



Loose Id

*Treaty of*  
**Desire**

Cynnara Tregarth

# TREATY OF DESIRE

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Cynnara Tregarth

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## Dedication

*Eric and Joanie Crandall -- to my longtime friend who played D&D with me and allowed me, ever so generously, to adapt Frelin to a more nefarious purpose. You've seen me write since the beginning and now, with Joanie on my side, I'm sure we can find a way to wrestle you to the ground and have a wicked moment or three.*

*To my soul sisters -- Nik and Shar -- I love you and adore you both. Thank you for putting up with me and for pushing me to keep going. Without you both, I'd have given up.*

*To Sinjin -- heartmate, friend, and more -- what can I say but thank you, I adore you, and my love for you is very complicated. LOL. You're an inspiration, and your healing of me has been nothing short of miraculous. Your strength is simply amazing, especially given what we've been through together.*

*To my mom -- Jean Witkus -- I love you, Mom. You taught me to read. You taught me to put stories on paper. You always let me be creative. Get well, and know that you are always with me. I love you.*

## Prologue

Representatives of two races not at war, but definitely not at peace, looked at each other across the marble table. Perhaps this agreement would change all that. The glow lights that surrounded them were soft and warming. Thank the gods there were neutral territories in which they could meet and discuss this world-shaking treaty. This inn was but one of the many places they'd used in the negotiation process.

Reina brushed her hair from her face as she spoke to her possible ally. "Look, Alterran, we both know that it's for the best. Neither of our people can withstand another attack from the humans, once they remember who and what we are."

She watched the black eyes of the Seelie king constrict in suspicion, then in understanding of her words. Her senses were very accurate and honed after leading the weres for the last thirty years. When Alterran had approached her months ago about making a treaty between the Seelie fey and the weres, she'd been skeptical. Now, however, she knew firsthand how important this treaty was for them both. They were hammering out the last details, but as for her and her people, the weres, they could live with this. The question remained of how the sidhe, the highest ranking of the fey, would take this accord.

"Are we agreed to the terms of the treaty?" Alterran asked, his voice low and musical. "My people will be a bit difficult, especially those of sidhe birth. Already we've heard rumors that some would try to break any contract our people make with those not full-blooded."

She patted his hand. "I know, Alterran. However, you've met the other races. You're a hell of a lot more open to other people than most sidhe. I've never understood why your people are so insular compared to the Unseelie court."

The glow lights dimmed as Alterran waved his free hand before Reina. A mist seemed to form between them, and shapes appeared within it. The images before them showed the first sidhe and their roles in the world.

“My people, the sidhe, were the first of fey creation. We are the warriors, the mages to protect those of magickal essence. We were meant to walk side by side with those gifted in other ways.

“Humans resented us because of our magickal abilities. With many deaths among our people, we decided we needed to close the gateway between our worlds, no matter the price. The doorway between our realm and the humans’ would be seen for one year every millennium. So we paid the price, giving up a part of our magick in order to prevent more troubles.”

Reina watched as the sidhe opened their wrists and gave a portion of their blood to the well before them. On the other side of the well were the others. Others like her, members of the Unseelie court, and the vampyrs, Dorsa and Xeron. Thoughts raced through her mind as she realized what she was seeing.

“I know of this. Some of our past rulers kept records. This was the time when the vampyrs, weres, and those half-breeds were granted some magick. So that’s the price that the pureblood fey -- more importantly, the sidhe -- paid.”

Alterran nodded, his black hair covering his face. All sidhe males wore their hair shoulder-length to mark themselves as warriors or mages. Only those who were both warrior and mage could wear it to their hips. Reina knew that much because of her secret source on all things Seelie and Unseelie. In fact, perhaps that source would know who could best enforce the treaty’s provisions. Reina made a mental note to speak to the informant, who was here as her security for this final negotiation.

“It was when the Seelie court was formed. Those of pure sidhe blood, and the other fey races, formed the main court. Those who found it acceptable to crossbreed and try to win back their lost powers formed the Unseelie court. We keep close ties with them, but the sidhe and the other purebreds are aloof in many things.” Alterran dismissed the mist images with a flick of his hand.

Reina’s eyes widened slightly at such ease of magick use, then narrowed as she contemplated how little she knew of the Seelie magicks. “The weres never knew what we had done to earn Seelie enmity. All we knew was that suddenly you had all disappeared, and only on occasion would we meet up with Unseelie court people. What news we heard of the Seelie was through the Unseelie. I know from our records what happened the first time the gateway between the human realm and the fey realm appeared. It was a bloody time for both sides, as well as for those of us who aren’t of either race.”

“This is why I’ve been working on this treaty with the other races. Mankind isn’t quite ready to deal with fey, vampyrs, or weres on the level we will face when the portal opens in three years. It is why I want to make these agreements and help all of our races for when that day arrives. The risk to all is mind-boggling.”

Alterran’s face held the worry of a man who’d seen the first, second, and third appearances of his world in mankind’s. Sorrow, pain, and worry were etched in his dark eyes

and in his regal bearing. So much stress was there. However, Reina knew that an alliance between the meta-races could help ease their way when the courts made their appearance in three years' time. There was one thing that needed doing, though.

"Alterran, do you accept what I've asked for? In exchange for one of our best glamour-users to teach your best mage about how to access and use that magick, the teacher is taught how to use basic fey magick. Things that could make it easier for the weres to protect themselves," Reina pushed. She knew this was the hardest step in the negotiation process.

"Agreed, Reina. The only change I ask for is that your chosen teacher comes to the Seelie court to learn. My people need to open their minds and get used to interacting and living with other cultures. We've got so little time before we have to face the world of man once more." Alterran pulled out the final, revised treaty between their two races.

Reina looked over the agreement. "You know, sometimes it doesn't pay to rule. There's always so much to consider. Ruling the shape-shifters has not been easy for me. There are times when I've wished I could run far from my life."

Alterran chuckled. He sipped on his goblet of wine. "Reina, my dear, that's how all of us feel at one time or another. Are you sending one of your ladies or lords, or someone who might be more amenable to learning from the fabled sidhe mages?"

She tilted back in her chair as she closed her eyes, her animal senses heightening. Within seconds, she knew which one of her people might be the best in promoting were-fey relations. The were leader knew that her chosen would try to get out of it, but in the end, it was for the best. She opened her eyes and gave Alterran a feral smile before realizing that her animal side was showing more. After carefully using her glamour to school her features better, Reina spoke. "It'll be one of my ladies. She has a way of teaching those who become weres to be comfortable with themselves, and teaching basic protection magick."

Alterran's eyes widened as he took in the nugget of information. "So, she is indeed one that my people could respect, once they get past their initial resistance. Is she strong-willed enough to handle people who might try to make her leave?"

Reina snorted. "The Lady of Cats can handle herself. She's smart, sassy, and can sniff me out no matter what form I shift into. I trust her to do what needs to be done for us both."

Alterran quickly signed the alliance contract. Reina penned her signature below his. She handed him the pen. "I guess this is it. We're officially allies."

His smile lit up the room. "Allies, yes, and hopefully we'll be friends, as well. May I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Is your name Reina, or is your title 'Reina'?"

Reina let out a roaring laugh. The fact that Alterran had waited until this moment to ask something that most people would've asked up front said much for the business-first characteristic for which Alterran was known. "My parents always had high hopes for me. My



name is Reina, as well as it being my title. Were rulers use the title reina or rey, depending on whether they're female or male. It was ironic that I, in fact, became their queen."

The leaders shared a laugh as they continued discussing the harder aspects of taking care of their people before turning back to the treaty. After discussing time frames, they quickly wrapped up the last details of the treaty. Reina left the table, taking her time as she headed out the arched doorway leading to the rented rooms that housed all travelers in this area.

The hallway was a bit darker than normal, but she didn't mind it. Her eyes automatically adjusted to the lack of light. Hearing the sound of childish laughter and a voice that belonged to the woman she was looking for, Reina knocked on a door.

\* \* \* \* \*

A two-year-old was turning from boy to wolf cub and back again as he tried to manipulate the toys in front of him. A dark-haired woman laughed as the boy's father knelt down to help him. The man glanced up at the leather-clad woman. "Laugh it up, why don't you? You don't know how frustrating it is to deal with a child shifter, Taja Marya Drevin."

Taja laughed. "Byron, because Juren is constantly shifting, it means he's got to learn control early. Better he learn on his own than have it forced on him. You know the reason is because of the Unseelie blood in us."

A knock at the door interrupted Byron's response. Taja jumped up lightly. Quickly, she palmed her dagger and spoke. "Yes?"

"Open up, Taja. This is Reina."

Taja blinked to let her senses enhance beyond the human range. The woman's scent was indeed that of her queen. Taja slid her dagger back into its sheath before opening the door. She looked at Reina, who was dressed casually in a leather jerkin and a soft blue linen shirt. "Often dress like a peasant?" she teased. They both knew the value of being underestimated. Sometimes it was best in the long run.

Reina laughed as Taja shut the door behind her. "Not often enough, it seems. I'm glad you were here. The treaty is signed. We are now in alliance with the Seelie court of the fey. And thanks to your personal information about how the courts work, the treaty was easier to achieve than it would've been."

Taja gestured for Reina to take the seat she'd just vacated and arranged herself on the floor next to Juren. The young boy crawled into his aunt's lap. She kissed his furry face and hugged him close. "Tell me, what are the costs and the benefits of this treaty?"

The were leader quickly listed the requirements of the treaty on both sides. Taja withheld her comments until Reina had finished. "So we're teaching them the skills they lost, while learning how to use some of their basic magick for defense of our people. Who are

you going to con into taking this job? Anyone with brains will step back and run like hell before accepting this asinine assignment.”

Reina looked pointedly at her and Taja got the hint that the answer wouldn't be one she liked. Taja squeezed her nephew harder while Byron spoke. “Whoever it is, they're going to be fighting an uphill battle there. The Seelie don't like interlopers, even if they asked for help. Hell, they've not asked for much help from their own Unseelie cousins in centuries.”

Taja nodded as the young cub fell asleep in her lap. “This is true. I know that they've got to be concerned about the gateway being opened, if they've come to other races.”

Her hands stroked her nephew's soft fur. She knew what was going to come. Her queen gave her that stern, commanding look only when she wanted her to do something. Taja tried not to think about it. Facing people who would consider her impure or a crossbreed if they knew the truth...it would tear into her. No matter how much time had passed, no matter how much she was truly a sub-queen among her people, she was nothing but a half-breed with ill-gotten abilities among the Seelie. She tried to control her thoughts, hoping that she had misread her queen.

Reina looked quizzically at her friend and confidante. The scent of fear had increased slightly. Taja let out her breath. “Who are you sending to deal with the Seelie court? You need someone strong and able to hold their own, no matter what's thrown their way. It has to be someone also familiar with their ways and their basic culture.”

The queen's gaze narrowed. “Who do you recommend, Lady of the Cats? Who knows enough of the policy and procedures of the sidhe, as well as the Seelie court, to not embarrass us?”

Taja lowered her eyes to the sleeping child. Here was a child who could benefit by being able to call the Seelie court friend. Knowing their basic magick for protection could keep him safe while under the influence of the full moon each month. In her heart, Taja knew the decision that had been made by both her laird and herself. It would be tough, but if it meant peace for her nephew and those like him, it didn't matter the price she paid.

“We both know the only one qualified to do so is me. When do I go to the Seelie court?” Taja asked, while silently forcing her magick to change her nephew back to human form. When it was accomplished, she gently handed him over to his waiting father. Her brother always knew when to leave at the right time.

Byron departed the room. Taja stared at her queen, aware of how her friend's thought processes worked. Reina broke the quiet first. “There's no one else who's qualified. Plus, you'll be under the guidance of Alterran's heir. He's promised you full support for your time there.”

The tone brooked no disobedience. Then, as the were queen shifted from one animal to another, Taja realized just how much power and control this negotiation had taken. Finally, Reina regained her human form, though her eyes were still slightly flat, as if shedding a reptilian nature had been tougher than normal.

Taja snorted, though she was careful not to be too disrespectful. "If you think your evil snake glare will work on me, you're sadly mistaken. You don't know how hard it was for me growing up between our realm and my dad's family." Her queen's look didn't change and the sense of a trap being snapped around her made Taja even more uncomfortable. "Reina, please, you can't be serious."

The were leader shifted into a large vulture. "*I'm dead serious,*" she said mentally. "*There is no one else I can trust. Plus, your heritage is a bonus. It'll help you learn quicker.*"

"It won't show us if a true were can access those abilities."

*"You'll make it work. I know you will. You've done it before with the vampyr. Why would I doubt you?"*

Taja scrubbed her face with the back of one hand. There was the rub. Reina had faith in her, where she herself lacked it. What the hell was she supposed to do? Telling her queen that she didn't want to face the people who shunned her father because he was half sprite and half sidhe was a pretty poor excuse.

She drew herself up straight. "I guess there is no choice. So I'm the guinea pig. Joy."

The lack of inflection was evident to her, to Reina, and to the returning Byron. He looked from her to Reina, then said, "So the queen of the shifters got you to do it? I'm impressed. I'd thought you'd figure out how to get out of dealing with the people who shunned our father, but kept his parents in their court."

Taja shrugged while shoving down her emotions. There was too much to think about to let her emotions run the moment. Control first, release later on, perhaps during a run in panther form. "That is the past. Supposedly, the Seelie court is looking to be more accepting and more open. They might not like it, but they'll entertain crossbreeds during this time before the gateway opens."

Reina smirked. "Taja, I've not told them you're a crossbreed. No one knows. To them, you're a full were. I've not said anything about you, except that you are the Lady of the Cats in the were realm. The king's heir will be your teacher and his second son will be one of your protectors. You leave in ten days. That should be enough time to get ready."

Taja bowed her head at the regal pronouncement of her queen and friend. "As you wish, Reina."

Her only hope was that this would go as smoothly as everyone involved in the treaty seemed to think it would. Taja decided to prepare for the worst and go from there. In the end, one could never overprepare for meeting the fey, be it Seelie or Unseelie court. Mentally, Taja began to make plans. Later, she'd deal with the physical aspects. Much later, she'd let her panther out to run.

## Chapter One

Taja Drevin arrived at the opulent entrance to the Seelie court and groaned. She didn't want to be here, truly, she didn't. She approached the male fey guards as her eyes took in their appearances and summarily dismissed them. Though they were tall and broad-shouldered, they weren't her type for mating, fighting, or any other kind of challenge.

She knew by the looks in their eyes that they were spoiling for a fight. Others in the Fey-Were Treaty were having problems adjusting, too. *Interesting*. She waited while they finished their inventory of what she looked like and the threat she posed.

She watched their almond-shaped eyes linger over different parts of her body, from her long black hair, caressing the top of her buttocks, to her black leather catsuit. The slits in the dark, supple leather showed her creamy, honey-toned skin while still covering her body effectively. Her green eyes sparkled with highly contained amusement at the scents of desire mingled with caution. She turned to the taller of the dark-haired guards and smiled. "I'm Taja Drevin. I'm from the were contingent. Let me pass."

The second guard snorted. "How do we know you are who you say you are? Perhaps you're someone trying to break the treaty."

Taja's eyebrow lifted. "Who else has come here dressed in traditional were fighting garb?" She tossed her pack to the side. Placing her hands on her hips, she looked at the guards and dropped her glamour. She allowed them to see the slight animal look in her eyes. "Is this enough?"

The dark-haired guard on the left shook his head negatively. He stepped forward, then back again when Taja emitted a growl. "Lady, it only shows you're able to wield some magick that we're not able to."

"So be it. Not many get to witness this." Taja willed the transformation to begin. She felt her nose lengthen and fur begin to pop out of her skin. Inside, laughter bubbled up in

her, as she knew the normal wall of fog wouldn't protect the guards from the sight. She felt her skin stretch, thicken as her bones shifted, popped and assumed more animal-like dimensions.

Within five minutes, a fully formed, deadly black panther swished her tail at the two guards who were disgracing themselves on the side of the gate. A snarl rent the air, showing how disgusted Taja was at the guards' behavior. A few moments later, she picked up the pack she had tossed to the side earlier. "Well?"

The fey struggled to regain their much vaunted composure. The second guard looked at his partner as they both tried to breathe through their mouths. Nodding, the taller one opened the gate. "Welcome to the realm of the Seelie court, Taja of the Weres. May your time here be well spent and highly enjoyable for all."

Taja laughed at the guard's attempt to maintain the famous fey dignity. Once past the gate, the sights before her were just as she'd been told. The colors within this realm were deeper and more powerful than colors she'd seen anywhere else. The blues, greens, and reds were vivid and almost pulsating with a life of their own. Realization made her consider that where she lived felt hot and colorless versus the cool, multi-hued Seelie court.

The sights reminded her of why the treaty was created. Fey magick like this was dreamt about by mortal and meta-human alike. Seeing once again the differences that could bring a better life to all cultures, she was even more determined to keep this treaty intact. The writings about the last war that had occurred between fey and humans were filled with thoughts of the devastation, greed, and sorrow. Not even the other meta-humans were left unaffected.

*The one place I'd prefer not to be and it's where I'm sent. Someone somewhere has a very ugly sense of humor that needs correcting.* Though she knew most of her experience was with her dealings in the Unseelie court, it could be used to great advantage here, since no one knew of her ties to the shadow-court of the fey.

Her stride was bold as she made her way toward the center of the Seelie realm, where the official court was located. Thoughts of what to do while in the Seelie court were interrupted when angry whispers caught her attention. Most people wouldn't have heard them, but being part feline in nature allowed Taja to hear at higher and lower sound frequencies.

Taja palmed her silver dagger from its sheath. As she stealthily made her way between two buildings, she saw a fey man and woman. She could hear them speaking quietly and with directed malice. Taja slid between two empty crates and listened to their conversation.

"You do know she's a threat to our way of life."

"The king declared her protected. But if she learns the sidhe ways, she will help the other weres to overcome us in the next millennia." The woman's voice was angry, yet whiny. Taja's eyebrows lifted in interest at what she was hearing.

The man growled, his fey features hardening. "If this creature learns to wield our Seelie magick, we'll be just as the Unseelie court, impure and truly lost."

The woman leaned into the man and began to unfasten his pants. Her hands were deft about their work. "While we wait for her arrival, how about indulging this Seelie with your pleasures?"

Taja watched with increasing distaste as the fey male angrily and hungrily kissed the woman. His hands lifted up her skirt. Once freed from his pants, he swung the woman around. He shoved his cock into her swiftly. There was pain and pleasure in the cry the woman uttered. Taja's eyebrow rose at the dominance that this fey displayed over the woman. Her eyes scanned for others who might be waiting in the dusk of early evening. When she found no threats, she crept closer.

Intrigued by this show of the much-rumored fey sensuality, she crouched behind a *bahali*, a flowering shrub found in the fey realm. The smell of sex clung to the air. The man kept pumping into the woman while she moaned and tried to impale herself on him. The man leaned against the female and bit her neck as she released, and then he joined her. Taja bit back a groan. It'd been too long since she'd indulged herself sexually.

She waited for a moment until they were both tidying themselves before she sprang from her hiding place. She slid the dagger's edge against the man's neck. Kicking her leg out, she tripped the woman.

"Nice performance. A bit lacking in grace and skill, but not too bad for an ice-blooded fey. So tell me why you both want me dead so badly. Don't move, *churla*, because I can move faster than you, and gut you, as well," Taja growled at the woman. She knew her referring to the woman as prey wasn't right, but she couldn't help herself. Something about this pair irritated her immensely. The fact that members of the royal court were against the treaty didn't bode well for her time here, but she had to stop it dead in its tracks, and intimidation was one of the quickest ways she knew of to deal with opposition.

The woman's almond eyes opened further, revealing the brightest blue that Taja had ever seen. "Who are you?" she said, fear evident in her eyes.

The man looked into Taja's face and she saw when the light of recognition widened his eyes; the scent of fear and worry filled her nostrils. Taja grinned as the man pronounced, "This is Taja, the were-panther we were to greet. Where were the guards when you arrived?" The man's voice was like ice in the coldest of winters.

"I think you're a bit mistaken about who gets to ask the questions here," Taja responded, her voice dropping a notch while her blade caressed the pale neck of the fey male. "Seems they didn't recognize me. After proof, they waved me in with no fanfare or anything resembling a royal greeting. Could have something to do with the fact that they were cleaning themselves up. Now, let's talk about why you want me dead."

"You couldn't be royalty to this court if you tried, Were," the lady said snidely.

The man's ice blue eyes turned to the woman. "Hush, Virea. She might indeed be royalty among her people. Are you, Taja of the Weres? Are you a royal creature to be played with and enjoyed?"

Taking in the handsome fey's appearance, his shoulder-length silver hair, and his ice-blue eyes, Taja grinned wickedly. The pretty fey warrior thought to play games with one who could smell the fear and doubt emanating from his body.

"Whether I'm royalty or not doesn't concern you, Fey. What concerns you is whether I bite and make you one of my kind or not. That would definitely cause a bit of friction, wouldn't it, among your people?"

"You can't harm me. I'm of the royal house and one of your protectors during your stay in the Seelie realm. You may call me Frelin." His pause was to see if she would recognize the name. Somehow, she knew he was hoping she wouldn't. *Too fucking bad he's about to discover just how much I've heard about his royal ass.*

Her quickness shocked both fey. Her dagger flashed in the moonlight as she cut Frelin's arm. As the blood dripped down from the cut, she licked it until it was only a fine mark on his pale skin.

"Frelin, the cold-hearted royal. Third in line to the throne and the one of the biggest opponents to the Fey-Were Treaty." Taja licked her lips greedily as she leered into Frelin's wide eyes. "You're the ass who tried to stop the treaty with talk of purity." She mimicked his speech pattern and deeper voice, "We must keep the blood and the magick lines of our races pure." She shook her head and stepped forward into his personal space, so he understood just how little respect she had for him. "Purity, my ass. You're not as pure as you think, Frelin. I know whom you've played with. Your tastes are known throughout the realms, and it's not always pure. You'll get yours one day. I'll see to it."

A fine-boned hand reached out and slapped Taja. The woman railed, "How dare you say that about Lord Frelin? He would never...!"

Taja reacted by grabbing and twisting the woman's arm behind her back until she cried out in pain. Only when she was sure that the woman understood the nature of the insult did Taja push the woman to the ground, releasing the arm. She looked down at the mused-up fey.

"Bitch, don't touch me again. As for Frelin, I dare because I know. I've seen him in action, though he's never seen me." Taja bit her lip to keep back just how much she knew of Frelin's exotic tastes in sex. That information could be useful later. She turned to Frelin, who brushed off his blue tunic. "Now, I'm expected to make an appearance before the king. You forget that we're not sure that either race can learn the other's magick. Foolish churla. Take me to the king now, before I forget my manners."

Taja sauntered out of the alleyway, heading back to the main street, ignoring both the woman and Frelin. She counted silently while waiting to see if he would come to escort her

to the main court. Frelin emerged from the alleyway without the woman. His eyes blazed with anger as he stood toe-to-toe with Taja.

"You're a bitch, Taja. Just remember that bitches are meant to be used. I will have you one way or another. Mark my words," Frelin ground out between clenched teeth.

"You don't scare me, Frelin, child of Alterran. You forget the power in a were bite. Plus, if I remember correctly, the only kind you haven't bedded is a were, so you don't know any of our special techniques in sexually pleasing our partners," Taja sneered in kind. "Let's go before I decide to cement fey-were relations by making you one of us."

Taja thought about her outburst as they headed toward the center where the main court was located. She knew she'd regret her angry words and yanking this fey's chain, but the idea of people wanting to kill her to break the treaty was absurd. Why they thought her death could break a treaty both races needed was beyond logical reasoning. Whoever was behind this reaction needed education on the were race, and desperately.

As they approached the courtyard entrance to the king's palace, Frelin grabbed Taja's arm. He took his cut arm and brought the wound to her lips. "Drink of me, Taja, and know the ecstasy of fey blood. Know that you'll want it more. That earlier lick was as nothing -- we both know that."

She tamped down the surge of merriment as it threatened to burst from her lips. *Does he think me a vampyr?* Really, the erroneous myths that linked the were and vampyr were quite amusing, especially if the long-lived Seelie sidhe believed in it nowadays. Deciding to play into it, she rubbed against him and let out a little purr. *In for a pence, in for a pound.* She gazed up into the ice-cold eyes of Frelin and smiled sexily before leaning against him. His body temperature was remarkably hot for a cold-blooded sidhe, and even his erection was impressive as it pressed against her hip. She moved against him again and could smell his growing lust for her. "Your blood has already given me pleasure. I don't need more. I can trace you anywhere and everywhere you go, Lord Frelin of the Pure Fey. I know exactly how impure you are."

With that comment, Taja turned and swiftly entered the gateway to the garden of the Seelie court. She knew he thought she hadn't seen his fleeting smile of deadly intent, but she was on her guard against people such as him. There was too much she understood of Seelie politics to be at ease while in this part of Hylia.

As they past through the archway entrance, a mass explosion of colors and sensuous smells greeted her senses. There were flowers everywhere. Roses, carnations, and blossoms she'd never seen before. There, in one corner of the garden, a large silky-looking flower called to her. Taja inhaled the sweet, musky fragrance as she stepped closer to the aromatic bush. The flower contained the deepest of reds and the softest of purples, enhancing the long petals. Taja stroked the blossom carefully and shuddered at its silkiness against her hand. The soft petals stroked her back. She pulled her hand away slowly. The scent lingered in her



nostrils and made her hungry in a way she hadn't been in a long while. Hungry -- sexually hungry -- with her senses reeling from the quick, biting call of the flower.

Frelin's voice was low and caressed her body. She'd never even heard him come up behind her. Somehow, the aroma of the flower and its essence seemed to root her where she stood. His voice was pitched for her ears only. "Those are Lovers' Blossoms. Their touch releases a person's inner passionate nature. When with your lovers, they can also bring you to the heights of passion with each gentle caress. I'd love to stroke them between your thighs while my mouth tastes their essence and yours."

Taja felt herself grow warm and damp. She wanted to feel that flower on her naked body -- craved to feel the were magick inside her ignite as her lover thrust himself over and over into her, powerfully and masterfully, as he imitated the stroke of the petals against her smooth skin. But here in the realm of the fey, there was none up to dealing with the were way of lovemaking. Nevertheless, the scent seemed to strengthen a need deep inside her, even while she tried to resist its siren call. Suddenly, she felt a petal against her cheek.

Frelin gently stroked the blossom from her face down the front of her outfit, where it left her skin exposed. The petals found the slits in the leather that covered her body, and there, they caressed her skin. Each touch seemed to prevent her from pulling away from him. Perspiration erupted as the aroma of the flowers teased and tantalized her senses. Her breasts throbbed heavily with the touch of the blossom. She ached to take her taut nipples and pull them to release the tension. She craved a hot, wet mouth to soothe the peaks.

Her breathing came shallower as Frelin moved the flower across her exposed abdomen. The touch of the soft, velvety petals against her slick skin caused her to shudder. Desire and need curled in her belly as her wetness trickled down her inner thighs. She arched toward the flower while trying to remain aloof from Frelin's whispered comments. Her warrior training warred with her sensual nature, with the sensual nature reveling at the caress of the petals.

"Don't you wish my hands and my mouth were stroking you? My erection rubbing up and down your soft belly?"

She knew he was taunting her with his words. He couldn't know the control she was relying on not to rip his clothes off and slake her sexual hunger. Taja knew she was a shape-shifter, not an animal. Though others thought her hotheaded and prone to react instead of acting with deliberation, they didn't know the true Taja. She took a trembling breath and fought for tighter control on her need. *I'm a warrior, not just a woman, dammit.*

She felt Frelin urge apart her legs with his knee. The petals brushed between her leather-encased thighs where she most craved its touch. Her hands went to Frelin's shoulders in order to steady herself. Though the blossom touched only the thin leather, the heat of the petals sensually burned her. His hooded eyes spotted a slight change in the leather outfit. His fingers swiftly pulled at it, and her feminine curls, dewy with wetness, were exposed to him.

A low growl emitted from Frelin's throat. Just as Taja was under the spell of the Lovers' Blossom, so it seemed was the fey royal. As Taja rocked against the flower's delicate touch, Frelin's hand pressed against her curls as the petals dipped between her labia. Taja bit back a scream as the petals caressed her constantly, back and forth, tempting and teasing.

A growl of desire ripped from Taja's throat as the flower petals finally dipped inside her. The pressure of the blossom against her clitoris caused her to climax violently. Frelin licked his fingers, as they were coated with her juices. His body trembled in reaction to Taja's orgasm. Grunting, he adjusted his throbbing cock within the confines of his pants before standing.

Once her own body stopped shivering, and her breathing returned to normal, Frelin's hand closed the flap of leather. He placed the damp blossom behind her ear. With an evil smile, Frelin placed a finger on her lips. "Better now, Taja of the Weres? The king awaits."

Her eyes narrowed on the retreating back of the royal. *I wouldn't turn your back on me, