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Eryn Blackwell



The Lure of Passion

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The Volk want to eliminate her, the medved desire her, but only Zoya can decide her own fate...

Zoya is Rusalki, a powerful Russian forest sprite, whose heart navigates her destiny. Luka, a medved shifter, knows she's his mate, the problem lies in convincing her of that before the Volk attack.

The passion and desire between Luka and Zoya is unmatched, but will they bond before their sworn enemy, the Volk, take away a secure future for both of them?

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, violence.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to Angie who puts up with the many moods of my muse.

Chapter One

The Ural Mountains; 1290

She stood, trying to catch her breath, surprised it was so easy to get away. Too easy. He would be angry when he found her, but then she had known he would be when she escaped her escort at the kremlin. She was under guard, watched and protected.

She knew from what she was defended, the Volk, but she also knew some risks had to be taken, some boundaries had to be tested.

Her escape of the fortress was not a frivolous whim, but one of necessity.

Right now she was more interested in getting to the woods, to the sacred pools. She needed to see what her future would hold, if following her heart was indeed the right way to go. Uncertainty never sat well on her shoulders.

There was too much at stake.

For her, it wasn't simply her heart, but her very life.

The early morning light dappled through the autumn forest blanketed in bright oranges, yellows and browns. She stepped deeper into the place she'd always felt safe. Though in these troubled times, perhaps safety no longer applied in this situation. It was why he would be furious with her.

The Volk were after her and it wouldn't be long, she knew, until one or all of them followed her, until one of them found her, until one—if given a chance—destroyed her.

Closing her eyes, raising her arms up, she chanted a protection spell, asking the forest for help and guidance. For balance.

The forest would aide her, it always had.

At least for the present. All things were balanced and had a habit of always shifting back, so while the trees and spirits would protect her now, didn't mean the protection would be lasting. She would still have to take care.

She breathed deep and knew her time was short. She must make it to the pools today with enough time to meditate, to foresee. Otherwise, this whole venture was pointless.

She picked up the edge of her *svita* and hastened through the woods. The branches hung low, the pines whispering of the snow to come, of the long cold winter.

Zoya cast a glance back over her shoulder one last time and hurried on. She might have escaped, but she knew without a doubt he would come for her sooner or later.



The forest was growing dark. The trees, littered the ground with dying foliage. The days, this time of year, were shorter and colder.

He looked down at the tracks as his great horse stomped again.

Luka stroked the beast's neck and breathed deep. A noise drew his attention, and he climbed from the horse, black as the shadows and mean as an adder. "Dvori, stay," he told the animal.

He followed the faint tracks in the ground, barely moving away as one of the tree limbs swung towards him.

There was not a breeze to have born the limb's movement.

He paused and waited. The forest was silent; a storm was moving in and he knew it would not be long before the cold of winter beckoned at their door. This time, he stilled himself, let his *medved*, his inner self, tease the air around him. His heart was still beating too quickly—out of anger and a good dose of fear.

Fear was something he rarely dealt with, but his fear for Zoya wouldn't abate.

Damned foolish woman, she knew, *knew* the Volk were after her and would stop at nothing until they had her in their clutches.

The pulse pounded in his skull. He took another deep breath and tried to calm his senses.

The forest settled.

The noise drew his attention again, almost like laughter, but not. Singing. It was singing.

Carefully, he tracked the sound. He closed his eyes and listened, allowed his instincts to take over and follow the faint sounds that broke through the trees. The farther he scouted, the quicker he moved through the brush, along the paths and over fallen logs.

Then he saw her.

Luka froze and breathed deep, shaking his head and shoving the lingering fear for her down deep.

A slight dance of notes on the air, whether from her or the air itself, he couldn't tell and didn't care.

Fates, she stole his sanity.

No wonder legend told of the *Rusalki*, beautiful women, luring young human men to their doom.

She was of the powerful *Rusalki* women, forest dwellers.

She stood in a pool of water no deeper than her calves. Her *rubakha* was already drenched and molding her body as he wanted to.

Zoya would damn well lure any man—not that he'd allow it.

He watched from the shade of the trees. Idiot. Plain and simple. What the hell was she doing out here alone? Already he'd seen where the Volk had tracked her to the edge of the forest.

No one had noticed she'd been missing all damn day. When some observant soul had finally noticed his betrothed had not been seen in hours and verified she was no longer within the fortress walls, it had taken another two hours to locate him and give him the news.

His betrothed had disappeared yet again.

He'd picked up her scent quickly and followed her, always behind, always in the shadows, never wanting her to know.

He took another deep breath, hoping to calm his still racing heart. She smelled of rain, of the mountains, of the forest itself. His cock had hardened the first time he'd caught the scent of her, weeks ago. Now,

that he knew of her will, of her spirit, he couldn't decide if he wanted to sink balls deep into her or run in the other direction.

Actually, he had little choice in the matter. She was his.

"She's an enticing little piece isn't she?" a deep voice growled beside him.

Luka didn't turn at the sound of his second-in-command. Instead he watched as Zoya cupped the water in her hands and let it cascade down her body.

"Damn, Luka."

The tone had Luka slowly turning to stare at the man standing just behind him. "Did you need something?"

Boris dropped his gaze to the ground. "I apologize, my lord, but your bride is a very beautiful woman."

Luka didn't answer, instead he sighed and waited.

"We can't leave you unprotected in the woods." Boris finally looked at him with hard, determined eyes.

"Fine. Go wait over there while I fetch my beautiful bride-to-be."

The dark chuckle danced between them. Boris slapped him on the shoulder. "Look at it this way, you'll likely never be bored, and she's special enough to free you, my lord."

Luka ignored the remark and shoved the branch out of the way, stepping from the shadows.

He listened as he heard his men mount up and ride several hundred yards away. He glanced over his shoulder and noticed that the fog was quickly moving in.

When he turned back to the pool, he saw she was watching him with her wide, slanted blue eyes. "I wondered when you'd come."

He looked at the water. "Think to pull me under do you?"

She snorted. "Hardly. That only works with mortals anyway."

He sat on a rock, brushing the sides of his *korzna*, the furs, away from him and watched her.

"You're very beautiful, Zoya."

Those wide lush lips of hers lifted in a smile, dancing thoughts in his mind of them wrapped around his hard cock as she took him deep into her throat.

"I know," she whispered and turned around so that her back faced him.

She was tall, curves in all the right places to cushion his form.

The wet material of her shift, of her *rubakha*, rode mid-thigh. From here he could see the slope of her waist as it flared out over her rounded bottom. His fingers itched to fill his hands with the fullness of each cheek. She glanced back at him, her long blonde hair pulled over one shoulder.

"Don't you want to come in with me?"

He motioned to her to continue. "I think I'll enjoy watching for now."

Her full bottom lip pouted as she turned to face him. "And here you're rumored to be a man of action, my lord."

His dick jumped against his *porta*. "A woman in your position might want to hold tight to caution before tempting—"

"The bear?" she asked, cupping her wet breasts and pushing them high. The material of her shift was wet and transparent. Her nipples were dark against the pale silky material.

"Tease your nipples," he told her, settling back.

She raised one light blonde brow. She was pale and, as the legend had it, she was dressed in white. Though he didn't think the legend makers had thought to mention the material molded her breasts and body, transparent and enticing. He watched as she caressed her breasts then rolled her palms across the centers, until finally, the stiff peaks stood against the material.

"We are going to be mated," he told her as her hands trailed her breasts. Breasts large enough to fill his hands. Thankfully. He hated small busted women.

Her eyes, blue as the twilight sky, locked to his.

"You've put me to much trouble, Zoya. It is not safe for you to be out alone. The wolves still track you."

She shrugged and anger lit in him anew.

“My mate does not so easily cast aside my wishes.”

Again she only looked at him. “I’m not your mate.” Her hands traveled down her stomach, to the tops of her thighs. From here he did not see a shadow between her legs. He wondered if her pussy was pale pink, if the hair covering it was as white-blonde as that of her head.

“Not yet,” he answered, his hand rubbing against his aroused dick.

Her smile was sly. “You worry needlessly. The forest protects me from the Volk.”

He merely stared at her.

“For your trouble in fetching me, I shall grant you a wish. Only one wish though.”

He snorted. “You’ll grant me more than that, I dare say.”

She wasn’t afraid of him and for that he was thankful.

“Your wish? And it must be one that can be granted here.” She played a fingertip along the top of her thigh, just at the edge of her bunched *rubakha*. “And mating here will not be granted.”

His eyes ran over her. “But mating elsewhere would?” He chuckled at the frown between her brows. “Fine. You’re a desirable creature.”

“We Rusalki women are known for our passionate natures.”

“So I’m learning.” He motioned her with his fingers. “I want to watch you pleasure yourself. Here.” Her eyes met his. “Now.”

She closed her eyes for a moment and the trees moved, hushed, seemed to whisper. Then she began to sway as if music of the forest sang for her and only for her. Yet, he could feel...something...in the air.

