearing those?" He eyed the bra and panties my mother had bought me.

"Armor," I told him. "I just don't know what to wear over it."

He flipped through my clothes, grabbed a layered ankle-length skirt with a boxy sweater the color of my eyes.

I dressed quickly, slipped on some heels and did my hair and makeup using magic.

I wandered into the kitchen, relieved to see that no one had arrived yet.

Dade handed me a glass of wine.

"Relax," he told me, then kissed me until my mind went blank. He looked over my shoulder when he broke the kiss and I heard someone clearing their throat.

I knew I was blushing when I turned to see who had entered.

Mick, Mac and Sean were lounging at the kitchen table.

Dade leaned forward and sniffed me. "You work out a spell?"

"I tried, but I don't know if it's working."

Dade motioned for Mick to come over.

"Hi, sunshine," Mick greeted me, then grabbed me for a kiss. I could tell right away his body was not reacting to me. "What'd you do to yourself?" Mick asked in an accusing voice.

"I'd say you got it right," Dade told me.

Soon the house was crowded with McClurs. I met the two brothers I hadn't met before and all three mates. The women were kind of scary. All of them were around six feet tall with hard athletic bodies. Not unfeminine, but intimidating anyway.

The mated couples tended to group together while the rest of us ranged across the house. No one paid me much attention after the introductions and I toyed with the idea of lifting my spell to see what would happen.

At one point, I found myself alone on the deck so I wandered to the far end, leaned against the rail and soaked in the quiet. I was heading back for a refill on my wine when I noticed everyone sitting at the table eating dinner.

My feelings hurt, I returned to the bedroom, let myself in and quietly made my way up to my studio. I got a glass of wine from the mini fridge then curled up in my thinking chair.

I could hear the murmur of conversation from below, but only a word now and then clearly.

I finished that glass and returned to the mini fridge for more. My heart breaking, I sat on the floor of the storage room and hugged my legs to my chest while silent tears streamed down my face.

It was tough to admit to myself that Dade's interest in me resulted exclusively from my scent.

Around two a.m. I heard the last of Dade's brothers leave. I gave him a few minutes to realize I wasn't there, overlaid my spell to keep my scent dampened, then wandered down to the kitchen.

Dade was putting the last of the dishes away. I sat at the counter and waited for him to notice me.

He jumped when he caught sight of someone sitting at the counter. Then I saw understanding finally dawning on him. He glanced at the clock and I could see him calculating how many hours had passed since he'd last thought about me.

I just sat there.

He looked around the kitchen, for food, was my guess, but it was all gone.

"I'm so sorry, Kris." He came toward me but I couldn't handle it. I backed away from him, a hand held out in front of me warding him off.

It was all I could take. I ran past him, shaking his hand off when he tried to grab me and ran up the stairs. I bolted into one of the guest bedrooms, locking the door behind me.

I crawled under the covers on the bed and willed myself to sleep.

I woke fourteen hours later. My head felt like it was stuffed full of cotton. My eyes burned.

I dragged myself downstairs to my bedroom, stripped out of last night's party clothes and put on the crappiest pair of sweats I could find and some big furry slippers. I brushed my teeth and washed my face, but that was all I did.

I shuffled out to the kitchen, bypassed the Coke and went straight for the wine.

I hadn't seen any sign of Dade.

I took my wine out to the deck, curled up in a chair and proceeded to drink myself into oblivion.

Dade found me out there several hours later, tanked out of my head. Numb. I liked being numb.

I got the impression he was talking to me, but he wasn't making any sense, so I just ignored him. I think he sat there staring at me for a while.

He went away. He'd come back every now and then and stare at me some more. Finally I was beyond even noticing that.

I fell asleep in the deck chair that night.

I woke up the next morning when Dade threw me over his shoulder. He carried me into the bathroom and dumped me into the shower. He was already naked. He turned the water on, climbed in with me and stripped my clothes off.

He bathed me and I ached at the feel of his hands on my flesh.

After he toweled me dry, he carried me to the bed, dropped me on it, then dropped down on top of me.

"Scent or no scent, I'm dying here without you." He took my mouth with his, his tongue sweeping inside, wrapping around my tongue. His hunger washed over me and I felt my melancholy cracking, the morose mood that had held me in its grip dropping away from me in the face of his desire.

It was like coming back to life.

"You forgot about me, even after you told me you'd be my backup."

"I know, I can't tell you how sorry I am that happened."

"You only loved my scent." Might as well get all the hurt out of me now.

"No, Kris," his hands stilled on my breasts where he'd been playing with them, "I love you. When your scent was gone, my brain told me you weren't here. I've never been around you when I couldn't smell you." He leaned on one hip and ran his hand down to my crotch.

"These past two days I've noticed the other ways that I can sense your presence." He slid a finger inside me, groaned, then kissed me. He picked up the pace with his finger then slid a second one in beside it. When I started pushing back against his hand, he replaced his fingers with his dick.

A long groan rolled out of me as all my senses came alive.

Chapter Eight

He cooked me dinner that evening.

"I've been thinking about it. I'd like you to turn your scent back on. And I think you're blocking too much of it with your spell. Everyone uses smell to identify and connect with the people around them. When you block yours out to this extent, you disappear."

I just removed the spell entirely. The effect on Dade was amazing. His attention riveted on me, his eyes went green, he leaned over, nipped my neck and stroked my thigh. "God how I missed you."

This proved his point more effectively than his reasoning had.

"Here's what happened while you were out of it." He even ate his food with increased vigor. "The family decided to call a convocation against Dad. Over the past few years he's become increasingly intolerant of other species. Recently he's been given to acts of aggression against them, or refused to aid anyone outside the were community. That kind of behavior is inexcusable." Dade paused to chew a large bite of steak. "When he exiled me, he pretty much sealed his fate."

"So what's a convocation?" I was hoping it didn't involve violence.

"A convocation is a gathering of a majority of the pack. Chase, as the next in line for leader, will preside. Any member can bring up issues they have with my father. Everything is open for discussion. You and I may even be called to answer questions. When everything has been talked out, Chase will call for a decision. It will be the pack that decides whether my father will continue on as leader, whether I'll remain in exile and basically if Chase or I will take the pack over if my father is given the boot."

"What happens to your father if they want him out?"

"Nothing. He'll be told to step down. What he decides to do after that is up to him."

"When is this going to happen?"

"Day after tomorrow."

Chase popped in briefly later that evening.

"You're back!" Chase gave me a hug. "Where'd you run off to the other night?" He even looked a bit insulted that I'd gone off somewhere when they'd all come over for dinner.

I rolled my eyes, leaving it up to Dade to explain. Then left to get him a beer.

When I got back Chase looked at me sternly. "Don't do that again."

I looked at Dade.

"Evidently they're more comfortable scenting you, even if it does cause a few problems," Dade explained.

Okay by me.

* * * * *

The following evening I was curled up against Dade on the couch in the TV room. We were watching *An American Werewolf in London*. Dade found the movie hilarious.

"There you are."

I jumped when Albert walked into the room. He sat in a chair next to Dade and watched the movie for a few minutes.

"Can I get you something to drink?" I asked him, wagging my beer bottle for emphasis.

"I'll have one of those."

I got three beers out of the mini fridge. Then curled back up against Dade. Dade stopped the movie.

"I heard about your exile, Dade."

Dade shrugged.

"And about the convocation tomorrow. I wanted to suggest to Kris, since she's new to our society, she should be sure to have protection spells set if she's called to the convocation. It would probably be a good idea to protect you as well." This last he said to Dade.

"You think there's going to be trouble?" I cast a worried look at Albert.

"I think it's good to be prepared for it and not just from Kurst. Some of the other pack members agree with his prejudices."

"Kurst?" I asked Dade.

"Dad's given name."

Albert finished his beer. "Dade, you might want to tell Kris about your pack. How you wolves interact with each other so she's not—surprised unduly."

Albert stood, so I got to my feet too. He reached out, grabbed my hand and pulled me into his arms.

"I must be running along." I felt the rumble of his voice against my chest.

He kissed me. Dade growled a warning at him.

Albert winked at Dade. "Unholy bitch, indeed." His laughter echoed behind him after he'd gone.

Dade yanked me to his side and turned the movie back on.

After we'd made love that night, Dade lay on his side, stroking my belly. I felt warm and liquid and complete.

"Ready for a little Werewolf 101?" he asked me, stilling his hand.

I snuggled closer. "Sure."

So Dade proceeded to give me the short course on his kind.

"My natural form is a timber wolf. I was born a pup, singly. It varies, but usually weres have single births, or small litters." He began stroking my belly again.

"How come I've never seen you as a wolf?"

"You will," he assured me.

"The top of were society are called Packs. Packs consist of 'clans' of related families. It's a patriarchal society and the leadership is passed down from the father of the lead family to his firstborn son. Our pack consists of seventeen families."

He checked to make sure I was still paying attention.

"It's difficult for us to assume human form for extended periods until we reach maturity. You must remember we're wolves and our nature is that of wolves. The more time we spend as humans, the easier it is for us to maintain that identity and to act according to human standards. But the wolf is always just below the surface."

He flashed his sexy half smile at me and growled while he cupped my crotch and squeezed.

"I come from a long line of pack leaders. We've bred true for generations. You've seen my brothers, we're big, we're strong and we're aggressive. All traits required in a good leader."

I'd only seen hints of the aggression before.

"I guess what you'll need to prepare yourself most for is the overt sexuality of my species and the aggression. We're wolves. Any unmated female is fair game to us. And we like to play."

He tickled me between my legs.

"You're mine. Forget extenuating circumstances, I have no intention of sharing you with anyone. Do not be surprised, or scared, if I get physical with any male who tries to touch you. It's our way."

I remembered his comment about his right to kill his father and shivered.

"What about the fight with your dad?"

"Any male has a right to challenge the pack leader. The challenge is always a show of strength. We will not abide a weak leader. It's pretty much a given that Dad will be forced out. When I beat him, I destroyed his credibility. I should have killed him. It would be his desire to end his leadership in honor.

"I didn't feel he deserved that honor. So I disgraced him by allowing him to live."

Yikes. I thought Dade had let him live because he had a good heart.

Dade saw my expression. "I'm a wolf, love, always."

"Quick question," I tried to edge away from Dade a little, but he held me tight. "You'll let me know if there's anything I might do around weres that could get me killed?"

Dade just laughed at me. Then his eyes darkened and flashed to green. His lips claimed mine and his tongue possessed the depths of my mouth.

I never did find out that night if there was anything I might accidentally do to get myself killed.

* * * * *

Convocation day. Dade and I had been summoned to appear before the convocation at two o'clock that afternoon. It was a beautiful, crisp autumn day, the leaves a riot of colors.

Once again, I stood before my closet and pondered my wardrobe. I'd spent that morning weaving protection spells for myself and Dade. At least I'd saved myself a couple of hours to get dressed. I finally settled on a pair of black wool blend slacks and a lightweight sweater in shades of blue and black. I still had an hour to get ready.

Dade strode into the bedroom and eyed my selection. Then he tackled me onto the bed.

"I've got to get dressed, Dade." I slapped at his arms to let me go.

He ignored me, undid his pants and shoved them down to his knees. He pushed my underpants down my legs and off the end of the bed. Then he covered my body with his and rammed his way inside.

My muscles clenched at the abrupt intrusion.

Dade kissed me, hard and with such hunger I became instantly hot and wet. I wrapped my legs around his waist as he started thrusting. The intensity of his desire drove me wild and I slammed my hips against him at a frenzied pace.

I was so accustomed to my magic flowing through us, I no longer noticed it. I just knew I was building toward the ultimate detonation. The muscles in my vagina clenched tighter around Dade's penis, his every stroke an exquisite torture of nerve endings and sensations.

Dade bit me and my orgasm burst over me, without thought I bit him back, exploding with him as he climaxed.

"Mine!" he cried as he came.

"I am yours," I responded, beyond thought.

When I came back to my senses I lay stunned as the enormity of what had just transpired finally reached my brain.

Dade hauled me off the bed, found my underpants and handed them to me.

"Hurry up, we're going to be late."

I magicked my clothes on. Did my hair and makeup the same way. Didn't have time to wash up.

Dade must have read my mind because he said to me, "Do not clean my cum off you."

Well, okay then. I was ready to go.

He grabbed me around the waist for transport.

I found myself in the doorway to a large hall. Dade kept me gripped to his side. Several long tables formed U-shapes around the center of the hall. At the open end of the U, a table sat elevated a few feet above the others. The rest of Dade's family, including his father, sat at the raised table. There were empty seats on the end farthest from Kurst that I assumed were for Dade and me.

Nearly two hundred men and women occupied the other tables or wandered about the hall, drinking and chatting, waiting for the proceedings to begin.

Cardive and his men sat at a table at the base of the U. I shouldn't have been surprised to see them, but I was.

I was so nervous, I didn't even notice the attention I attracted as Dade guided me to our seats.

Dade held a chair out for me, next to his brother Mick. I sat while Dade glared at his brother then took the seat on my other side, at the end of the table.

Mick shifted in his seat and pressed his thigh against mine. I scooted closer to Dade.

Mick set a mug of beer in front of me and handed one over me to his brother, accidentally brushing my breasts with the back of his arm. It was then I began to notice how many people were staring at me, how many conversations my presence seemed to have sparked. I also noticed several men openly ogling me. I pressed myself to Dade's side and felt his arm circle behind me. His muscles tense, his expression hard.

Chase must have made some gesture because everyone took a seat and quiet settled over the hall.

"I am Chase McClur of the Clan O'Connell, Erin Gregor pack, recognized son of pack leader Kurst McClur. I call this convocation to order.

"We are here today to address the competency of our current pack leader and his recent actions. Who would like to begin?"

Chase scanned the room, including the family table. I was thankful I couldn't see Dade's father.

Chase pointed to an older man sitting at a table to our right.

"Bergen O'Dell, what have you to say?"

Bergen cleared his throat, glanced at his family members then nodded to himself. "Kurst, I agreed with you, for the most part, about keeping our bloodlines pure. But I won't stand by you for what you've done to Dade. Dade's one of the finest members of

this pack and if we have to accept this unholy bitch he seems to be so fond of in order to keep him, then I say we accept her."

Mick snorted next to me.

Several voices rose in response and a couple of fights broke out. It seemed to me the meeting was out of control.

Chase kept his eye on everyone but did nothing to bring the room under control.

Dade placed one hand on the back of my neck, leaned into me and placed his other hand on my stomach. His lips brushed my ear. "This is going better than I thought, we probably won't even be called on."

I took another look around the room. It looked like chaos to me. Dade's father and his brother Leigh launched themselves into the general mayhem.

The rest of the McClurs chatted among themselves and drank their beers.

Mac left the table and returned a short while later loaded down with snacks, which he passed to the rest of us.

Dade leaned back in his chair and idly traced patterns on my back.

It was almost like being at the theater. I munched bits of meat and cheese while I watched the roiling mass of people before me slugging it out and yelling at each other. Chairs went flying, food and drink went flying, a table collapsed.

After about forty-five minutes the noise started to die down. Tables were set back in order, chairs righted. Leigh returned to our table. Kurst did not. There were bodies scattered about the floor and I fervently hoped they weren't dead.

When the room was once again quiet Chase leaned forward.

"Has there been a decision?"

All eyes turned to Bergen.

"The pack accepts pack leader Kurst McClur's resignation." He scanned the gathering. No one moved to comment.

"The pack further refuses to recognize the exile of pack member Dade McClur." Again no one disagreed.

"As such, the pack asks Dade McClur to assume leadership of the pack immediately." There were a few low growls aimed at me, but no one spoke openly against this decision.

All eyes turned to Dade. Dade leaned forward and eyed each and every person in the room.

"As leader of the Erin Gregor pack, Clan O'Connell, I Dade McClur call this convocation completed."

Whistles and howls broke out among the people. The bodies on the floor were removed, music was put on and more food and beverages were brought out. The convocation turned into a party. People started mingling and dancing. Everyone

wanted a word with Dade and a look at me. I had to excuse myself, finally, to search for a bathroom.

A couple of women waited for me outside of my stall. I'd never met them before. They were taller than me, of course, and had a lot more muscle.

One shoved me back against the wall and yelped when she was shocked by one of my protection spells. After that they just moved in close, looming over me.

"You need to stay away from Dade, magic user. He belongs with one of his own kind."

I looked up at them, towering over me.

"No."

I used a small burst of power to shove them out of my way, washed my hands and left.

I was a few steps down the hall when I felt movement behind me. I kept walking toward the hall, unconcerned, mentally daring the females to try something.

Suddenly, a big hand clamped around my neck and shoved me up against the wall. I stared into Kurst McClur's demented eyes, knowing my spell was shocking him and seeing he was too far gone to notice. Spots started dancing before my eyes and I couldn't focus enough to cast a spell.

I flailed futilely in his manic grasp, the edges of my awareness growing dim.

Suddenly, the hand was gone and I collapsed into a heap on the floor. I sucked deep gasps of air into my lungs, coughed and saw stars. The blood thundering into my head gave me a headache.

Then strong arms were gathering me up, cradling me like a child.

"Come here, little one," a deep male voice murmured to me.

The thundering in my head lessened and I opened my eyes. I didn't know the man holding me. I looked around the hallway. Dade's father was sprawled on the floor, eyes open, unmoving.

"Uh, thanks," I said to my rescuer and tried to squirm out of his embrace.

"Let me see you to your table." He set my feet on the floor but kept an arm locked around my shoulders.

"I think I can make it now." This guy was far too attractive to be touching me.

"I insist." Then he dragged me down the hallway and into the hall.

Call me an ingrate, but I fought him every step of the way. It didn't have any effect on him.

Dade saw us coming, he broke off his conversation and stalked over, eyes green.

"You've got your hands on my woman, Aaron."

"And your father is dead in the hallway."

Dade blinked then looked at me.

"I didn't kill him!" I tried to scoot behind Aaron, but his grip was too tight.

"He had her pinned to the wall by her throat when I came along," he informed Dade.

Dade's eyes dropped to my neck and when he clenched his jaw I figured there were marks there.

"He was out of his mind, Dade," Aaron continued. I tried to pull away again, but his grip tightened even further.

Dade moved in close to Aaron. Dade, the taller and bulkier of the two. His expression fierce, he leaned even closer.

"Not this time, Aaron." He grasped the hand Aaron had on my shoulder. "She's to be my mate. No man touches her but me."

Aaron glanced at me, scanned my lips, my breasts. He bent his head until I felt his lips brush my neck, then he inhaled. "If it was anyone else but you, Dade." His voice was rough with arousal. Then he released my shoulder, gave my butt a squeeze and took a step away from me.

Dade hauled off and punched him in the stomach. He grunted at the impact.

Dade grabbed me around the waist and led me back to the family table. His body vibrating against mine with tension barely held in check.

"Guys," Dade yelled down the length of the table, "Dad attacked Kris in the hallway by the bathrooms. His body is still there." Everyone looked at me, some not kindly.

"She didn't kill him." He glared down at me, like maybe I really had. "Aaron Connery did." All the men at the table got up and started for the back of the room. Dade paused a moment beside me.

"Are you okay?" He brushed a stray clump of hair off my face.

"I will be," I assured him.

"Think you can stay out of trouble while we see to Dad?" Dade was actually serious.

"You going to be long?" I asked him, eyeing the women at the other end of the table.

"No." Dade brushed his lips across mine. "Dance with me when I get back."

I nodded and he went to join his brothers.

Several people stared at me while I waited for Dade to return, but no one came near me. One guy was fixated on my breasts and kept licking his lips. Aaron raised his mug in a toast to me, smiling wickedly.

Dade finally returned, extended his hand and pulled me out of my chair. He led me to the area in the center of the U and took me into his arms. The music was soft and slow. Dade moved with an animal grace that took my breath away. He pressed me close and fairly made love to me in the middle of the hall.

"I can still smell me on you," he whispered into my hair. "I like it."

I felt him hardening against my stomach. He tipped my head back at the end of the song and gave me a slow kiss, his tongue languidly stroking inside my mouth, his arms slowly crushing me to him, before he returned us to the table.

The rest of the evening was pretty boring for me, for which I was grateful. People mostly wanted to talk to their new pack leader or get a closer look at me. Several sniffed in my direction, which made me uncomfortable.

No one else confronted me on my way to or from the bathroom, but I did notice that one of Dade's brothers always seemed to have to go at the same time I did.

Finally the evening came to an end and Dade and I went home.

* * * * *

The house was a bustle of activity for the next few weeks. All having to do with Dade's new responsibilities as pack leader.

I busied myself with my jewelry. I found I could create the loveliest beads with magic, as well as work silver and gold that way. I created an entire new line that even astonished myself.

I was dressing one morning after a very satisfying night when I realized that Dade had moved in with me. I know that sounds stupid, but bit by bit over the previous month he'd hung clothes in the closet and appropriated drawers in the dresser. I'd never really thought about it before now. And now, when I did, it seemed right.

My mother called to remind me about Thanksgiving dinner. I reminded her Dade would be with me. She reminded me to use contraception.

There was also a pack feast coming up the weekend after Thanksgiving.

Chapter Nine

I was searching the internet for a spicy meatball recipe. We were to contribute a dish for the pack feast and I figured I had time to run a couple of test recipes past Dade. Spicy meatballs sounded good to me. Meat always goes over well with wolves.

Dade looked over my shoulder to see what I was up to.

"Can you take a break?" Dade asked me.

"Sure." I turned and gave him my attention.

"It's time we were mated," Dade declared.

I blinked at him. He waited, confused by my reaction.

"What?" His patience wearing thin.

"Well, we never really talked about it, you know?"

"What's to talk about?" He really was confused.

I thought about how to answer him. I couldn't really say that the idea of committing myself to him forever scared me. Then I thought about not having Dade around and that idea scared me more. I took so long to answer, Dade started to look worried.

"I'm not ready to have children," I blurted out.

He smiled, pulled me out of my chair and into his arms. "Honey, as much as the idea appeals to me of your carrying my child, if you're not ready for children yet you can use your magic to keep from getting pregnant."

Then he threw me over his shoulder and carried me off to the bedroom. He set me down on my feet and undressed me, then shed his own clothes. I scrambled onto the bed and kept creeping backward toward the headboard.

He grabbed my ankles, pulled me backward, flipped me onto my back and pinned me down in his favorite position.

"I love you, Kris Anderson, and today I intend to make you mine forever." His lips were soft and warm, his tongue danced lightly with mine.

"I love you, Dade McClur."

He kissed me again and ran his hands over my breasts. He sucked and nipped his way down my throat, pausing to appreciate my nipples. Then he licked a path down to the juncture of my thighs. He pushed my thighs farther apart with his hands, spread my lips open, flicked his tongue across my clit, then licked his way down between my folds to my vagina. He licked and sucked his way back up to my clit and inserted a finger into me. He gently stroked me a few times, added a second finger and drove

them deep. Then he sucked my clit into his mouth, flicked it hard and fast with his tongue then suckled on it while he stroked inside me.

My climax rolled over me in undulating waves, my muscles convulsing around his fingers.

He kissed his way back up my body, wrapped my legs around his waist and thrust his penis into me.

"Dade." My muscles hugged his cock and I started the loop.

"Repeat after me," Dade told me and then stilled himself when he realized I was lost in the feel of his thrusts. "You with me, love?"

"Always." I focused on him.

"Repeat after me. I give my heart, my body and my soul to you. I am yours and only yours, forever."

I repeated the words to Dade.

"I accept your gift and claim you as my mate, forever."

He started moving inside of me again and I met him stroke for stroke.

"You are mine," he said just before he bit me.

"I am yours," I bit him back and the world exploded around me. I was consumed by a record-breaking orgasm.

I felt my life force shift and link itself with Dade's. The joining sending us both into another climax.

He was still shaking from the experience when I finally regained my senses.

"Wow." My understatement of the year.

"No kidding," he gasped back.

I tried to get out of bed to go clean up in the bathroom, but Dade wouldn't let me.

"I want to bond with you." He nuzzled my neck.

"Okay, just let me pee first."

He let me go then and patted my butt as I climbed off the bed.

I used my time on the potty to cast a spell against pregnancy. I'd refine it later. After a quick wash I crawled back into bed with Dade.

He started kissing me all over as soon as I lay down. His fingers on my breasts creating their own magic. He slid between my legs, I raised my knees on either side of his hips, he aimed himself and drove straight in to the hilt.

We both groaned.

He stroked me a few times then stopped, embedded as deeply as he could get. He ground his hips once, then again.

"I'm going to have to ask you if you really want to bond with me and that you understand all the implications of bonding?"

"It's a closer connection between the two of us and if one of us dies, the other dies. Does that cover it?"

"Pretty much. You still want to bond with me? I guarantee I want to bond with you."

"Yes." Maybe I should have said something more profound, but Dade was stroking his cock absently inside me and it caused a bit of a distraction.

"Then repeat after me—I give my life to you, for without you I am not complete."

I said my vow to him. He started pumping, giving a little grind at the end of each thrust.

"I accept your life to complete my own."

He drove us to the brink with his hips, then we bit each other at the same time and another world-class orgasm ripped through me. I felt a wrench in my soul and then utter bliss when it melded with Dade's.

I woke a couple of hours later when Dade pulled out of me and rolled onto his back. Missing his warmth, I rolled over and draped myself across his chest.

"So how do you feel, Mrs. McClur?"

"Happy," I purred against his chest.

"Oh shit, Dade!" I jumped to my knees.

"What's the matter?" He looked alarmed.

"I didn't even tell my parents we were getting married."

"We're not married," Dade said, "we're mated."

Like my parents would understand that?

"So am I Mrs. McClur or what?" My voice rose higher on each word.

"To the supes you're Kris McClur now, Dade McClur's mate."

"Since my parents are mortals, you're going to have to marry me, rings and all," I insisted.

Dade grimaced. "Can we elope?"

"I was thinking justice of the peace myself. We'll just pick up some rings, fill out the paperwork and exchange our vows. The sooner the better though."

"Okay, let's try to take care of it tomorrow."

"Thank you, love." I kissed his cheek.

"I can think of a better way for you to thank your new and future husband." He waggled his eyebrows at me.

I was happy to oblige.

* * * * *

Dade and I picked out matching platinum bands with a Celtic scroll design. The paperwork was easier to fill out than I'd expected, especially since I didn't know if Dade had identification. But before I knew it, I was Mrs. Dade McClur.

We ate lunch downtown, then picked up some supplies for home.

I was back on the internet, searching recipes, when Cardive and Max popped into the living room. Cardive headed off for Dade's office. Max just stood there looking at me.

"I guess congratulations are in order." He looked and sounded disappointed.

I walked over to him. "Thank you."

"I'd like to say I'm happy for you, but I've missed you, often. Before now, I had hope of being with you again."

"I'm sorry." I couldn't think of anything else to say. Especially since I could easily see myself spending my life with Max under different circumstances.

"May I kiss the bride?" Before I had a chance to answer, he'd pulled me into his arms and planted his mouth on mine.

"That's my wife you're kissing, Max."

Max stepped away from me. "I know." He sounded dejected.

The surprising thing to me was that I felt so much less during the kiss. Before, he would have floored me.

Dade asked Max to wait for him in his office then approached me.

"I didn't feel a thing," I told Dade, the wonder apparent in my voice. Well, it was true enough.

"I knew that's what happened to weres when they mated, I wasn't sure about you though."

"You know I'd never be with another man, attracted to them or not."

Dade kissed me possessively.

"I know, love."

He started back toward his office, turned back to me, "Did I ever mention how jealous werewolves were?"

I shook my head.

"Possessive too." He was grinning slyly at me.

I wandered closer to him and he trapped me against the wall, sliding his thigh between my legs.

"I wish you'd had my cum dripping out of you while that darkover was kissing you." He pressed his thigh against my crotch. His kiss hot enough to curl my toes.

With a satisfied expression on his face, he strolled into his office.

* * * * *

I was sprawled across Dade, waiting for my heartbeat to return to normal when the phone rang.

I eyed the clock. It was only eight a.m.

Dade grabbed the receiver on the second ring and answered.

"Good morning, Millie." I groaned and rolled off Dade.

"Dinner's at four, yes, I'll remind her." He was silent for a minute while Mom said something to him.

"I don't plan on getting her pregnant in the near future, but I'll talk her into it one of these days." Another pause. "We'll see you at four." He hung up.

"Thanks for telling my mom you'd like to get me pregnant."

Dade's grin was pure sin. "I do, but I was just having a little fun with her."

Now my big decision of the day, do I go back to sleep, or do I get up and do something constructive? Sleep won hands down.

I got up a couple of hours later, showered, dressed in dark blue jeans and a gray cashmere sweater.

I refined my anti-pregnancy spell, then I went up to my studio to work on my new line of jewelry.

I noticed Dade's office door was closed when I passed, the rumble of male voices within.

I knocked off working at three and went in search of Dade. He'd gone out and hadn't left a note anywhere for me.

I occupied myself with a list of ingredients I'd need to get the next day for the trial meatballs. By quarter to four I was pacing in the living room, cursing Dade. At four o'clock I was cursing all men as I stomped over to the phone to tell Mom we were running late.

I had no idea where Dade had gone or how to get hold of him. I tried screaming for him mentally.

At four-thirty he finally materialized.

"Where the hell have you been? We're late for dinner at my parents' house!"

"Pack business," he replied nonchalantly, grabbed one of the arms I was waving around and zapped us to the alley behind the strip mall across the street from my parents.

The distraction calmed me down some. "You should have left a note. I had no idea where you were and no way to get in touch with you."

We were at my parents' front door by that time so the discussion would have to wait until later.

Matt opened the door, a napkin tucked into the neck of his shirt.

"You're late," he informed us.

I made Dade stop and wash his hands before we went to the table.

The seating arrangement was the same as before except they'd added a leaf and Uncle Ralph and Aunt Eugenia flanked my father. I took my place next to the spawn of Satan, Dade sat next to my mom.

They hadn't waited for us.

"Sorry we're late," Dade said, "but Kris looked so tasty when she got out of the shower I just had to make love to her again." He didn't bat an eye when he said this. Just helped himself to the turkey.

Matt snorted mashed potatoes out his nose.

Everyone else gaped at Dade. Myself included. I thought Aunt Eugenia might faint. Uncle Ralph snapped his mouth shut and stated, "We haven't been introduced, young man, but I like you."

Dade pressed his thigh against mine and shot me his sexy half grin.

I loaded my plate up and dug in, hoping to avoid answering any questions. Dad was looking way too closely at the carving knife. Bruce was strangely quiet beside me.

"What's wrong with Bruce?"

"He got into Dad's highball," Sara told me.

Something to remember.

I introduced Dade to my aunt and uncle.

"Aunt Eugenia, Uncle Ralph, I'd like you to meet my husband Dade."

"Pleased to meet you," they replied in unison.

"So what is it you do, Dade?" Uncle Ralph asked him.

"To your niece?" Dade asked.

Ralph chuckled. "For a living."

"I run the family business." Which was pretty much the truth, but I wondered what he'd say if Ralph pressed for details.

He did. "Yeah? What kind of business?"

"We manufacture and distribute marital aids."

Well, Dade certainly fit into my family.

"You don't say," Ralph said and I thought he was going to let the matter drop. "Could I get a family discount?" This time we all stared at Ralph.

Bruce slid off his chair under the table, curled into a ball and fell asleep. Everyone ignored him.

My mother finally caught up with the conversation.

"Did you say husband?"

Dade set down his fork, put his arm around my shoulder and pulled me close.

He turned to my mother. "So do I call you Mom, or what?"

I burst out laughing.

"How could you get married, Kris, without telling us?" Mom was clearly upset.

"Sorry, Mom, but that's the way I wanted to do it."

Mom's eyes lit up and I thought she might cry. Instead she blurted, "So that's why you wanted to get her pregnant!"

I rolled my eyes and caught a glimpse of Dad tapping the carving knife against the table. I didn't know which one of us he was planning on stabbing, but I decided I needed to disarm him.

Just then Meg slid off her chair under the table. I raised an eyebrow at her parents.

"She saw Bruce drinking the highball and decided to try it for herself." Sara calmly finished her meal.

How interesting.

I wrestled the knife away from Dad when we were clearing the dishes for dessert.

"So you married my daughter," Dad said to Dade as I passed out the Irish coffee.

"Yes, I did," Dade replied.

"You ever hurt my little girl, I'll take care of you myself."

Holy shit. My father loved me.

"I'll keep that in mind, sir."

"Just see that you do." Dad concentrated on his coffee, he'd said his piece.

"So do I call you Dad umph." I kicked Dade before he got any further.

Dad looked as if he wasn't going to answer.

"Bob will do," he finally told Dade.

Sara and I were carrying in slices of pie when I heard Uncle Ralph say, "I'd like me one of them blow-up women. Can you get me one of those?"

Sara calmly set the plates she was carrying on the table and turned back to the kitchen.

I raised my eyebrows at her and she mumbled, "Prozac," as she passed me.

Dinner just wasn't the same with Matt's wife zonked out on Prozac and his kids out cold under the table. Though Dade was making a valiant effort.

"What color?" he asked my uncle.

"You got any black ones?"

My father got up from the table, poured himself two fingers of Scotch and threw it back.

"I'll see what I can do," Dade was saying when my mother and the others brought the rest of the desserts in and took their places at the table.

"I just can't believe the two of you got married!" my mother started. "Where are you going to live? Did you go on a honeymoon? We haven't even met Dade's family. If I'd have known I would have invited them for dinner today, what must they think of us? Do they know?" She finally paused for a breath.

I thought of Dade's father briefly – I was not going there.

"We're living in my house, our house now. No honeymoon. Dade's parents are deceased. He's got some brothers I've met. They know. I've gotten mixed reviews from them. And Mom, he's got seven brothers, three of them are married, you don't have room here to have them all over for dinner."

"You got any of them edible panties?" Ralph interjected.

Leave it to Ralph.

"You old pervert, why don't you stuff a sock in it!" Everyone gaped at Mom. She even got Dad's attention. In all the years they'd been married my mother had never spouted off. She was off and running now though. She slapped her napkin down on the table, stomped over to the sideboard and filled a rocks glass with Scotch. She drank half of it in one gulp.

"It's no wonder my only daughter runs off and gets married without telling anyone in this family about it. I'm surprised she even let us meet Dade for fear of us scaring him off!"

She finished the Scotch. Patted her hair to make sure it was still in place. Then calmly sat back down at the table.

Matt belched loudly.

It broke the spell we'd all been trapped in at Mom's outburst. We got back to finishing our desserts. The rest of the meal passed uneventfully.

When we were getting ready to leave, Mom asked me to come with her to her bedroom. I followed, a little afraid of what she was going to do.

She went to her dresser and dug in the back of her underwear drawer.

This did not relax me.

When she turned back to me she held a box in her hands. She opened the box and I saw a beautiful pearl necklace.

"This necklace was my great-grandmother's. She passed it on to her oldest daughter on her wedding day. Who then passed it on to her daughter. I received this from my mother on my wedding day and planned to give it to you on yours."

I looked from the necklace into mother's tear-filled eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mom."

"Nonsense. You never were the type to go for all the trappings of a traditional marriage anyway. So long as you love each other and take care of each other, that's all that really matters."

She didn't know how nontraditional my marriage really was.

I gave her a big hug, getting weepy myself.

"We're terribly in love with each other, Mom."

She patted my back. "That's all I needed to know."

Then she gave me a kiss on the cheek and pressed the box into my hands.

"Thanks." For everything.

We found the rest of the family in the living room, except for Meg and Bruce who'd been left under the table.

I said my goodbyes, dragging Dade away from my Uncle Ralph who was requesting something from him I'd never heard of and was quite sure I didn't want to know about.

Mom gave Dade a kiss on the cheek. "Welcome to the family."

He smiled at her and she actually laughed.

* * * * *

Three of Dade's brothers were waiting for us when we returned home.

"Just a minute," I told them and hauled Dade off to the bedroom. "Before you get tied up in family business, or pack business, I want to get something straight between us."

Dade raised his eyebrow and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"You leave here, you have the courtesy to let me know. It would also be nice to have a way to get in touch with you."

A muscle twitched in his jaw. "Is that all?"

"No, it's not. But the rest can wait until after you find out why your brothers are here."

He nodded once at me and left. What the hell was that supposed to mean?

I went to the kitchen, grabbed the recipes I was going to try out the next day and headed for the utility room. I checked the grocery list I'd made to make sure I hadn't forgotten anything. I checked the pantry. Then I checked the fridge and cupboards too and the freezer we'd just added in the garage.

With that taken care of I went back into the kitchen. Dade and his brothers were drinking beer at the kitchen table, I grabbed myself a bottle and made to join them.

They all stared at me. Obviously they didn't want me to join them.

I sat my beer on the table and glared at each one of them in turn.

"This is pack business, Kris," Chase informed me.

"So?" I crossed my arms and waited for an answer.

They broke eye contact first, cleared their throats, shifted around in their seats then looked at Dade. I shifted my attention to him.

"Pack business doesn't concern you, Kris," Dade said.

I clenched my fists and willed my face to remain impassive.

"Oh really?" I managed to grit out between clenched teeth.

Dade just stared at me, impatience rolling off him in waves.

I waited, but it became evident he had no intention of saying anything else.

"I must have misunderstood. Here I thought I was the pack leader's mate."
I didn't even give him a chance to respond, I just blinked out of the house.

I showed up in the first place that had come to mind. Nina's living room.

She was reading a book by the fire when I popped in.

"Hello, dear," she welcomed me and gave my aura a good going-over. "Have a seat." She levered herself out of her easy chair and disappeared into the kitchen. She returned moments later with a glass of wine for each of us. She sat down on the couch next to me.

"So you mated with Dade, I kind of thought you might."

"He's an asshole," I grumbled.

"So tell me what he's done."

I unloaded on her, ending with my grand departure.

"The nerve of him to tell me pack business was none of my concern. It's like marrying me then telling me I'm not welcome around his family!" Okay, so that was kind of up for debate.

Nina patted my knee and murmured, "There, there now," to me while I ranted. She waited until I wound down before responding.

"I have to agree with you. I can't imagine what Dade is thinking keeping you separate from pack business. I can tell you what the pack is currently up to, but I don't think it's going to answer that question."

"So what is the pack up to?"

"The majority of hunters in this area are members of Dade's pack. Seems there has been a rash of indiscriminate activities in the mortal quarter that points to at least one rogue vampire. There've been vampire sightings, blood has been taken from unwilling mortals and their memory of it left intact. There's even been a couple of mortals found drained dry. We absolutely do not allow this kind of behavior in our society.

"The hunters are searching for those responsible. Most likely a vampire gone rogue, but could be a magic user making it look like vamp activity."

"Doesn't make any sense. Why would it matter if Dade told me about this or not?"

"That, my dear, is a very good question."

Nina and I spent a quiet night after that. I'd found a book in her library and the two of us read by the fire. I must have dozed off because Nina roused me, "You should probably go home."

I thanked her, gave her a hug and zapped myself home.

Dade was in his office when I got home. In no mood to confront him, I went straight to bed.

I woke the next morning when Dade took my nipple in his mouth and sucked on it. I might have been mad at him, but my body craved his attention.

I ran my fingers through his hair and pressed his head closer to my breast. He sucked harder and I sighed. He shifted his attention to my other nipple, rolling it between his lips and tongue, nipping lightly. Desire flared between my legs and I pushed my hips upward in invitation.

He knelt between my thighs, lifted my hips and entered me. I moaned as he leaned over me, placed an elbow on either side of my shoulders and pressed deep. I wrapped my legs around him, encouraging the speed of his stroke with my own. I grabbed the back of his head and pulled his face down to mine so I could taste his mouth.

The energy sang through us. Whatever else happened in our lives, our joining was absolute perfection.

We climaxed together.

Dade showered with me. He spent more time kissing and touching me than washing me. Then he bent me over the sink and took me from behind, watching our reflection in the mirrored tiles on the wall around the bathtub.

"God, you turn me on," was his only comment.

He made us breakfast and served it at the table instead of the counter.

"I thought about what you said after you left last night."

He'd surprised me. I figured he'd start by asking me where I'd gone.

"I didn't handle the situation properly." Boy, that must have been hard to admit.

"You never asked me questions about pack business. Yeah, I sensed you wanted to know and I figured you were just giving me time to get settled into the position. It was an easy out for me. The pack is still wary of you because you're the first non-were to ever mate a pack member and not just any pack member, but their leader.

"So I figured the more I kept you out of pack business, the happier everyone would be."

I kept my mouth shut. With effort.

"But you're right. You're the pack leader's mate. My mate. I want you to be involved in every aspect of my life and I'll take on any member that disagrees."

I kissed him.

"I'm going grocery shopping, you need me to pick up anything while I'm out?" I went in search of my purse.

"No, but I'd like you to spell us a couple of communication devices." He came up behind me and wrapped me in his arms. "I didn't like not knowing where you were last night."

Dade helped me unload the groceries and put everything away. I got to work on the meatballs.

Dade left to get updates from the hunters.

After I got the meatballs in the oven I went up to my studio to work on the communicators. I pulled out some sheet silver, then got to wondering if silver really did have a bad affect on werewolves. So what metal was safe? I knew Dade could wear platinum, but that seemed pretty ostentatious for what was, in effect, a magic cell phone. Gold? Yeah, right. White gold maybe. Did it need to look like a phone? What else would you make it look like? How would it work?

I had a brainstorm, but I'd need Dade here to try it out.

I headed back for the kitchen. I was in the hallway above the living room when I happened to glance down.

A wolf stood in the middle of the living room, staring up at me. It didn't feel like Dade, but what did I know? It fit his description, brown timber. Couldn't see the eyes from here.

When I got to the living room, the wolf was gone. I looked in the other rooms on the first floor but didn't find it anywhere.

The oven buzzer went off so I busied myself with the meatballs and put the wolf out of my mind.

What was I thinking of? It took me hours the next morning to roll enough meatballs for the feast that night. I almost broke down and used magic, but I didn't want the wolves finding out and having something else to hold against me. I did use magic to create two big buffet pans with Sterno warmers.

When I went to get ready, Dade was waiting for me, naked on the bed.

"Take your clothes off and join me."

He didn't have to ask me twice.

I climbed on the bed at his feet. Licked my way up the inside of his thigh, then ran my tongue up the ridge on the underside of his penis. His legs twitched and he groaned.

I circled around the head of his cock with my tongue, then sucked it into my mouth. I backed off the head then ran my tongue all over the outside until his cock was wet. Then I returned to the tip and slowly lowered my mouth until he was embedded in my throat, my jaws and lips aching from the girth of him.

"God, yes!" he groaned.

I wiggled my tongue back and forth across the ridge while I slid my mouth up and down his shaft, his hips rising slightly on every down-stroke of my head.

He tangled his fingers in my hair and pressed me down until my lips were buried in the curls at the base of his penis. He held me there for a moment, then pulled me completely off.

"I need to be in you. Now."

He grabbed me and rolled me under him. Spread my legs with his knees and without even aiming, slammed straight into me.

"Yes!" we said at the same time.

I hooked my legs around him.

He gave me that wicked half smile as he drove us closer to the edge.

I immersed myself in the sensation of his flesh sliding deep into mine. The slap of our bodies, the smell of our arousal.

My vagina started clenching. Dade responded with increased speed. The tighter I gripped his penis the more overwhelming the sensations became. In a rush of heat and liquid we climaxed together. The feel of Dade's cock throbbing spurts of cum inside me, the sexiest thing I'd ever felt.

We took a quick shower. Then once again I faced the dreaded decision—what to wear.

Dade pulled on a pair of black leather pants and a black cashmere sweater. I ogled him, amazed that this incredibly sexy man was all mine.

Catching me ogling him, he gave me a slow body scan. The heat in his eyes, when they returned to my face nearly caused me to come.

"Bend over, put your hands on the bed," Dade ordered, his hand going to the waist of his pants.

"Spread your legs."

I was so turned on, I could feel myself dripping.

He rubbed the head of his cock up and down my slit then stuffed it just an inch inside.

He grabbed my hips and paused until I started wiggling my ass in an effort to get him moving.

He rammed himself into me then started pounding hard and fast.

I tried to thrust back at him but his hands held me tight.

Dade started growling, the sound sending shivers up my spine. My muscles clenched at the thrill and I blasted over the edge. The hard contractions of my orgasm dragging Dade over with me.

Dade rested a moment, buried within me. Then he put himself back together and turned to the closet to pick out an outfit for me while I dug through my underwear drawer.

He selected a short black leather skirt and a fuzzy white sweater cut low in the front and high on the hip. I slipped on white lace underthings and tan thigh-high hose. I completed the outfit with ankle high black leather buckle boots with three-inch heels, plus magic hair and makeup.

I was loading the meatballs into the buffet pans when Dade came up behind me, placed his arms around my stomach and nuzzled my neck.

"I love the smell of my cum on you."

Actually, so did I.

* * * * *

We flashed into the doorway of the hall. A man I didn't know immediately relieved me of my pan. Dade and I followed him to the food table.

"Do you have any matches?" I hadn't thought to bring any myself. Dade shook his head so, trying to look inconspicuous, I passed my hand over each pan, magically lighting the Sterno.

I looked around the room, noticing the tables were set in the U shape again, but farther apart so there was more open floor space in the center for dancing. The McClur table was on the same level tonight as the others.

The lighting was dimmer and each table had arrangements of flowers on them.

Music was playing, the beverages flowed, people were eating, or chatting, or dancing. All in all a much more relaxed atmosphere than the last time I was here.

I followed Dade to the family table. They surprised me with their welcome. Even the women were polite, if not friendly. I raised my eyebrow at Dade and he just smiled in response. I wondered if he'd had to beat the crap out of any of them.

Dade and I sat at the far end where we'd sat before. Several people came by to say their hellos to Dade, and many of them introduced themselves to me. I had become so used to people sniffing me, I barely noticed.

Dade excused himself to get us some food and a refill on our drinks. Mick spent the time Dade was away staring down the neckline of my sweater.

I didn't mean to look, but I noticed the bulge in the crotch of Mick's pants.

Dade set a plate heaped with various dishes in front of me then went back for his own. I hoped he was planning on eating some of this stuff, especially the strips of raw beef.

Dade glanced at his brother when he returned but didn't say anything to him.

I poked through the selections on my plate. Everything was either meat, cheese or potatoes.

"Don't you guys eat vegetables?"

"We eat potatoes."

Okay, that was a vegetable.

"And occasionally baked beans."

I gave up and concentrated on eating.

I still felt uncomfortable going to the bathroom here, but nothing happened to me when I did. It was a testament to Dade's power and the respect his pack members had for him, though I didn't know it.

Dade whirled me out to the dance floor several times. A number of men tried to cut in, but Dade never let them.

I had a wonderful time, never noticing the hostile glances directed at my back.

We were one of the last couples to leave. My buffet pans were empty. I doused the flames and cooled them.

Chapter Ten

I was stuffed, happy and a little tipsy when we zapped into our living room.

A blur of movement came from the hallway, too fast for me to react in my current state. I was slammed onto the floor before my brain processed that a wolf was attacking me.

I started throwing defensive spells up as another wolf loomed over me. I strengthened my spells as I got to my feet. I looked around wildly for Dade, but all I saw were wolves. I trusted my powers to know which one he was and sent a defensive spell out to protect him.

Then the wolves broke into a circle around me, circling, snarling. I knew which one Dade was then. He stood in front of me. A huge, dark brown wolf, hackles raised.

Okay, love, Dade spoke in my mind, cast a spell on this lot forcing them to human form. Be sure to contain them so I can question them.

I cast the containing spell first, locking them in place, then I forced them one by one to human form.

Dade's brothers arrived. I'd have to ask him later how he'd contacted them.

Dade shifted to his human form then walked around the circle of men, inspecting each one of them. He stood in front of the one he'd identified as their leader.

"What pack are you from and what is your purpose here?"

The man curled his lip at Dade, baring his teeth.

Dade punched him so hard in the stomach it would have knocked him to his knees if not for the containing spell.

"You will answer my questions," Dade growled at him, angrier than I had ever heard him.

The man stared him in the eye and said nothing.

"Mate, bring me one of your knives," Dade said aloud, adding mentally, *Use your magic, make a silver blade with a wooden handle.*

I dashed up to my studio and whipped one up for him even though I hoped he wouldn't use it.

After I brought it to him, I moved out of the circle and stood behind Chase, peeking around his shoulder.

Dade placed the point of the blade against the man's thigh.

"Your answer?" Dade asked in a deadly tone. Christ, I felt moisture pool between my legs. I was terribly aroused by this dangerous side of Dade.

The man still refused to speak. Dade slid the knife into the man's leg. There was no blood whatsoever.

The man screamed. A high, tortured, inhuman sound.

Dade withdrew the blade, blue sparks flashing in the gash left behind.

The man, held in place by the spell, writhed and howled in a bizarre upright dance.

Dade moved in front of another man. He showed the man the knife then asked in a low voice, "What pack are you from and what is your purpose here?"

The man's eyes flicked to his leader. He looked back at Dade and held his tongue.

Dade placed the knife on the man's thigh.

"I'm waiting."

And so it went. Dade's questions going unanswered, him stabbing the guys in the thigh.

After he'd stabbed the ninth and last man, he asked me to cast a silence over them so they couldn't hear what he and his brothers discussed.

I passed bottles of beer around. Mac had gone off somewhere, the brothers drank in silence.

I sat at the counter, feeling a little unsteady.

Mac returned with Cardive and four of Cardive's men.

When I brought the newcomers their beverages I noticed, inappropriately, that all the chairs at the table were in use.

"Your mate could probably make them talk, but that doesn't seem right somehow. Maybe we should just beat them 'til they see fit to answer us," Cardive said.

"I'm as much for a good beating as the next wolf, but something about this doesn't feel right," Dade responded.

"I know, I've never seen nor scented any of those weres in there," Leigh said.

"Neither have I," Sean agreed and the other brothers nodded.

"What about Albert?" I asked Dade.

"He's not a were," Cardive replied.

"He's a hunter," I shot back.

"I'm going to agree with her." This, unexpectedly, from Leigh.

Dade raised his eyebrow at Leigh. Leigh looked him straight in the eye. Dade checked the rest of the group. No one spoke up so he sent Mac to fetch Albert.

I grabbed empties off the table, passed out fresh ones and placed a spare next to me on the counter just as Mac and Albert flashed in.

Albert disappeared into the living room for several minutes. When he returned he raised an eyebrow at me.

"Been learning a few tricks I see." He sat on the stool beside mine. Opened his beer and took a long swallow.

"Cardive, you've been around long enough to remember the McKutchen brothers?" Albert turned toward Cardive.

"Too much inbreeding, right?" Cardive chuckled.

"Must have been about three hundred years ago," Albert explained to the rest of us.

"Family of wolves moved into the area, approached the Erin Gregor pack claiming distant kinship."

Albert paused for a drink.

"Problem was, they'd been living by themselves so long somewhere out east, they'd taken to mating their own females. Don't care what species you are, inbreeding pretty much leads to the same results."

He finished his beer and I got up to get him another.

"Needless to say, the Erin Gregors ran them out of the area. From what I see of those guys in your living room, Dade, I'd say they never did find another pack to breed with."

"So what are they doing here?" Sean asked.

"I have no idea. From what I picked up from them, though, I'd say they might not have answered your questions, Dade, because they can't. I think they've bred quite a bit of their intelligence out of themselves. My guess is someone is using them to get to you."

Cardive and his men wandered into the living room and returned a few minutes later.

"So any suggestions?" Cardive asked Albert.

"I'll take a couple with me, you take the rest and we see if we can get any information from them."

Everyone looked at Dade.

"Good enough by me." Dade ran his fingers through his hair.

"I'm going to have Kris block access to the house, you're going to have to come to the front door from now on," he added.

Albert stood, nodded to me, "Kris," then he, Cardive and Cardive's men wandered into the living room.

Dade looked at his brothers. "Family will still be able to enter through the living room," Dade assured them.

Dade gave me a tired smile and I went ahead and fashioned the spell. I figured my ex-fiancés qualified as family, though I didn't tell Dade that.

We all wandered into the living room then. Everyone was gone.

Dade and his brothers split up and searched the house top to bottom for anything the wolves might have left behind.

I reached out with my power, searching for any foreign magic. I didn't find any, which only partially reassured me. I didn't really have any idea what I was doing after all.

I stripped and crawled into bed. Dade joined me a little while later. I was too tired to talk so I just snuggled close, seeking his protection. He wrapped his big body around mine. No matter how much power I could wield, I would never feel as safe as I did right then in Dade's arms.

* * * * *

I woke all too soon and wondered why. Still groggy, I noticed I was on my back, Dade's hand holding my right breast. Not moving. Morning light was filtering through the trees outside the window.

"Dade, wake up," a male voice said from somewhere on my left. Dade's body jiggled, he snorted, squeezed my breast and started fondling my nipple.

I was lost in Dade's touch, trying to remember why I shouldn't be.

"Come on, Dade, quit playing with your mate, I need to talk to you."

My eyes snapped wide open. I was totally uncovered except for Dade's hand on my chest and his leg over my thigh.

Dade jerked awake, smiled at me then took in my expression.

"Dade." We both glanced at Dade's side of the bed where his brother Mick stood enjoying the scenery.

Dade roared and dove off the bed, tackling his brother. I grabbed the sheet and wrapped it tightly around me.

"Morning," I heard Mick say from somewhere under Dade.

"What the hell are you doing here, besides ogling my mate?"

I dashed off the bed, climbed over Mick and Dade and escaped into the bathroom. I drew myself a hot bath, loaded with bubbles and slid into it, up to my chin.

I woke up when Dade lifted me out of the tub. He carried me to the bed, climbed on it with me, pulled the blanket over us and tucked me against his side.

"What did Mick want?"

"Besides you?" I poked him in the ribs.

"I'll tell you after we get some more sleep."

It was much later when Dade and I finally made it out of the bedroom. I was having difficulty walking and loved it. Dade looked extremely pleased with himself. I figured he had every right to look that way.

Dade dug the leftover test meatballs out of the fridge and nuked them for our supper.

"Albert and Cardive figure the force behind the weres' attack here and the acts against the mortals is the same one. Albert's kind of pissed off that he can't determine if it's a magic user, a vamp or a team of the two. He's got some ideas he's checking into though."

"Mick woke you up for that?"

"Honestly, I think he just wanted to see you naked."

"Great. Are you going to have to kill him now?"

Dade laughed. "Hardly. They can look all they want. It's when they touch you they risk dismemberment."

"Hey, maybe I don't want your brothers to see me naked."

Dade just leered at me.

"I certainly don't want other women looking at you naked."

Dade's mouth dropped open as he goggled at me. "Sometimes I don't understand you at all," Dade said, shaking his head.

* * * * *

Albert called a meeting at Coria the next day. There were several people there I recognized, including Wayne, who I hadn't seen since I'd rejected him.

Wayne greeted me with a hug and a kiss.

"Why don't you ditch the mate and come make love with me?"

Dade's eyes were a dark green as he took a step toward Wayne.

"Gotcha, wolf."

"You're a funny man, magic user."

Wayne started to say something else, then thought better of it.

I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Seriously, Dade, Kris never looked better, you must be treating her right."

Dade's eyes mellowed to blue as he accepted the compliment.

Then Max wandered over. He kissed my cheek and lingered a little too long, inhaling my scent.

I felt Dade bristling beside me.

As soon as Max wandered off Dade grabbed me and hauled me out of the kitchen. We ended up in a bathroom. He pinned me to the wall with his body, his lips capturing mine, this tongue dancing inside.

"Christ, I need to mark you with my scent."

He undid my pants and shoved them to the floor. I kicked them aside while he freed his erection.

It was a quick, hard fuck against the bathroom wall and still he came twice inside me, taking me with him both times.

We pulled ourselves together and returned to the group.

Everyone turned to look at us when we entered. I might just as well have carried a sign that said "Dade and I just fucked in the bathroom".

Random thought – at least it didn't happen at my parents'.

We found a place to sit and Albert called for everyone's attention.

"Since everyone is here now, I can continue." He eyed Dade and me. "I believe we're looking for both a magic user and a vampire, working together. We need to start spending more time mingling with the mortals until these men are caught. I'm asking everyone to volunteer a few evenings to go out on the town and keep your eyes open. At the very least your presence will be noticed by these men and might deter them. I've got a map of town posted on the wall, split into nine sectors. I'd appreciate it if you'd sign up for a given sector, on a given night, so we don't all congregate in the same area.

"I've got a cell phone. You'll be given a cell phone with my number programmed into it. You're to call me if you see any supes that look out of place. I'd rather the hunters do the actual apprehension. Any questions?"

"Are these rogues from our society?" I didn't catch who asked that question.

"I don't believe so. Things indicate they're from a society on the east coast."

"Do you have anything for us to scent off of?" a guy that resembled a mole asked.

Weremoles? Why would you bother?

I leaned over and asked Dade, "Is that guy a mole?"

He squinted at me. "Shush," he said and turned his attention back to the discussion.

I only half listened to it, wondering why I didn't smell anyone around me. I mean, I liked Dade's smell, a little spice, a little musk, a lot of male and though I knew it was uniquely Dade's, I didn't smell him from across the room or anything. I leaned closer to Dade and sniffed him. I was sniffing him and thinking about sniffing the guy on my other side when Dade leaned over, his lips brushing the side of my face, "You're giving me a hard-on."

Whoops.

I tried to tune back in to the discussion, but frankly, it bored the hell out of me. I spent my time checking out the other people in the room.

They started getting up and moving about. A beautiful, willowy blonde took a seat at a table next to the map. Albert was standing next to her, behind the table, checking cell phones. He smiled at something the woman said and touched her shoulder with an easy grace. A dull stab of jealousy shot through me.

"Let's go sign up for some duty, love," I wrenched my attention back to Dade. I stood and Dade placed his hand on the small of my back to guide me across the room.

"Dade, Kris, I don't believe you've met Aliselle." Albert placed his hand on the beauty's back.

Aliselle glanced at me then let her eyes linger on Dade. I felt myself tense as she scanned him from head to groin. I couldn't help myself, I looked at Dade's groin too. Albert laughed.

Dade and I signed up for three nights each week in three different sectors, for the next month.

Albert handed Dade a cell phone. I waited for Albert to give me one too, but Dade guided me away from the table.

"Hey, where's my cell phone?" I looked back toward Albert.

"You don't need one," Dade informed me.

"Huh?"

"You think I'm going to let you out of my sight on this mission?"

Dade, the outraged male protector.

"Oh." So sue me, it really turned me on when Dade got all alpha male on me.

We spent an hour socializing with the group. The men tended to discuss strategies, the women tended to discuss the men.

I saw Mick talking to Wayne, the two men casting glances in my direction. Mick's wicked smile leaving no doubt what they were talking about.

I met the mole man. His name was Urud and he looked even more like a mole close up. I almost asked. When Urud wandered off, I looked at Dade.

"His people make good spies."

I thought of James Bond and the guy in the Bourne movies. Then mole guy. What did I know? I couldn't even smell anyone.

Dade and I flashed home. No visitors, welcome or otherwise, awaited us. Dade went to the kitchen and stood looking in the fridge. I came up behind him and started sniffing his neck.

He slammed the door shut, threw me over his shoulder. "I just figured out what I'm hungry for," he told me as he carried me to bed.

* * * * *

The next morning brought news of another incident with a mortal. A young woman was brought into the emergency room, bite marks on her neck, breasts and thighs. When she regained consciousness, she started yelling, "That's it, oh god, that feels so good," and something about an inhumanly long tongue.

Fortunately, there were supes on the staff. They'd take care of her mind, but the police had already been involved so there'd be a record of the incident.

Albert popped in around noon. Dade was back in his office with a couple of his brothers. Before Albert had a chance to join them, I cornered him.

"So what's up with Aliselle?" Damn. I was mated to the sexiest man on the planet, but I still felt that Albert was mine.

"She's a distraction, love." Albert's eyes glistened with humor. "You are, after all, mated."

"Yeah, I know," I grumped.

Albert took a few steps toward the study, then turned back to me.

"My heart will always be yours."

His words pierced my heart. Someday, maybe, I'd learn to keep my big mouth shut. I watched Albert's back until it disappeared into Dade's office.

Then I busied myself in the kitchen making lunch.

More people arrived, others left. I set up a buffet-type spread on the kitchen counter. Then headed upstairs to my studio.

I had trouble concentrating on my work. Then I remembered that I hadn't devised a communicator for Dade and myself. I decided to add a locator function to the spell. Just in case.

It was late afternoon when I wandered back downstairs. Several men were gathered around the kitchen table, eating and drinking. More were out on the back deck. Chase was manning the grill, the smell of cooking beef and chicken scenting the air.

Dade's expression brightened when he saw me. He gathered me in his arms and kissed me thoroughly. Yum.

"Save some time for me before we have to go out tonight," I told him.

"I'd planned on it," he grinned at me.

"There's a spell I want to cast, wolf boy!"

"You turn me on when you talk to me that way." He squeezed my ass and I laughed.

At five thirty, the house still crawling with people, Dade led me off to our bedroom.

"So what's this spell?" he asked me as he pulled my sweater over my head.

"You spoke to me telepathically when those wolves were here. Can we communicate that way no matter how far apart we are?"

"The longer we're together, the farther our range. Right now, speaking to you when you're in the same room with me is about it."

"Then I've decided to use our rings for the communicators," I explained to him. "Twist the ring to initiate a call. The ring will vibrate to indicate the call coming in. Twist the ring to answer it. We'll talk to each other telepathically. Another twist to hang up. I'm also going to include a locator function as a safeguard."

He thought about it for a moment, then agreed to give it a try.

I took his left hand in mine and pressed our rings together. His right hand went to my breast and stroked it.

I concentrated on the spell.

"That should do it." It took him seconds to rid us of our clothes and get me onto the bed.

I lost myself in his touch. The feel of his lips and tongue on my mouth, my neck, my breasts. The way his penis filled every inch of my vagina. The burning look of desire in his eyes that raised answering flames throughout my body.

My muscles tightened around his dick, he lowered his head next to mine, his body tight as a bowstring. He paused, grinding his hips against me, the magic building between us. The tension in my groin causing me to moan. He locked his arms around my shoulders, crushing my breasts to his chest. I tightened my legs around his waist. Then he started thrusting, hard and deep. Faster and faster. The sweet spot in the depths of my vagina driving me nearly insane with pleasure. The magic sparked and I exploded, screaming Dade's name. He followed close behind with a roar, pounding into me until his balls were totally depleted.

I lay, cradling him with my body, waiting to come back to earth.

He kissed me and levered himself up. He froze in mid-motion.

"What?" He was half on, half off my body, our hips still pressed together, his penis inside me.

"We forgot to close the drapes."

I stared in horror at the sliding glass door. Several men leaned back against the deck rail, Mick among them, drinking beers, gazes focused on us.

Every last one of them grinned when they saw us looking at them.

"Oh god." I tried to squirm away from Dade.

Dade finally pulled out of me and let me escape to the bathroom.

As I shut the door I heard the men cheering.

Dade joined me in the bathroom. A smug look on his face.

"I can't believe those guys watched us!" I paced back and forth in the confined space.

Dade caught me on one of my passes and hugged me tight to his body.

"It happened. And to be honest, I'm not in the least bit sorry it did." His grinning irritated me.

"But...but..." I didn't know what to say to wipe that look of male satisfaction off his face.

"I'm the envy of every man out there." He kissed me. Then he had me magic us clean except for our genitals. Must be a wolf thing.

He wrapped a towel around his hips and I waited while he closed the drapes.

"So what should I wear tonight?" I asked Dade.

He picked out a red miniskirt and tight black sweater that revealed ample cleavage. I went with black lace underwear, skipped the stockings and magicked some color into my legs. Black four-inch pumps. I magicked some body and volume into my hair, added some highlights and a little wave. Then I magicked my makeup, adding bright red lipstick and dark brown eyeliner to my mascara. I didn't need to use blush.

Dade had already left the bedroom when I'd finished. I squared my shoulders, took a deep breath and almost chickened out. I grabbed the bedroom doorknob and, with a silent prayer, forced myself out the door.

I tried to stroll casually into the kitchen.

Hoots and whistles greeted me. Beer bottles were raised in salute. Every idiot in the place was grinning. I spotted Dade by the fridge, a glass of wine in his hand that I knew was for me. He looked devastating in black jeans and a navy sweater. With his wild hair, his eyes a dark blue and a smile so sexy I felt my nipples harden.

He crossed the room to me, put an arm around my back and pressed his hips into mine. "You look great," he told me before he kissed me.

I no longer cared if anyone watched.

Chapter Eleven

We took the Explorer. It was seven thirty when we finally hit the road. The sector we were working tonight had a steak place that had a great reputation so we'd decided to go there for dinner. After that we'd do a little bar hopping.

I'd never been on a date with Dade. I was in for a few surprises.

He steered me into the restaurant with a hand on the small of my back. He moved with the easy, loose-limbed stride of a man ready for a fight. His eyes took in everything. He radiated danger. I found this aspect of Dade tremendously exciting.

I noticed both men and women watching him as we were shown to a booth. He sat on the same side of the table with me, trapping me against the wall.

He managed, at the same time, to play with my thigh, peruse the menu and evaluate the other patrons.

I had trouble concentrating on the menu with his fingers stroking a slow burn between my legs.

He kissed the tender area of my neck where it met my shoulder.

"I see a few supes in here," he whispered into my ear, his breath sending shivers across my flesh. "None of them strikes me as suspicious."

During the meal I tried to surreptitiously check out the other people in the restaurant. I had to concentrate to pick out auras. Which pretty much amounted to my staring. Dade told me to cut it out.

We passed on dessert. Dade handed the waiter a credit card. Funny, I'd never thought much about Dade's finances. I wondered where his money came from, I didn't think Pack Leader was a paid position and I knew his family did not make marital aids. I reminded myself to ask him later.

We left the restaurant and found a place on the street to park near a few popular bars. Dade was in his element. His predatory nature and heightened senses perfect for assessing his surroundings and spotting trouble. It did wonderful things for my libido as well.

Dade also kept a hand on some part of my body constantly.

He insisted on walking me to the restroom. I was so aroused by that time I was planning on dragging him in with me and having my way with him. There was a line of people waiting so I had to settle for necking with him while I waited.

We spent five hours total in four different bars that night. Nothing happened. No suspects sighted. No bathroom sex. I did find out that I could use my magic to eliminate the headache that I'd gotten from the loud music and smoky atmosphere.

Dade casually strolled into the house when we got home. I was a raging hormone, my panties wet enough to wash a car.

I dove on him, intending to tackle him to the living room floor. His breath whooshed out, but he remained standing while I clung to his back.

"For the love of god, Dade, I need you inside me *now*!"

Dade reached for the waist of his pants, so I dropped off him so I could take my clothes off too.

He twisted around, grabbed me and had me pinned to the floor, faster than I could blink.

My hunger and urgency burst out of me and in a tangle of hands and lips, we were kissing and touching and clothes went flying. Just before I thought I would lose my mind, I felt his cock penetrate me. We took turns on top. Both of us caught up in my frenzy. I felt him go rigid beneath me and that was all it took to send me into outer space.

When I regained my senses, I was on my back. Dade's shudders slowly fading.

When I wandered into the kitchen the next morning, Dade was on the cell phone with Albert. I got myself a Coke and waited for him to finish.

"No activity reported last night, no sightings," Dade told me.

"You know, Dade, the next time we go out, we're going to have to take a sex break or two during the night."

Dade smiled. "You have a thing for sex in public places?"

"I don't think so." The idea sending a twinge of excitement through me. "Your macho wolf act drives me wild."

"All those men drooling over you drives me wild." His voice was lowering to a growl. "Ever do it on the kitchen table?"

"Unh uh." I jumped up and sat on the edge of the table, a leg on either side of Dade. Just then Chase and Mac walked into the room. They looked from me to Dade.

"You weren't going to have sex on the table, were you? We eat off that thing." Mac tried to sound appalled.

"What do you guys want?" Dade asked.

"Just wondered what sector you were working tonight," Chase said.

"We thought we might tag along," Mac added.

"Come on," Dade sighed. "I've got it written down in the office.

I waited until they were down the hall before I hopped off the table.

* * * * *

Two weeks passed before the next incident came to light. Two men in their twenties were found drained dry. Their bodies had been discovered by a farmer when he went out into his field to cut down his Christmas tree.

The bodies had been in the field for a few days and were frozen solid. No new clues surfaced.

Albert arrived looking especially grim.

Dade and his brothers Mac, Chase, Sean and Mick were sitting at the kitchen table. I was perched on my stool at the counter looking through a recipe book for a new meat dish to try out.

Albert joined me at the counter.

"I think you might be a target, Kris," Albert stated.

Everyone's attention turned to him.

"Someone tried to kidnap Aliselle. I intercepted the spell before it could reach her. It was directed at my woman, not a specific woman. I'm unfamiliar with the caster, but I picked up traces of Bakiturian behind it."

I broke out in a cold sweat at that name. Dade came to my side in a flash and wrapped an arm around my shoulder.

"I had no doubt Bakiturian would try to find a way out of Umbar. My guess is he's linked with the magic user and vampire. He enhances their powers, allows them their nasty bits of fun and ultimately gets them to capture, subdue and deliver Kris. He's tasted your power. By combining your power with his, he can surely break the containing spell I placed on him."

"Am I stronger than he is?" I held my breath while I waited for his answer.

Albert looked me straight in the eye. "No."

Dade started rubbing my arm, a soothing up-and-down motion.

"But you are stronger than the magic user and the vampire. Even enhanced as they are. Even if they both attack you at the same time."

Albert walked over to the fridge and got enough beer out for everyone. He deposited them on the table and motioned Dade and me over.

"Here's what I propose." Albert turned one of the chairs around and straddled it. "I've got a much stronger grasp on the magic user's scent now. I think a group of us should go out tonight and search for this scent. Not too large a group, I'm thinking myself, Aliselle, Dade, Kris, Wayne and Max. Kris and Aliselle will split up from the rest of us."

"I don't think so," Dade objected.

"We'll be keeping a close eye on them, Dade, but those men won't come near our women if they're surrounded by bodyguards." He stared at Dade until Dade grudgingly agreed.

"We'll scout around town until I catch the magic user's scent. Then Kris and Aliselle can wander the area in an effort to lure them into the open. The rest of us can take care of them once we find out who they are."

"That's all there is to it then?" Sean asked.

"I'm sure it's not going to be as easy as it sounds. But basically, yes."

"What about this Bakiturian guy?" Mick asked.

"Once he loses his minions, it will take him time to get new ones. Unfortunately, he's not the type of being that's easy to destroy. He's a very old, very powerful, very evil demigod. I only have certain powers I can use against him. If his only goal is to break free from Umbar, then we don't really have much to worry about."

We decided to have everyone meet for an early dinner at our house.

Albert was going to leave his cell phone with Dade's brothers and take one of the spares for himself. They were going to stay at the house and coordinate any incoming information and forward anything to Albert that might be pertinent.

After Albert departed, I went to scrounge in my closet for just the right outfit to lure the bad guys with. I also didn't want to look like a total frump next to Aliselle's supermodel good looks.

I started with black lace panties and demi-bra. Tan thigh-high stockings. Black leather miniskirt over that and a red top that fit tight across my chest. The top had laces halfway up that I left loose enough to expose a lot of cleavage.

I gave myself a lot of tousled wavy hair in shades of brown with copper and gold highlights. Eyeliner and mascara came next, then red lip liner and a shiny red lipstick that left my lips looking wet.

I even put on some dangly gold earrings and a gold chain with a blood red stone that pointed down to my cleavage. I shoved my feet into some red pumps with three-and-a-half-inch spike heels.

I checked myself out in the mirror. I looked good.

I sashayed my way out to the kitchen and soaked up the guys' compliments.

Albert entered the kitchen almost on my heels, followed by Aliselle. She was stunning. The men just stared at her, mouths open. One of them made a sound like all the air had left his lungs in a rush. Even Dade was mesmerized by her.

Albert smiled like an idiot at their reaction, like he was somehow responsible for Aliselle's beauty.

I stepped on Dade's foot as I headed for the oven.

After the meal, of which I ate very little, Dade pulled me aside for a private word.

"Don't take any unnecessary risks," he admonished.

"I won't." I met his lips with mine for a deep kiss.

"Hey, Dade, what is Aliselle?"

"She's a nymph, why?"

"Does she have any defensive powers?"

"None. All her magic is tied up in her looks."

Well, that made me feel better.

Dade and Albert set off on Dade's motorcycle. Max drove my Explorer behind them, with Wayne riding shotgun. Aliselle and I sat in the back.

Tension began eating at my stomach as we cruised around.

We started in the northwest sector of town and worked our way east. We were crisscrossing the fourth sector, the east one, when Albert finally got a hit. This was a newer section of town, populated by the upwardly mobile and retirees with a certain amount of means. My parents lived in this sector. We parked on a dark side street behind a row of clubs that seemed likely pick-up spots for our perpetrators.

Aliselle and I got out of the Explorer, took a last look at the men and began walking toward the clubs. When we reached the corner I looked back toward the men. They were gone. I had to trust they were watching over us.

The first place we entered was called The Rave. The clientele said "career-oriented meat market" to me. Men, still in their suits, eyed women who had taken off their suit coats and let their hair down. Aliselle and I made quite a stir when we entered. We cruised the length of the bar, pretending to look for our dates.

"Are you sure they said to meet them here?" Aliselle asked.

"I don't really know." I kept looking around. "Hell, I can hardly remember what they looked like."

We made a move toward the bar, then decided to check out the other clubs in the area.

We strolled to the next place on the street. A wooden sign hung over the door, MacReady's. Inside was a lot of dark wood and subdued lighting. Most of the people in there were in their thirties and forties. Everyone wore jeans or casual pants, sweatshirts or sweaters. Several appreciative looks came our way as we repeated our search pattern.

When we stopped by the bar on our way out, the hairs on the back of my neck tingled.

"Why don't we get a drink and wait?" I suggested to Aliselle.

"I agree." She nodded at me, letting me know she felt something too.

We took a couple of stools at the bar, closest to the door. We each got a glass of white wine. It occurred to me as we sat there, sipping our drinks, that we hadn't really planned this out very well and it was too late now to discuss it.

We sipped our wine and chatted. We were pretty much reduced to talking about makeup and fashion. Didn't want to say the wrong thing. A couple of men approached us. They were mortal. But even so, we didn't want to appear too standoffish. I gave one of them my phone number. What the hell. I could still feel—something—lurking in the bar.

Aliselle and I took a bathroom break. I stepped out of the bathroom first. I sensed him before I saw him. His power wafted across me, raising the hairs on my arms. He took a step toward us. It was the vampire. He was just under six feet tall, blond hair, white skin, eyes like black holes. I felt them sucking me into their depths. I stumbled back from him, turned to Aliselle and shoved her toward the other end of the hall. Only thirty feet or so to the emergency exit. We were almost there when another man stepped out of a door on our left. Tall and wiry, his face cast in shadow, but his eyes glowed. Eyes that looked beyond us toward the vampire, his hand flicking in that direction, a burst of energy tingling across my arm as his spell shot past.

I glanced over my shoulder, wondering if he'd done something to his partner. Instead I saw the rippling wall of an illusion behind the man. The air in front of me popped and sizzled as one of my defensive spells destroyed whatever spell the magic user had cast at us. The ozone smell of burnt wiring filled the air. I turned back in his direction, saw his hands were already working another pattern in front of him, preparing another spell. I pulled Aliselle close to my side, frantically thinking up new ways to protect us.

I felt a web of energy dancing over the force field I'd surrounded Aliselle and myself with. The strange energy began interlocking with itself, forming patches at first then expanding like a net.

Since it was enclosing, but not attacking, my spells did nothing to stop it. I knew I had to keep his power from completing the net.

I tried to remember everything Albert had taught me. I just knew there was something he'd said that I couldn't quite grasp. I tried to trap the magic user's magic and got stung for the effort.

And then I had it, I could reflect the magic user's power back at him. I envisioned my power to be like a big metal bowl. I slowly turned the bowl over in my mind so the inside scooped up the energy and deflected it back toward its source.

I effectively stopped his magic from netting Aliselle and myself. I was less effective in causing his net to trap him. My bowl deflected his energies to a spot to his left. The vampire moved closer behind us, herding us closer to the magic user and the back door.

I started casting containing spells over the vampire while the magic user took time to reshape his powers. Once I felt I had the vampire firmly controlled, I turned all my energies toward the magic user.

I had no idea what he was working up to next. I decided I needed to go on the offensive. I worked on fireballs of a sort that were designed to disperse formed spells on contact. When I had several of these balls formed, I began lobbing them at the magic user. Little flashes of light and a muted boom erupted whenever one of the balls was successful. We were at a standstill. I needed something more to disable and capture the man.

A surge of power shot into me. I knew that power. Albert was close and he was feeding me additional energy. I knew what I wanted to do. I needed to drain the energy

from the magic user while at the same time locking him in place so he couldn't escape. I started forming my spell, still lobbing fireballs at him.

Wayne's power came onboard. I drew it in, amplified it, merged it with Albert's and cast the entire combined energy with a single thought.

There was a brilliant explosion as my spell blew through his defensive barriers. The magic user was slammed into the wall and fell in a heap on the floor. Aliselle and I were blown back down the hall.

Aliselle knocked over the vampire. He was rooted to the spot I'd contained him to, but I hadn't immobilized him. He wrapped his arms around Aliselle, forced her head to the side with his and bit into her neck.

Aliselle screamed. There was pounding on the back door. I twisted my ring and shot a mental image to Dade of the hallway we were in.

Dade flashed in, followed shortly by the others. They converged on the vampire.

Albert wrapped one big hand around the man's throat and squeezed. Dade worked on prying the man's hands off her. Max and Wayne went over to keep an eye on the magic user. I grabbed Wayne's cell phone and called Dade's brothers. By the time I hung up, Albert and Dade had freed Aliselle. She clung to Dade's side, the vampire insensate on the floor, all his fingers bent at odd angles.

Albert modified my containing spells, then he and the others dragged the two men out into the alley behind the club.

Cardive and his men, along with Melton, met us there and transported the prisoners away.

Albert took Aliselle off Dade's hands. Dade turned and looked me over.

"Thanks for checking on me." I huffed at him, a little burned that he hadn't bothered to see if I was okay earlier. He moved in close.

"Honey, I've been listening to everything that's been going through your mind since you called me. Seems you forgot to hang up after you sent me the image."

Damn. I twisted my ring. Then I glowered at him, but the smile he gave me was so wickedly sexy I gave up.

He threw an arm around my shoulder and zapped us back to our vehicles.

Albert rode in the Explorer with Aliselle, Max and Wayne. I climbed on the back of Dade's motorcycle, not caring that my skirt hiked up to the tops of my thighs.

* * * * *

The next night everyone gathered at our house.

Dade's brothers and their mates brought the meat, Wayne and Max brought beer. Albert and Aliselle brought wine.

Dade and I provided the potatoes. Nina brought a fine old bottle of Scotch.

Chase lugged in one of the outside tables, Mac and Leigh following him with the chairs. Whoever thought I'd have more people eating in my house than I could seat?

"The two men we captured last night will be answering to their own people," Albert told me. "The vampire will be brought in front of the Vampire Council. Because vampires are made and not born, there is no familial hierarchy established. The Council is made up of the oldest of that race. Seems the vamp, name of Edgar Whist, is barely two hundred years old. A member of the council told me that he'd heard of this Whist before. Got into some kind of trouble on the east coast a year or so ago.

"The magic user is one Brent Collins, four hundred and sixty-four years old. Got into dark magic at a young age and has been creating pockets of trouble wherever he goes. He will answer to Wayne. Wayne sits at the head of the magic users' local 'family' hierarchy."

"I can't speak for the vamps, but I have no intention of letting Collins off lightly. He was directly responsible for mortal deaths," Wayne interjected.

"Anything in the wind about Bakiturian?" I managed to ask.

"Not a word," Albert replied, his face reflecting his awareness of my concerns.

After that the conversation turned to sports. Seems supes are into mortal sports as much as mortals are.

So many things for me to learn yet.

When the last of our guests departed Dade hustled me off to bed.

"At least I waited until there was no audience," he told me, as he peeled my sweater over my head.

"Are things always this hectic in your world, Dade?"

"Our world, love, and hardly." He unhooked my bra and dropped it to the floor. "We go for months leading fairly mundane lives, not so very different from what you're used to."

I took over with my pants so that Dade had his hands free to undress himself.

We climbed into bed and snuggled under the covers. I scooted close to him and rubbed myself against his chest.

"Why have I only seen you as a wolf just that one time?"

"The more time I spend as a wolf, the more I revert to that nature."

"Don't you miss it?"

"No," Dade kissed me on the tip of my nose, "I've never been happier in my life."

I pressed my lips to his, slipped my tongue inside his mouth and wrapped my arms around his neck. He took the kiss over, his hunger bursting to the surface. He rolled me onto my back, his hand finding and squeezing my breast. He trailed kisses down my neck, pausing to suck on the pulse point, raising a gasp out of me and hardening my nipples even further.

I tangled my fingers into his hair and directed his head to my breast. He traced around the nipple with his tongue, then sucked it into his mouth and suckled on it. I slid a hand between our bodies and grasped his erection. He jerked then groaned as I began to stroke. His hips moving in mock cadence with my hand.

Then he pulled away from my hand and levered himself between my legs.

"I can smell that you're ready for me." Dade's voice was gruff with his own arousal. "Have I ever told you how much I love your scent?"

I squeezed his hips with my thighs, hard. "Is that the only thing you love about me?"

He placed the head of his cock against my opening, grinned his sexy half grin at me, then entered me in one smooth push.

"I love everything about you," he groaned. "But your scent is what brought us together that first time."

I moaned as he began pumping in and out of me.

"What about me? You had your choice of at least four men to mate, why did you choose me?"

His words were almost a whisper, his lips close to mine, as he rocked his hips against me.

"My family didn't scare you off."

He laughed, low and throaty.

"And you offered your life to me when you didn't even know me."

He took my mouth, his tongue dancing with mine.

I stroked his back and pulled his hips closer to me with my legs.

The magic flowed through us, bright and sweet.

"You're the sexiest man I've ever met and I love your smile," I told him when he'd released my mouth.

"God you feel good." Dade picked up the pace.

"You're a perfect fit." I matched him thrust for thrust.

The magic swelled within us, the pressure in my groin growing with it. Building.

I thrust back harder, encouraging him to increase his speed.

The orgasm broke over me, sweet and hard, my muscles convulsing around Dade's penis. I screamed out his name. As the shockwaves began to recede, Dade's body went tight. "Aaahhhh," he cried out and I felt the heat of his cum fill me. He thrust a few hard times until he was fully drained.

Then he gathered me tight in his arms and let the weight of his body settle over mine.

I kept my legs and arms wrapped tightly around him.

I felt such total completeness at that moment, I knew that whatever I had to face in this new future of mine, I could do it as long as I had Dade there to face it with me.

Epilogue

Christmas came and went. I gave the women in my family and Dade's family, as well as Nina, jewelry from my new line. I bought the devil child a dozen of the messiest toys I could find. I gave my brother and my father each a set of golf clubs. I bought Uncle Ralph a year's worth of HBO and Cinemax for his cable TV. For Dade's brothers, I got them each a case of beers from different microbreweries.

Albert, I gave a wish. I fashioned a hollow glass ball about the size of a cherry. Before I sealed it shut, I placed a spell in there granting Albert one wish, provided it was within my power to give it to him and didn't involve sex.

I gave Dade a soft black leather biker jacket that I'd spelled for protection.

Dade bought me a beautiful platinum necklace in the same Celtic scroll design as our rings. It tingled when I put it on, so I knew there was some sort of spell on it.

He and I had spent Christmas Eve with my family. It was the usual Anderson family dinner, though I seriously considered loading Matt's children up with spiked eggnog. When we were leaving, I saw Dade hand a package to Uncle Ralph. I was glad we weren't going to be there when he opened it.

Nina surprised me with a journal she'd written for me. It contained information about the supernatural society I now lived in.

It also contained information most supes learn about using magic as they grow up.

My life settled down to a kind of routine after that.

I tried to spend some time every day learning the information Nina had written in her journal. Trying out and testing my magic. I couldn't believe how much I didn't know about magic, even though I'd been born a powerful magic user. I'm surprised I did as well as I did fighting Bakiturian and Collins.

I also learned that Dade's family was rich. Seems living for hundreds of years has its advantages.

Previous McClur family members had invested their earnings wisely, with subsequent members spending at least part of their lives earning more money to contribute.

As the new year began, Aliselle and Albert split up, he's seeing a sprite now. Wayne has been seen on more than one occasion with the same female darkover. Max is still playing the field. I still have trouble sharing any of them.

As for Mick? The poor bastard still lusts after me.

All in all, I can't wait to see what my next birthday brings.

About the Author

Lisa Andel was born in City Iowa, Iowa. When in grade school, her family moved to Illinois, where she found she had a knack for telling stories. Most of them got her into trouble. It wasn't until she had lived in Ohio for several years before she finally found a constructive outlet for her creativity.

She lives with her lover, two mentally challenged dogs, and an ever-changing number of freshwater fish.

Lisa writes contemporary erotic romance that features vampires, shapeshifters, dragons, demons, sorcerers, gods, and beings that you've never dreamed before. You'll even find some humans.

Lisa welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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