Arousal, already toying with him, tightened his gut as her eyes opened. The blue was brighter, yet darker. The day was waning, the sun dipping lower on the horizon. The air was a golden pink in color.

“Remove the shift,” he told her.

She slowly walked to the edge of the pool, the water dripping off her, running down her body. She stopped, and lifted the hem of her transparent *rubakha*.

She waited and watched him as he sat on the rock. The music of the forest, the song of the trees, and the deeper song of the earth moved through her.

Part of her knew he was her mate, he called to her as none of the men her father had bought forth for her to meet had. She had fought the idea of being Luka's mate for several weeks now. His army had rid her father's lands of the invading Volk hordes, but still she had wondered, had resisted.

Until she was able to come to the pool

The pool was sacred to the Rusalki for many reasons. She called on the ancient spirits to show her, to guide her, and in the shimmering water of the late autumn day, she saw her future.

A future with a *medved*.

He was wide of shoulder. Tall, and even from here she could see the muscles of his forearms were corded and thick as the branches of the trees. His hair was long, pulled back from the sides of his chiseled and serious face. It wasn't a face of fallen angels or the long, elegant faces of her forefathers. Nor oval like her own. His jaw was squared, muscled. From here, she could see a twitch near the edge of his jaw. He sat on a large rock at the edge of the pool. His dark hair matched his dark brows and the small beard which, she was glad to see, he kept trimmed. His lips were fuller than most men she'd seen, his nose slightly crooked as if it had been broken—and she'd bet with his aggressive personality it had. She knew his eyes were the warm color of amber, slightly tilted at the edges. He was an impressive specimen.

She wondered if his cock was in proportion to the rest of him, if it was, she would guess it to be long, thick and...

Her arousal fisted and vised within her womb.

Zoya closed her eyes and swayed, felt the cool trickle of water as it slid down her skin. The forest this time of year was getting colder a lot sooner than normal. She didn't like the coming winter. But the fall was another matter. Here was a promise of what was to come. The long, cold, frozen time reminded her of darkness. The cold was coming, but now, now was the autumn, which always reminded her of the time just before

one fell asleep. There seemed to be a sort of lulling, a sort of call as if every being gathered its energy, an energy that pulsed through the earth before sleeping beneath frozen sheets of ice and snow that would soon cover it.

The earth held power, so much power.

She loved this time of year.

Humming a song her mother had taught her, of passion, of want, of tempting, she moved, swaying and calling on her energy to help her.

For though she hadn't initially agreed to be his mate, she escaped to come here in hopes of finding answers.

She had.

The man sitting on the rock was hers. A bear, a powerful being that would protect her and all they created together.

All she had to do was take what was offered. While still remaining herself, still remaining true to her Rusalki path of independence.

Her mother had managed, but before mothers normally told their Rusalki daughters "the way", hers had been killed, slaughtered by the Volk.

Zoya shook off the unhappy thoughts and instead centered herself on the here and now. On the feel of energy. On the hum of arousal that pulsed through the air. From him, straight into her.

His gaze zeroed in on her, raking her with primal possession.

Her blood hummed in her veins.

She ran her hands over her body, cupped her breasts, then ran her palms over her nipples.

"Remove the shift," he said again, his voice deep and even timbered.

Again she just smiled at him and kept her rhythm with her slow, even movements. Zoya tilted her head to the side and licked her lips, then she pulled on her nipples, all the while keeping her eyes locked on him.

Slowly, so very slowly, she lifted the hem of her *rubakha*, stopping just short of the juncture of her thighs.

The wet material shifted and moved against her. Her nipples were chilled in the late afternoon air, the silk stuck and rubbing against the distended peaks.

He cocked one dark brow and sat back, one hand hanging off his raised knee.

Smiling, she lifted the hem again, this time a little higher and higher still, exposing the tops of her thighs, her mons and her lower abdomen where her skin markings seemed to stand out even more against her flesh. She ran her hands along her bare thighs, down low over her abdomen, then back up to trace the patterns of the markings that swirled around her navel, out to her hip bones.

All the while she watched him, noted how his fingers twitched, how his brows beetled on a frown and how those full lips tightened at the edges.

She breathed deep and could smell the scent of him, dark as a cave, heady as the earth and promising as rain from the mountains.

“You like to tease.” His deep voice caressed over her.

She only smiled wider and continued to push the material up until it caught on her breasts.

As she watched him, his eyes seemed to glow almost gold for a moment. She pushed the material higher until she clasped it and pulled it over her head, freeing her long tresses and tossing it towards him.

Never breaking eye contact, he reached out and caught it. He brought the bunched, wet material to him and breathed deep.

She raised her arms and whirled, watching him over her shoulder, as she completed a turn. “Like what you see?”

He took another deep breath, his furs rising as he inhaled, the hand on his knee, fidgeting again.

She caressed her stomach, her breasts, taking the nipples between her thumb and forefinger, whirling, twisting, pulling until her breasts were full and heavy.

He motioned her to come to him.

Instead, she took several steps closer and then sat in the water. The water barely covered the tops of her feet. The soft gravel bottom was gritty beneath her.

She placed one foot to the side, then the other, until finally she opened her knees and allowed him to see, to appreciate.

His gaze dropped to the intimate part of her she'd never exposed to another being.

She ran her hands down her thighs, then inside her knees, up her inner thighs, all the while watching him, watching her.

"Have you pleased yourself before?" he asked.

Again she raised a brow as she trailed one finger over the soft skin of her pussy.

"Would it matter?"

His eyes didn't waver from between her legs for a moment, then he finally looked up to meet her gaze.

The intensity of his eyes pierced her. "Has another touched you?"

She started to ask again if it mattered, but something in his expression stopped her.

Instead she shook her head. "*Neit.*"

His eyes on hers, he said, "Good." His fingers fidgeted again. "Continue."

"Are you not afraid I'll lure you here to the edge of the pool?"

He slowly smiled and the grin changed his countenance. He no longer seemed so serious. "You're not granting my wish, *Rasulki.*"

This time she ran her fingers back and forth over her slit, watching him, watching her.

Then a charge hummed over the air, through the shallow water and straight into her.

The same grin played at the edge of his mouth, squinted the corners of his eyes.

She closed her eyes at the rush of arousal. The water was shallow, allowing her to recline. She did, keeping her eyes on him, letting him watch.

His hand untied the *gashnika* holding up his *porta*. She watched him free his cock.

Zoya grinned. Her imaginings from before were not far off. He was well proportioned. Long and thick, his shaft rose from the ties of his pants where he'd loosened the bindings.

"Do you like that which you see?" he asked.

She only smiled and ran her finger up and down her slit, all the while keeping her eyes on him and his intense gaze.

Then she dropped her gaze to his impressive cock. His fingers were wrapped loosely around it

She played and strummed her clit until she felt the warmth of her own cream. Her juices slicked her fingers.

The bulbous head of his shaft pearled a drop of come.

"Next time it will be my fingers on you," he told her.

She couldn't help it, she wanted to watch him, but his gaze...

The energy electrified her nerve endings. Zoya closed her eyes and imagined the fingers on her flesh were his, that it was him bringing her to pleasure, that it was him...

Finally she slid one finger deep inside her, sighing. She heard him mutter something but didn't open her eyes to see.

Her breasts were heavy, her pussy slick and hot as she slid first one then two fingers deep within her pussy.

She strummed her clit with her other hand. Lust swirled through her, tightened her limbs and clamped her womb.

She opened her eyes and watched him pump his cock, a muscle twitching in his jaw.

"More." His guttural voice sparked against her nerves.

She stroked deeper, harder, faster, quickly building herself up...cream, thick as honey coated her fingers, slid down her cunt, wetting her thighs.

So close.

Her eyes locked with his.

"Now. I want you to come now."

She curled her fingers within her, flicked her other finger over her clit and flew apart.

She cried out, almost rising out of the water as her pussy clamped down around her fingers, again and again.

He bit down, stroked once, twice then growled low in his throat.

Come spurted from his cock, arcing through the air to splatter hotly on her naked body.

Still his eyes stayed on hers.

Zoya ran one hand over his seed splattered across her belly and breasts, smearing it on her as she continued to stroke herself. She closed her eyes, sighed and kept playing as she calmed down, as her body slowed, the blood in her veins heavier.

She opened her eyes, and looked at him. His eyes were hooded, dark with promise, yet still she could sense the edge of anger in him. Anger at her, for her.

She smiled and held his stare.

The *ursa* was hers.

Chapter Two

Luka waited, his heart slowing, the blood in his ears still thundering. The woman was a witch, plain and simple, a damned enchantress of the woods.

He had wanted her when he first laid eyes on her.

She'd been standing on the ramparts of her home, a home she'd die to defend and almost had. The wind had blown that day, as if whispering to him that she was his. Her pale hair had blown across her face, across her voluptuous breasts, the braid having come loose hours before. And though he hadn't been close enough to see the color of her eyes at the time, he knew she watched him. Her gaze raked over him as embers stirring to life. Nothing had changed since except that when he looked at her, felt her watching him, the embers didn't glow, they inflamed him and his thoughts of her.

He sighed. Luka knew he had given her more than enough time to come to terms with the fact they'd be mated. He had wondered if she was the one meant to break his curse, least he be forced to remain in bear form for the rest of his days.

He had searched long and hard for his mate, and one night, late in the spring, he'd dreamt of a woman in white who would break the chains that bound him.

When he'd rid her lands of the Volk and had seen her on the ramparts of her home, he'd known. There was a power about her, something deep and abiding he had no name for, but could feel and sense all the same.

She was his.

The sight of his seed on her kept his dick hard and ready again. He could take her now and be done with the mating ceremony, but he found he didn't want to rush things, at least no more than he absolutely had to.

Zoya was a passionate creature. He wanted to wait. To cherish, to pleasure as much as he wanted to take, to demand, to claim.

From here, he could see her pussy glistened with her arousal.

He breathed deep and smelled her essence on the air. His cock twitched in his hand.

"Come, Zoya."

She merely looked at him with a wicked grin on those lips he wanted wrapped around his cock.

"We must return to the keep."

Her breasts, high and full, rose and fell, slowing as he knew her body calmed. The water lapped at her pale skin, made him want to taste, to lick, to mark.

"You want me," she said, her voice low, caressing.

He didn't think that needed answering. Instead, he stood and righted his clothing. He whistled low and long, listening carefully for his stallion as he watched her.

She sighed once and then rose, her movements as graceful as the falling leaves. Her body was slick with moisture, her curves enticing him. He clenched his hands in an effort not to reach for her and finish what they started. He wanted nothing more than to feel the slick, tight walls of her pussy fist around his cock. And he would, just not at this moment.

A tingle of awareness, not of passion, but of warning trickled through him.

"Come."

He reached over onto the rock and lifted her brown tunic. The material, unlike the shift, was not soft. This gown was coarse.

He fingered it and realized he'd never thought of her clothing before. Surely she had better gowns. And if not, then he would see to it that she was clothed as befitting her station as his mate.

Never taking her eyes off him, she strode over and reached to take the tunic from him.

Luka held it up for her and waited. She stared at him, but finally, she raised her arms and let him drop it over her head.

He realized then, he'd never dressed a woman before. Had never even thought of it.

There was something very sensual about watching her curves and attributes be hidden from him.

He pulled the material over her ample breasts and smoothed it over her trim stomach, finally letting it fall down over her hips. Her feet were bare.

"Aren't you cold?" he asked. She was wet as well.

He took off his thickest fur and draped it over her shoulders.

A slight frown creased her brow and her eyes seemed to widen. "No. I'm rarely cold unless there is snow upon the ground." She shrugged. "Then I can never seem to get warm."

He raised his head and sniffed. Snow hung on the strange twilight. Probably the first of many.

"Yet you ventured out of the safety of my care. Why?" He took her hand and led her to the edge of the clearing, whistling softly so that his stallion trampled through the brush and appeared beside him.

"I can walk," she said, stepping slightly back.

He didn't even spare her a glance. "You will ride with me."

She paused for moment, muttered something under her breath and then shrugged. He lifted her up onto the horse and handed her the reins. Luka pulled himself up behind her.

"You will do as I command."

She said nothing, though he sensed she wanted to say quite a bit.

"You will not leave the keep again," he ordered, pulling her against him.

"The forest will protect me."

He jerked the horse to a halt and nudged her face around by the chin to face him. Her gaze held his. "You will do as I ask. I do not want to worry about your safety. The forest may be able to protect you, but the forest is also haven for the Volk."

The Volk... He wanted out of the blasted woods, wanted her safe and tucked beneath him back at the kremlin. Not out here where any could easily reach them.

A slight tremor ran through her and her eyes grew wide, the dark pupils crowding the bright blue irises.

“What?”

She shook her head and listened. He did as well and then he heard it. Something rustled off to their right.

“They’re coming,” she whispered.

He waited. “I want your word you’ll not leave without a proper escort again.”

She sighed and finally nodded. “Please, let us away.”

He nudged his horse in the flanks. The stallion took off through the brush.

A howl rent the air.

“I hate those beasts.” He felt her tremble again. “They’ve taken all from me,” she muttered.

He could hear her over the pounding of the horse’s hooves. Trees blurred by. He kept the branches away from her, pulling her closer to him. Her bottom was nestled against his groin and with each rock of the horse, she shifted against him. Her scent, warm, dark, and full of promise, teased around the edges of his control.

He simply had to think of other things, not her, naked...

Volk.

He knew the Volk had slaughtered her entire family. How she had managed to remain alive was a mystery to him. Perhaps she’d hidden out in the woods, perhaps that was why she’d felt so safe here where most would not venture even escorted.

But she was not the only child of the forest and sooner or later, the Volk would track her. Without her kind, the snarling, lycan beasts would gain an advantage in this part of the woods. The Rusalki had dwelled in these hills for centuries, trying to keep the balance of all around them.

Luka’s *medved* were already so depleted in number he had to keep and conquer any ground he could.

Currently that ground was her keep, her legacy, her power. Together, she would continue his line and free him to be both man and *medved*.

He tightened his arm around her.

The stallion tossed his head. Another howl was soon followed by another and yet another.

The brush and bushes beside the path began to move.

He could hear her whispering in a low drone, chanting. The vibrations of the sound traveled from her, through her, into him and into the very air around them so that the cool air seemed to pulse with a warmth. He had no idea what she was saying, what spell she was weaving, but he hoped it helped.

The howls and snarls grew in number and strength.

He felt her tremble again, could feel the soft hum of her power turn into a stronger push.

The stinging charge of the Volk also pushed against them.

Luka growled.

He heard the deep roar of his lieutenant yards away.

It wouldn't be long, Luka knew, before the Volk ensnared them. He would not let them harm her.

Rustles and snarls shifted the branches, keeping pace with the stallion.

With them. He knew it was only a matter of time.

One of them pounced, darting out into the path of the horse and riders.

The stallion reared.

Luka tried to keep the horse under control, but another Volk leapt from the trees and onto them.

Zoya was ripped from his grasp.

"No!" he roared.

Without thought, he called to his inner animal, cursing the fact that the one thing he had wanted to keep from her, hadn't wanted to scare her, or frighten her with, was what he needed the most—now.

She screamed and he saw the Volk crawl atop her, pinning her to the ground, even as she tried to twist away. The Volk snapped at her and she stilled, so that the wolf stood over her.

Another circled and two more joined the first, keeping him from reaching her. Luka took a step and then another towards her, but they tightened the circle, and more joined. Their dark power shivered in waves out from their pack, brushing against him like the legs of spiders creeping over his skin.

“She is mine,” Luka growled.

“Not for long,” the black wolf standing over her said, licking his jaws.

For an instant, Luka closed his eyes and willed himself to shift. He focused on the power he half the time cursed or hated, but here, at this moment—he needed. His other self.

He felt the bones lengthen, the muscles change and shift. The tendons stretching until he thought they would pop and rip. The alignment, once painful, slid seamlessly now.

He stood on his hind legs and roared from the deepest part of him, the sound echoing back from the trees and through the forest.

One wolf jumped from the left side, followed by another until the clearing was filled with the nasty beasts.

“Bring the bear down,” the black wolf, still standing above Zoya, said.

Her eyes met his, wide and afraid, but also angry. Her lips began to move, and he felt again her power. Unlike before, this time, there was no slight hum, or stronger charge.

This time her power lashed out like a bolt during storms. The wolf above her lowered and growled so that his snout was even with her mouth. “Stop, *Rusalki*.”

She continued to watch Luka and kept chanting. The trees began to move, groan and creak as they slowly shifted in closer. One long branch swung out and swept away three wolves standing at the perimeter of the clearing.

Luka roared and slashed out, his giant paw catching another Volk. He felt the fur and flesh give beneath his claws as the warmth of blood

filled his senses. One carcass landed with a crunch, the other wolf thudded to the ground with a low whimper.

He didn't pay attention to where those he killed landed. He saw only one enemy. One prey. The black wolf pinning Zoya to the ground. She tried to turn. The Volk flexed his paws and she winced, moaning, but she continued to chant. The Volk snarled, its saliva dripping from its fangs to splatter on her neck. The wolf bent down. "I said, cease, *Rusalki*." Then the damn beast licked her across her chest.

Rage clawed through Luka.

He slowly advanced, ripping one wolf away then another, littering the ground with their carcasses.

"You've dared to touch what is mine," he snarled.

The Volk laughed. "Is she really yours, cubby?" The wolf never took his eyes from Luka as he leaned in and licked Zoya's cheek, nipped and licked again. "She tastes sweet doesn't she?"

Zoya yelled and shoved the wolf just as Luka reached them and swept out. He felt his claws rake fur, but he missed his target. The wolf leapt onto Luka and dug his fangs deep into Luka's shoulder. Luka roared again and ripped the wolf away. They circled each other. Bear and wolf.

Medved and *Volk*.

The sound of yelps, of other *medved* growls and roars could be heard through the groaning of the trees.

And still her energy blanketed the clearing they were in, charging and shimmering in the air.

"You will not harm him, Voreski," she said, still on the ground.

"Stay out of this," Luka told her.

The Volk, Voreski, laughed. "Hiding behind a *Rusalki*. They said your greatness had dimmed, *medved*. I had no idea how much until just now." The wolf circled him, and Luka kept his eyes on the enemy. "Just think, after I kill you, I'm going to enjoy your *Rusalki*." Again the damned beast licked his chops. "She's sweet enough to eat and I'm going to enjoy every last little morsel."

The wolf jumped again, but this time, Luka was ready. He slashed out with his claw and caught the wolf's neck. He used his other claw and ripped the fucking animal's head off.

Breathing hard, he dropped the carcass and looked at the dead Volk at his feet.

He snarled and turned to her. "This is what they wanted. They wanted you alone. Unprotected. They would have killed you."

Anger and rage, fear all tangled inside him. He roared.

She merely blinked and moved her shoulder. The scent of blood teased his senses, but he knew it wasn't of the Volk, or even his own.

He quickly shifted back into man's form and strode to her. "You take stupid risks, Zoya. No more."

He grabbed her shoulder, intent on inspecting her. At her wince, he let her go and saw where the Volk's claws had sank into her upper chest. "You're bleeding." Her scent and her blood called to him.

She glanced down and blinked. He noticed how much paler she was than normal. "I am, aren't I?"

Cursing, he lifted her and whistled.

The trees were still groaning and Luka could hear his men's voices. "Let them through," he told her.

She nodded once. "I'm—I'm tired. Shifting..." She sighed. "Shifting the woods is hard. Tires me..." Her head slumped and the power popped so quickly the air seemed to freeze before thundering back together.

She lolled listlessly on his arm. Luka paused and shook her.

"Zoya?"

The trees quieted, stilled, and his men burst into the clearing. Trying to remain calm while she lay pale as death in his arms, he said, "Back to the kremlin!" One of his men held his stallion. He leapt unto his horse and turned the animal around. "Burn the carcasses. I don't want them littering or defiling the ground here again."

He glanced back down at her. "Zoya."

She didn't awaken or open her eyes.

"How badly is she injured, sire?" Boris asked him, seated atop his own mount.

"I don't know, Boris. She controlled the damn woods. The very trees," he said, nodding to the woods. "But the Volk..." He snarled.

"She needs to be seen to, Luka."

"I know that!" he snapped. "But not here. I want her back at the kremlin. Where it's safe. Where she can heal from their damn wounds."

Boris straightened. "They wounded her?" His eyes met Luka's. "Sire..."

"I don't think they wounded her enough to turn her."

"We must get back." Boris opened his mouth to say something, his eyes shadowed. "Sire, if she's..."

"She's not." He looked down at her, and knew that her wounds were not significant enough to turn her into the very thing she despised.

"You must finish and mark her quickly, my lord."

He ignored Boris and took off through the forest, giving his stallion the rein to take them home as quickly as possible. He would make certain she was all right, and then he would bind with her and complete the claiming of his mate. Stubborn woman.

Chapter Three

Zoya slowly opened her eyes. The air around her felt alive, her nerves humming beneath her skin. Warmth trailed down one arm and she turned her head to see what it was.

Luka.

He kissed the inside of her wrist. “It’s about time you awoke. You’ve been asleep for an entire day. I was starting to worry I wasn’t as persuasive as I’d thought.”

She grinned and realized she was naked under the furs, which were soft against her skin.

“Persuasive with what?”

He kept his eyes on hers as he again kissed the tender skin of her inner wrist. She shivered as his warm mouth moved up the soft skin inside her arm. His tongue swirled around the crease of her elbow, the crisp hair of his trimmed beard rough. She sighed as his mouth kissed higher until he nuzzled the skin between her neck and shoulder.

“You smell of deep forest secrets,” he muttered.

“As do you,” she whispered, running her hand through his hair, the strands soft beneath her fingers.

For a moment he said nothing, and then he raised his head and looked at her. “You took a needless risk. You cannot do so again.” His voice, though low and rough, held an edge of steel.

She sighed. There was no way she was about to admit she’d gone to the forest to see into the pool, to make certain he was her mate. Mates were for life, she did not want to choose the wrong one.

He propped his head on his fist and stretched out beside her, his other hand caressing lazily across her upper chest.

His finger trailed from her chest to her neck where he tilted her chin up. "Your word you will obey me."

A small thrill shot through her at his words.

She smiled. "But what if I don't wish to obey you, Luka?"

The corners of his eyes crinkled as he stared at her. "I've a feeling it won't be a problem."

"Really?"

His finger again caressed over her chest to hook the edge of the fur and lower it. The furs softly skimmed over her breasts, over her abdomen, tickling her lower belly. She shivered when he looked at her and grinned as he eased the furs lower, over her mons, over the tops of her thighs, until he pushed it all the way off.

For a moment he simply looked at her.

She realized then she hadn't imagined the intense possessiveness of his gaze over her body at the pool of water in the forest. Even now, his eyes lit with an inner fire.

Slowly he took his fill, his gaze rising from the tips of her toes up her body to rest with her own.

She started to cover herself, but he shook his head, laying one hand atop hers.

"I like to see you, the way your skin almost glows when you come to pleasure. I want to see that again." He trailed his hand up her bare leg, over the top of her thigh.

His touch hummed across her nerves so that each light stroke of his finger seemed to charge through her.

"You respond to my touch."

She didn't answer him. Instead, she ran her hand over his bare shoulder, trailed a finger from his corded muscles up his neck, raked her nails through the short hair of his beard, to swirl her nail over the skin of his ear.

He trembled slightly.

"And you respond to me." She grinned.

He leaned close, and then paused, his face inches from her. His gaze locked with hers and in the depths of his amber eyes she saw that this was more than him simply lust for her as a man lusts for a woman.

What she saw in his eyes was some unnamed emotion, something she couldn't put her finger on, but she knew this man would protect her with his life, just as she would him.

She leaned up and closed the distance between them, her lips softly connecting with his. He didn't move for a moment. He grasped her to him and his mouth wasn't tender, wasn't soft.

His lips were firm, warm and demanding. His hot tongue teased her lips until she opened to him. He swept in and took control. She couldn't think. Arousal tightened down her spine, swirled low in her center and called to him.

She closed her eyes and let her energy flow through her, let the desires pull her along in his wake.

His hand skimmed from her chest, over her belly, to the top of her thigh, back up, back down...a warm trail of heat that lit a fire in its wake. Fingers traced patterns on her skin, over her hipbones, tickling her. Over her lower belly, to caress up and trace the undersides of her breasts.

"You have beautiful breasts," he whispered against her mouth. He cupped and weighed her breasts. First one, then the other. "Large enough to fill my hands." He leaned back. "I want to do things with your breasts."

She grinned, chuckling. "Then do them. I want to feel your hands on me."

"What else do you want?"

She looked at the hard lines of his face, at the intense gaze of his amber eyes. Licking her lips, she whispered, "I want you to play with my breasts."

One brow arched. "How, Zoya? You must tell me."

She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth. "I want you to play with my nipples."

He ran the palm of his hand over her breast, pressing her nipple. Then he took the soft peak between his thumb and middle finger, rolling gently, pulling a bit harder.

She sighed as desire shot straight from his fingers on her nipple to her pussy.

He moved his hand to the other breast, and then he leaned down and played her nipple with his tongue. Pulling it deep into his mouth, releasing it to swirl the tip of his tongue around and around and around until she was writhing beneath him.

He gently bit down, the beard on his chin scraped lightly over her soft breast, and moisture creamed between her legs.

“Luka,” she whispered, running her hands over him.

“Hmmm...”

With his mouth he gentled the warm caresses, suckling softly, swirling his tongue around the peak. His fingers though, contrasted on the other breast. Where his mouth was gentle, his fingers demanded she play with him. They twirled, pulled and pinched just to the edge of pain, but never over.

The contrast wretched her desire higher and higher.

“I love your breasts. I wonder if you’ll come with me just playing with your nipples.” He switched so that the breast he’d been teasing harder, was gently caressed with his mouth and the other was then tweaked and played until she was restless and all but begging.

She tried to think, tried to reason, to remember what she wanted to ask.

Nipples. Coming.

“Do some women actually...” She shuddered as he suckled hard on her nipple. “Oh, Luka.”

The cord from her breasts to her womb contracted, tighter and tighter.

She could feel the edge looming closer.

She squirmed, wanting him to touch her center, for him to run his finger over her slit.

Zoya shifted her hands to do just that.

“*Neit.*” He took her hands in one of his and stretched them out above her head. “Just feel, Zoya. You will not bring yourself pleasure again unless I allow it.”

His amber eyes glowed down at her. “I’ll have to punish you if you do.”

Though he grinned when he said it, there was just enough intensity in his gaze that she knew he meant it and yet a part of her wanted to test him. A small thrill zinged through her at his words.

“I want you to touch me,” she pleaded, raising her hips closer to him.

His grin bracketed lines around the corners of his mouth. “Oh, I will, my Rusalki. I will.”

His head dropped again to her breast, his hair hanging down to hide what he was doing. “But in my time and my way. I want you begging, my Rusalki.”

Warm lips clamped over her nipple. A wet tongue swirled, teased, tempted. Teeth scraped, tightened, and bit.

She arched against his mouth.

Her wrists were caught in his hold. “I want to touch you.”

“You will,” he muttered against her chest.

He moved to the other and all she could feel was him. The soft strands of his hair tickled the sensitive skin of her breasts, while his lips, tongue and teeth tempted her closer and closer to the edge.

“Luka.”

“Come for me, my Rusalki. Come.”

She shook her head. She wanted to come with him touching her, with him in her.

“Come,” he growled.

Her orgasm popped through her, her breasts heavy and tight, seeming to grow even heavier, her womb contracting and contracting.

Panting, she lay looking at him as he still laved her nipple before moving onto the other, grinning at her, his eyes watching her.

She pulled on her hands and he let go, allowing her to wrap her arms around his neck.

“You’ve seen me naked, Luka. Yet, I’ve never seen you naked.”

With one last swipe of his tongue and a kiss to her nipple, he climbed off her, off the bed and stood beside it. He was dressed in a dark green tunic, saffron banding at the hem and around the neck and sleeves. His corded arms rippled as he jerked off his tunic and tossed it to the side.

Her breath caught in her throat.

Magnificent. Trim and fit all over, Luka's muscles rippled, reminding her how easily he had dispatched and shredded the Volk who had attacked them.

Dark hair dusted across his chest to vee and trail down to his groin where his cock stood erect, thick and long, its veins visible along its length.

He was perfect even with the long slashes that gorged through the chest hair, leaving the skin puckered and bare.

She reached out and traced the scars.

Legend had told of the great bears, but she had never seen them.

"You were not born *medved*?" The bear clan had always been whispered about. Like the Volk, they were powerful in these mountains for centuries, struggling for land, rights and power as any other group had.

He shook his head. "No, I was turned." He shrugged. "And I was cursed, to be honest. If I did not find my mate before three more moons, I would be forced to remain a bear for all eternity."

Knowing the truth already, from her vision at the pool, she said anyway. "Oh, so that's all I am, is it? Merely the one to break the curse? How fortunate, then, you did not meet another before me."

Those eyes narrowed on hers and he leaned down until they were nose to nose. "There were others before you. I simply knew none of them would do." He lay completely atop her, yet careful to keep his weight off her. The crisp of his hair tickled her breasts, her nipples, and her stomach. "I knew you when I first saw you." He tilted his hips so that his erection, lying against her belly, rubbed against her.

She ran her hands through the hair on both sides of his face. "I know Luka."

Chapter Four

He blinked, frowned. "You know?"

She smiled and nodded. "I just had to be certain."

For a moment he said nothing. Then he cleared his throat. "And are you?"

She lowered her eyes and again traced his scars with her own fingers, sparking a hum in their wake. "I am now."

Again, he only looked at her, his eyes searching hers in silence. For what he wasn't certain. All he saw in the blue depths was truth.

Something inside him clicked.

He crushed her to him and kissed her, not gently, but in the act of claiming.

She was his.

His and no one else's.

He gripped her head, crushing her long strands of silky hair beneath his fingers, tilting her head to further plunder her mouth. Her lips were soft, her mouth as sweet as her breasts.

Her tongue dueled with his, not only allowing him to take, but taking from him as well.

In the very center of his being, he knew this was a woman strong enough to have him. Strong enough that she would return all he gave or withheld from her.

She was Rusalki.

Zoya pulled away from his kiss and whispered as he kissed the shelf of her jaw, trailing a path to her ear. "You must promise to be faithful to me. If you do not, we're both cursed."

He paused and leaned up, looking down into her eyes. "My mate and no other."

A shadow danced through her eyes. "The consequences are great. Our kind do not mate often, and when our mates are unfaithful, we become Rusalki once again, to only inhabit the waters and glades of the forest. If our mates die, it is not long before we too perish."

Her words sent a chill through him, but he shrugged them off and again cupped her face. "My mate and no other, Zoya. The same I demand of you." He looked directly into her eyes so she would realize he was serious. "I'll kill any other male that dares to touch you."

"Like the Volk?" she asked.

He breathed deep, the rage and fear roaring through him again at the very thought of what almost happened today.

"You will never again take such needless risks."

"Needless to you, mayhap."

"Needless period."

She said nothing.

"I will protect you with my life, Zoya. Yes, like the Volk. I will destroy any who harm you."

She shifted beneath him. "The Volk are still out there, Luka. The Volk are always out there."

He kissed the tip of her nose. "But their numbers are waning."

"Until they make more. They will. They always do. There only needs to be one left, Luka. One and the terror remains, the danger to all."

He cupped her face. "The danger to you will be minimal if you only do as I demand."

Finally she nodded.

"Are there others like you? Other *medveds*?"

He propped his weight on his elbows. "Just like females, always wanting to talk."

"Are there? You should make more if you can. The numbers of the Volk are growing."

He frowned. "Do not tell me how to rule my people."

Her brows rose. "Fine."

“I’ve lived with this for many, many years, the curse of it almost has done me in more than once. But I will not carelessly curse others to this same fate. Others who, like me, would be lost and bound by something beyond most understanding.”

She didn’t look at him, only ran her hands over his chest.

“Zoya, that would make us no better than the Volk, turning just for the sake of increasing our armies and numbers.”

She nodded. “I know, but they frighten me, Luka.”

He leaned down and kissed her gently. “And my Rusalki is rarely frightened of anything. I think I’ll have to kill them just for that alone.”

She ran her hand along his hair. “Our fates were joined long ago, I believe.”

He kissed her again and again. “I want to kiss and taste every last inch of you, Zoya.”

She moved under him. Her long smooth legs, tangling with his, her hands soft as butterfly caressing over him, both and all, focused his every attention on the woman lying beneath him.

He leaned up and again admired her large breasts, pink tipped, their nipples standing like small berries. He flicked one finger over each tip, smiling as she shifted against him.

He ran his hand lower over her torso, to the slightly rounded lower belly where her Rusalki markings stood out, fanning from one hip bone, across her abdomen, to the other hipbone. The markings swirled together, and stood in pale pink against her skin, almost like his scars, except her markings were part of her skin, not like his own. His hand was a dark contrast against the whiteness of her skin. Her mound was covered with soft curls, as pale blonde as the hair upon her head.

His nerves seemed to hum the more he touched her, as if a charge raked over every inch of him.

Luka kissed his way down her chest, played again with her breasts, suckling, tugging and gently biting.

Then he moved lower, trailing his tongue along the underside of each breast, down over her torso to swirl in her belly button. She squirmed and giggled. He traced the skin markings with his tongue, from one hip

bone to the other and back again, all the while working his large body down hers.

She opened her eyes and looked at him, running her fingers through his hair. "I want to touch you. Like you touched yourself today."

Her words themselves wrapped around his already hard cock, making it jump. He wanted to sink into her so deep and so slow, until he had no idea where either one of them started and the other stopped.

"You'll get plenty of me, lady." He ran his fingers through the tuft of hair covering her *pizda*. The folds parted easily and were slick with her cream. He ran one finger down her wet slit, back up to circle the nubbin of flesh already begging for attention.

With his nail, he slowly grazed over the very tip.

Her breath froze in her chest.

"Your *pizda* likes my touch." He settled himself between her thighs, resting his hands on the soft skin of the insides of her knees. Gently, he pushed her legs apart to give himself better access. He parted her folds, running his fingers over her slick, pink flesh. "Very pretty, Zoya." He leaned in and breathed deep, lust gripping his dick in a fist and clawing to be appeased. "This is my pussy, Zoya." He swiped the tip of his tongue down each side of her slit, licking and learning the sweet taste of his mate.

Her eyes slid closed and her hands bunched on her furs.

He licked and laved, her essence filling his senses, his very being. All he could see was her, all he could smell was the deep promise of the forest, all he tasted was the secrets of Zoya.

Her honey flowed and he licked it down. Nothing had ever tasted sweeter to him. He licked a curve from above her clit down across her slit, under and back up and across. Over and over until she was straightening and arching against his face.

He watched as he slowly eased one finger deep within her. The tight walls of her pussy rippled and gripped his finger.

Luka closed his eyes and sighed at the feel of her. He opened his eyes and watched as he finger fucked her, then he added another finger and bit down as she moaned.

“Luka.” Her chest panted, her fists clenched.

His cock strained to sink deep within her.

Zoya raised her head and said, “I want to taste you. I want to suck your cock.”

For a moment, he almost refused. He wanted to sink balls deep in her, but the look in her eyes made him reconsider. He flipped over onto his back and reached for her, pulling her atop him.

Without a word, he faced her away from him, settling her, one leg on each side of his chest. She faced his feet.

“Fine. Lean over and taste.”

His dick pulsed and jumped when he felt the soft ends of her hair barely brush against it.

“Zoya.”

She leaned further over and he got a delectable view of her wet pussy from behind and the tight rosette of her ass. That he would fuck as well one day.

“What are you waiting on?” he growled. His beast was close to the surface. He wanted to fuck, to claim, to mark so that all would know she was his. She leaned further over and he barely caught a glimpse of those full lush lips slipping over the head of his cock.

“The fates,” he hissed as her warm mouth closed over him. She licked him up one side, down the other and around the head. He wanted to shove his dick into her mouth and fuck her until she swallowed every last drop of come.

As if she read his mind, her mouth tightened on him and her hands, fingers, nails danced wickedly over his cock and balls until he was gently pumping his hips into her.

Too much control. She was in too much control. Gritting his teeth, he held her hips, yanked her back into position and gave her one long lick across her slit.

She hummed against his dick.

He moaned against her pussy.

“More,” she said.

More? “Careful what you ask for.”

She let go of his dick with a pop and turned to look at him over her shoulder. "More."

"Suck my cock and you'll get it."

Desire slid hot and thick through his veins. When her wet mouth closed over him again, he ran one finger from her slit, pressing and strumming her clit until her moaning against his cock was almost too much.

Luka leaned up and licked her, nibbled on her pussy lips, pulled her clit into his mouth and gently bit down. "Remember you asked for more."

Her hands pumped him at his base, while her tongue danced and cast a lustful spell across the head of his dick.

Fates.

He licked the honey that poured from her pussy. Wetting his fingers with her cream, he decided to see how much she could take of him.

He swiped the thick cream back to the tiny rosette of her ass and gently rimmed the puckered skin.

She shivered against him, moaning against his dick.

He swirled his tongue, tasting her, suckling at her clit the same moment he gently probed her body's opening he knew no other had ever penetrated.

She arched and moaned, pushing her ass back against him, sliding his finger further into the tight, forbidden channel.

"You like that, my Rusalki?" he growled into her.

She could only nod, but each time he fucked his finger into her, and pulled on her clit with his teeth, her mouth suckled so hard on his cock, he thought his head would explode.

He lost all sense of time, all sense of who he was. Of the fact he wanted to wait and spend his first seed deep against her womb.

Her nails scraped his balls, the back of her throat caressed the head of his dick while the suction of her mouth and the vibrating hum from her moans jerked him over the edge. He yelled into her, just as he felt her ass clamp down on his finger as wave after wave washed through the both of them.

He lapped up her sweet honey.

She swallowed his come and still their orgasms seemed endless, shooting sparks through his very soul.

Chapter Five

They lay panting, bodies still tangled, her head near his feet, his arm thrown over her hips. Blood still roared against his ears, still pounded deep within him, and still filled his cock. Every sense felt alive. The only other time he ever felt like this was when he shifted.

And he hadn't shifted. Luka grinned.

Her giggle danced out and caressed his thighs.

He looked down his body at her. "What are you laughing at?"

She only shook her head.

He nudged her with his knee. "Tell me."

Her hair lay like a curtain around her. "T'isn't important."

He lay back and let it go. "You'll be the death of me, Rusalki."

Again her giggle danced out. "Probably. Do you think anyone heard us?"

He grinned. "If not, they will."

"What?"

Her sat up and gripped her waist, twisting her around so that she lay again next to him. He ran a hand up and down her side. "If they didn't hear us, or rather you. I'm certain they will."

She all but purred against him. "You think so?"

He rolled so that he was lying atop of her. "I'm very certain."

Her fingers ran through his hair. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes a glowing blue. Her power charged the air, or perhaps it was his, either or, it hardly mattered.

He leaned down and kissed her softly at first, but like all the other times he'd tasted her, a need roared up within him. He couldn't contain it. He couldn't control it.

She ran her hands down his arms, up to grip his shoulders as he rocked against her.

Zoya spread her legs, cradling him between the soft warmth of her thighs. This he could get used to, this he could do for the rest of his days.

He kissed her, kissed her longer and ran his hands over her. He wanted her begging like before, but his cock already twitched and jerked with the heat of her so close, still so wet.

Luka shifted his hips so that his dick lay against her wet pussy. He slid back and forth. Back and forth.

Her mouth opened, her eyes watched him, glazed and passionate. "Stop playing."

He rubbed against her again. One long, slow glide of his cock against her slit, rubbing directly along her clit. She moaned and tried to arch into him. But he didn't let her.

"Please, Luka."

"Please, what, Zoya?"

She whimpered and arched against him again.

Need and lust clawed within him. But he chained his beast and waited. "Tell me," he whispered against her mouth. "Tell me what you want."

"You."

He *tsked*. "That's not the right answer."

"I want you to fuck me, Luka. Mate with me."

His heart seemed to trip for a moment, then slam against his chest and rush more blood to his straining cock

"I want to play, Zoya. There is pleasure in the journey, not just the destination."

She all but growled, her eyes glowing brighter. She licked her lush, plump lips, reminding him they'd just been wrapped tight around his shaft.

He whispered in her ear, still sliding over her wet slit, but never in, "Are you ready, Zoya?"

"Yes."

“How ready?”

Zoya tried to think, to concentrate on his words, but her entire being seemed centered on the fact his large cock slid slowly back and forth over her clit. She gripped his shoulders. Why wouldn't he just fuck her already? Why wouldn't he just....

“We're going to do this my way, Zoya.”

She didn't care.

He pulled back and sat on his haunches between her spread legs. Frustrated, she started to close her legs, but his hands on her inner thighs restrained her.

His eyes were a dark amber. “My way.”

The blood, hot and thick, flowed through her veins. She just wanted...just needed...

He pulled her towards him, ran his hands, rough and nicked with scars, over her thighs. His fingers trailed down her slit, wet with her cream. She could feel the wetness sliding down the crease of her bottom, where he'd done the unthinkable before.

As if reading her mind, he knew just what to do. His fingers danced wickedly close, then closer to that spot. His long finger rimmed around and around that secret opening. His gaze was centered on her spread and open for him.

“You liked what I did before.”

She saw no reason to answer him.

Then she felt his finger probe gently inside. She could feel him stretching her tight opening. Heat surged through her ass straight to her womb as his finger slid past the resistance. She shuddered a breath out. His eyes rose to hers. “One day I will claim this ass as well, Zoya.”

She could only nod as he moved his finger in and out. In and out.

“Luka.”

He sighed. “I could play here for some time, but I want in your sweet pussy.” His other hand swiped the juices that flowed from her. She watched as he raised his fingers and licked them. “Honey. My honey. My pussy.”

She could only nod. His fingers parted her, parted her more. Cool air blew over her exposed flesh and she whimpered. He never entered her. Just held her open.

He shifted again and she felt the head of his cock nudge the edge of her opening he held wide with his fingers.

“Mine,” he said, looking down at where he slid into her, inch by inch.

She shuddered at the feel of his long, thick shaft easing into her.

Mortal women had the worry of maidenheads. The Rusalki were rid of theirs by the midwife when they reached womanhood.

He eased higher and higher.

She never felt so full.

He flicked a finger over her clit, fueling the need to have him fill her completely. His fingers lightly pressed, then rolled her clit. She moaned and he slid even further, deeper into her.

“You’re so big,” she whispered.

His dark chuckle raked over her nerves. “I wish you could see this. See this pink pussy stretched so wide to accept my cock.”

She leaned up and watched as he fitted himself to the hilt.

His eyes met hers and for a moment he stilled. Her power rose within her and she could feel his hum through the air.

Then he moved. She couldn’t think at all.

One long slide out before he slowly, oh so slowly stroked back into her.

She wanted more. She wanted faster.

He held her hips. “I’ve waited too long for this.” Then he leaned up, his cock pressing against her clit even as he was inside her. He shifted again so that he lay completely atop her.

His cock stroked some hidden place deep with her.

“Oh, by the fates, Luka.”

His mouth was hot and brutal against hers.

She didn’t care. She didn’t want easy. Didn’t want gentle.

“Fuck me. I want you to move.” She arched against him, but still he held her, pressing her into the furs so that she couldn’t move more than he’d allow her to.

He rose up on his arms.

"You want me to move?" His eyes bore into hers and she could sense his *medved* just beneath the surface.

She arched her hips up to meet his thrust. His eyes narrowed.

As he withdrew, she gripped his dick with her inner muscles.

His eyes slid closed on a curse.

He stroked harder back into her, pulling a moan from her. "Yes."

Again he thrust back into her.

"Is this what you want, my Rusalki?"

He slammed back into her, harder and harder.

She met him thrust for thrust. Blood roared within her. The air turned a golden green, swirling around them like the soft winter lights that danced over the snow.

"You'll scream my name." His deep voice promised. He held her leg and hiked it to his waist, then did the same to the other. She was spread wide for his thrust, open to his every whim.

She squeezed him with her thighs, moaned at each hard thrust that stroked some place within her.

At this angle, he stroked deeper. And deeper still. She couldn't think. Could only feel the long hot slide of his cock filling her, stretching her.

"You like that?" he growled.

"Yes. More," she panted. "I want more."

He slammed into her again and again. Faster and faster until both of their moans, their breaths, and the slap of skin mixed and melded into one sound.

"Your pussy is so tight. I can't..."

"I'm going to come," she whispered.

"Then come. Now."

She felt his mouth at her shoulder. Felt his fingers flex. Pain for just a moment pierced her side and her shoulder.

She flew apart. "*Luka!*"

Her orgasm ripped through her, screaming through the room to mix with his yelling growl.

Still he thrust into her. She clamped down on his cock, felt him pulse his seed deep within her. Again and again.

Bear and nymph, melded, bonded, mated.

Man and woman claimed.

Their yells quieted. Their bodies stilled.

The air still glowed with their mating, with their combined power.

He lay atop her, his head resting beside hers.

They both tried to catch their breaths.

Zoya tried to think, but nothing came to mind. Her thoughts were like water, rippling, clear, and evaporating.

His heart beat against hers.

They lay together until he rolled to the side and pulled her with him. She breathed deep and laid her hand on his chest.

He covered hers with his own. Her thumb rubbed over the puckered skin of one of his scars.

"How did you survive?" she asked, softly.

For a moment, he stilled. Then he huffed out a breath and threw his other arm over his eyes. "A woman in the forest found me. A Rusalki. She tended to me. Explained who I was, or rather what I was to become."

A Rusalki. She smiled.

"So you decided to mate with one as well?"

He put his arm down and looked at her. "No, that was decided for me."

She frowned.

"The moment I set eyes upon you. I knew. It would be you and no other."

Her heart stilled with a peace she hadn't known in a long time.

"You and no other," she vowed and leaned up, kissing him on the mouth. "When we can breathe again, do you think we can see if we can yell even louder? I'd hate to think no one heard us."

His chuckle danced within his chest. "Witch."

"Medved."

“A bear is what I am.” His hand skimmed down to caress her bottom, then dip lower to graze over her slit. “And like all bears, I love good honey.”



The soft air of the forest seemed to whisper, to quiet as if in reverence of what it witnessed.

The warriors standing guard shifted, their feet hushing over the fallen leaves that littered the ground.

Zoya glanced to the side to see her mate dressed in his finest amber silk tunic, purple embroidered collar and sleeves attesting to his wealth and ranking. The wolf lined cloak he wore spoke of his strength in battle and of his ability to protect her from the Volk.

She already knew of both but such were the ways of ceremonies. She wore a *svita* of dark purple velvet over the many layers of under tunics. Her hair was pulled back and wrapped in knots, the headdress a creation she knew was also tradition and hated just the same.

Why they needed this ceremony was beyond her. All the pomp and circumstance seemed almost foolish, but such were the ways of men and claiming.

She and Luka had laid claim to all the other mating rituals, now they needed to share blood.

The forest priest garbled the old tongue and she rolled her eyes, catching Luka's half grin he failed to suppress.

She frowned at him.

He leaned over and whispered in her ear. “Try not to look so happy, my Rusalki. It's only our mating ceremony.”

She shifted even closer to him. “We've already finished the most important part of that. I wonder if the priest could recite the songs more clearly, more accurately, if we gave him a demonstration.”

His hand caressed up her spine to rest at the nape of her neck where he squeezed gently. “Witch.”

She sighed and waited until some underling handed the priest the ceremonially blade.

She grasped it and sliced her palm, barely keeping the hiss locked behind her teeth as the skin opened and stung in the air.

He jerked it from her hand and like her, Luka sliced his own palm. Then he grasped her hand and pressed their palms together, linking their fingers.

“Blood of my blood. Mate of mine, I vow to honor and protect you until my death shall take me.” His eyes narrowed, his intense gaze bearing down onto hers.

She swallowed and placed her other hand over his heart. “Blood of mine, my other heart, I shall honor and protect you with all that I am and all we create.”

He didn’t release her hand as he pulled her closer and bent his head, searing their pledges with a kiss that brought to mind his awakening of her earlier that day.

As their lips parted, he whispered one word, “Mine.”

“As you are mine.”

About the Author

To learn more about Eryn Blackwell, please visit <http://www.erynblackwell.com>. Send an email to Eryn at eryn@erynblackwell.com or join her on MySpace at <http://myspace.com/erynblackwell>.

*Two firefighters battle the hottest flames
they've encountered—their attraction to one another.*

Red Hot Lover

© 2006 Lyn Cash

After a fire sweeps through the school where she teaches and she's unable to save the life of her best friend, Faith Sloan leaves the chalkboard jungle for a career as a firefighter, only to find that one of her former students may be the arsonist responsible for the current devastation in her area of the city.

Without losing her trust, Captain Chance James must ensure that his rookie firefighter doesn't get caught between the truth and a killer. He's willing to bend the rules to protect Faith from harm, but there's nothing he can do to shield his own heart once they become lovers. Faith takes him into her bed, her parents take him into their home as he recuperates from a freak accident, and soon the rough-and-ready firefighter must decide what he wants most...his woman or his career.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Red Hot Lover*:

Chance's fingers slid through the soft curtain of hair, giving him access to the zipper, and he felt her shiver slightly when the backs of his fingers grazed her neck. He bent to drop a light kiss on her shoulder as the dress slid down her arms, and when she relaxed against him, exposing her breasts to the moonlight, he knew he was a goner.

Her arms crept up and back to entwine about his neck, and she rolled her head against his chest, giving him total access to her body from the front and inviting his hands to claim her.

He'd never known a woman so trusting, so willing to give herself to the moment. To unabashedly invite him as she had, to taste and touch her. And he wasn't about to say no.

She turned in his arms and began aggressively undressing him, her fingers sure and confident as she released his belt and practically ripped his shirt open.

“Faith!” he whispered, his head bent to her hair. “Are you sure that you...?”

“I’m sure!” she said, pressing her lips against his chest and trailing kisses across it as she continued in her quest to strip him to the bone. “I want you!”

After a failed marriage several years back, in which case nobody wanted anybody, and several affairs in which case the spark just wasn’t there, Chance was overwhelmed with her passion, her audacity, and her...*enjoyment* of the moment. She took his breath away!

The little devil on his shoulder smiled an evil *ah-ha* as they tumbled to the bed in a flurry of undergarments.

He tried to register his thoughts, to rationalize why he was a party to this seduction, how he could possibly face her afterwards once she knew how their relationship would change come Monday morning. He struggled not to fall into the abyss she’d created and to cling to at least one solid reason for not sleeping with her tonight.

“Faith, I didn’t plan...that is, I didn’t bring any...”

She leaned over and pulled a foil packet from her beside table. “Taken care of, sir.”

“But...this is...I mean, you’ve had a bit to drink tonight.”

“I’m not drunk.” She shut him up with a kiss. “Intoxicated in another way, but I assure you that I am not drunk.”

Chance lay back and moaned in ecstasy as Faith administered the condom on his aching shaft.

“Captain,” Faith said, after she’d managed to land on top of him, with his hands on her bare hips and her body poised above him. “I’m not asking for your hand in marriage.” She cupped his balls as she slid down on him.

“Nope,” he agreed breathlessly, enunciating each following word clearly in an effort to maintain concentration. “That wouldn’t be my hand.”

“Then show a little enthusiasm.” She gouged him in the ribs and laughed. “You’re not immune to me, are you?”

“This feel like I’m immune?” His hips thrust to meet hers.

Faith eased herself up and down over his body, rubbing her stomach with her fingertips before letting them travel upwards to caress her own breasts and then to slip into her hair as Chance's hands replaced hers on her body. And as blood gathered speed and intensity in his veins and his rod became more rigid, she began thrusting harder, taking him deeper and eliciting one unvarnished groan after another from him, her body glistening with sweat the closer she came to climaxing.

Chance pulled her off him and rolled her onto her back.

"No!" she cried. "Chance...no...please!"

"I want to taste you as you come." He growled, burying his face into the moist curls that had rubbed against his groin moments before.

He thrust his tongue inside of her and laved her clit, tugging at it until he had his teeth gently but securely planted on it. She clutched his hair and screamed...

What was happening to her? This wasn't what she'd planned. She'd just wanted to release some pent up emotions, not fall for the guy.

Tears pooled in her eyes as her brain finally caught up with her body. This wasn't fucking—this was mating, and she had definitely crossed over into unfamiliar territory.

Anything can happen when jokers are wild.

Three Nights

© 2006 Lena Matthews

Working for your dream man is never a good idea, especially when he's as aloof as Chris Wilson. Eliza's been dreaming of having her boss in her bed for several months now, and when the opportunity comes up for her to spend some of her off time with him at a poker game, she jumps at the chance. Too bad Chris isn't as excited to see her, as she is to see him.

Eliza has gotten under Chris's skin bad. He can't go a day without thinking of his sexy secretary. Chris is determined to get her in his bed, that is until he finds out she has a daughter. He has a firm *never date women with children* policy that he isn't willing to give into for anyone, until Eliza makes him a little wager. If he wins, Chris gets to have her any way he wants her, and if she wins Chris has to fulfill three of her fantasies.

It's a win-win situation he thinks, but anything can happen when jokers are wild.

Book 2 of Jokers Wild series

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Three Nights*.

"Good morning," she said, walking towards him with a steaming cup of coffee.

"Morning," he replied back huskily. As usual, she looked fucking great. Eliza strolled up to him with a come hither smile and her eyes seemed deeper than they really should have been.

Dressed in a black knee length skirt and ivory colored buttoned up blouse, she dangerously straddled the line of professionalism and eroticism. The buttons on her shirt were not fastened all the way to the top, stopping just a button away from the top of her breasts, exposing her bountiful cleavage. Her skirt, although knee length, tightly molded her curvy figure. She made him want to bend her over his desk and take

a bite out of her full ass, and tongue her nipples until they were hard enough to cut glass. Just thinking of all the nasty things he could do to her made his penis jump in anticipation. He was going to fuck her if it was the last thing he did.

Standing next to him, she looked down as she handed him his coffee. Her green eyes twinkled with merriment, as if she knew where his hands wanted to go.

“There were several messages on the machine this morning.”

“Any I need to know about?”

“Yes, Mr. Kincaid called...”

“No,” Chris said firmly.

“You didn’t even let me finish the message.”

He reached up for his coffee as she pulled it out of his reach.

“People are going to think you’re a hard ass if you don’t watch it.”

“And I would care why?”

“Come on, Chris, it’s for charity,” she cajoled. “What’s one night? You buy a dinner, you donate money, you leave.”

“Because,” he said, reaching up for his coffee again, “it’s never that simple with those people. It’s shake this and kiss that. I’ll just send a check and call it a day.”

“I bet you’re worried you won’t find a date,” Eliza leaned against his desk, placing his coffee behind her out of his reach. “If you beg me nicely, I’ll go with you.”

Raising one brow, Chris said haughtily, “I assure you, Eliza, getting a date has never been a problem for me.”

“Color me surprised,” Eliza teased. “It must be your charming personality, because it can’t be your good looks.”

“You find something,” he paused, looking for the right word, “amiss with my looks?”

“Of course I do. I make it a rule to never go out with a man prettier than I am.” Chris flushed at her compliment, causing Eliza to laugh.

She was such a damn flirt, he thought irately. No matter how hard he tried to be serious when around her, she was always trying to make him smile or laugh. Eliza straightened and picked up his coffee, handing it to him.

"It isn't possible for me or anyone else to be prettier than you," he replied, reaching up for his coffee. Their fingers brushed each other's, neither one pulling away, allowing their touch to linger longer than necessary. He could tell he had surprised her with his comment. She looked at him thoughtfully and he stared back. The moment was broken by a phone ringing in the outer office. "Do I have a busy day?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"If Dylan snaps out of his funk or not."

"Fuck," Chris muttered, setting his untouched coffee down. Dylan and his girlfriend Kayla had gotten into a little disagreement a week or so ago, and ever since, he had been pure hell to work with. Walking around the office like someone killed his dog, Dylan had been unfocused, unreliable and completely annoying. "I'm going to have to talk to him again, aren't I?"

"Would that be so bad?" she teased.

"Of course it would," he frowned. "I'm a guy. We don't talk. We hit things. Big things. Things that hopefully will swing back."

"And does that help? Hitting something?" Cocking her head to the side, Eliza folded her arms across her breasts.

"Well," he tilted his head thinking, "only if it bleeds."

"See, that's what's wrong with the world today," she said, raising her delicately arched eyebrow. Leaning forward, she grasped his arm, feeling his biceps. "This here always gets them into trouble. Men act first, talk later."

He caught her hand and held it against him. His hard, callused hand lay against her smooth, satiny flesh. Running his fingers lightly against the back of hers, he looked up into her eyes. Eliza's smile was frozen on her face, and her breath deepened.

"We can talk before or after," he said softly. The mood automatically changed as the sexual tension filled the air. The atmosphere seemed heavier, thicker with desire.

Staring at each other, they both jumped as the phone rang again, interrupting their interlude. He had never been as tempted as he was now to take control of her. He could tell the attraction was mutual by the

way her eyes seemed to glaze over and her breasts began to rise. Chris secretly wondered what might have happened if the phone hadn't rung. Whoever said "saved by the bell", apparently hadn't been this close to heaven.

Eliza leaned over his oak desk, bent forward and picked up his phone, giving him a perfect shot of her cleavage. An arousing image popped in his head of him holding her full globes with his large hands as he pumped his hard cock between them.

"Thomas and Wilson Financing Company, how can I help you?" Eliza's sensual voice broke the spell his mind had woven around him. Chris looked up at her and noticed the slightly amused look on her face.

The sparkle in her eyes alerted Chris to the fact she knew where his eyes had been gazing, and maybe even where his thoughts had wandered. Chris flushed in embarrassment. He had just been caught red-handed, staring at her chest. Glancing back down at his desk, he shuffled random papers, pretending to be occupied.

He mentally cursed himself for his blunder. If he didn't watch it, he was going to either wind up fighting a half a million-dollar lawsuit or above her, pounding into her wet flesh. Either way, he would be fucked.

"Please hold." Hitting the hold button on his phone, Eliza hung the phone up and stood back up. Sliding her hand across his desk from the phone to her hip, she watched him as he watched her. "It's Michael Lundy, from Barron's. He wants to make an appointment."

"Do we have any openings today?" he asked, looking her in the eyes.

"I'll check." Turning away, Eliza strolled from across his office and paused at the door. Laying her hand against the doorframe, she looked back over her shoulder at him. "I'm not a big talker afterwards, but during is another story."

*He lost his inspiration but found his muse
in the Caribbean...in the arms of a woman.*

A Muse Me

© 2006 S.L. Carpenter

It's a slow death for a writer when the only key getting used on his keyboard is "Delete". His writer's block is firmly in place like a wall. All there is to do is bang his head against it.

What to do? A change of scenery might help—say a week in the tropics. If nothing else, it will warm his idle fingers and ease his worried mind. A getaway for the mind and soul.

Reservations made, Eugene flies to Aruba in search of answers to his problems. What he finds is more than a couple of fruit drinks with umbrellas in them. On the white sandy beaches, wrapped in almost nothing but a tan is someone who sparks his imagination and ignites his creative flow. He finds his Muse!

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Amuse Me*:

Eugene watched as the letters disappeared from the computer screen one by one. The words vanished, leaving the pages empty, just like the void of creativity in his imagination. For over three months he hadn't been able to write a single scene, page or paragraph that read or felt right. Everything was meaningless. His passion was gone and everything he wrote was dull and lifeless.

For a writer, this was a slow death. Writer's block was more painful than constipation after eating spicy Mexican food.

His small, lonely, microcosmic world had shrunk around him and now he needed to get out and have an experience to inspire and awaken the inner being and set loose his alter egos. The walls needed to be knocked down so he could spread his wings. Basically a good fucking and a drunken binge might do the trick. Not necessarily in that order.

He had written thirty books filled with romance and sex. Two were made into low budget movies for cable, with terrible acting and fake

breasts. He had a nice apartment and a kick ass computer set up for writing. California was a hotbed but his bed had run cold.

Lately, though, he had lost his urge to write. If the muse for his inspiration were a place, it was the Sahara desert. He needed a change of mind, a change of scenery. In the most basic of terms he needed to run away and find his muse.

He wrote under the name Dorris Daye. People told him there was a stigma problem with men writing romance and erotica. He was asked to think up something different than Eugene S. Finkter. His middle name was Scott. He liked his name but knew his parents had cursed him to a life of constant teasing.

Something had to be done. A drastic transformation in his hum-drum life to make him think differently. To get out of the rut he was entrenched in.

So he pondered his possibilities. *A vacation to someplace different. Las Vegas? Naw, just gambling and hookers there. Hmmm. Florida? Hmmm, naw, it's set up for retirement and other than spring break I'd end up in bed with a grandma with no teeth. That actually has advantages though.* He needed exotic, he needed the Caribbean.

Eugene needed Aruba.

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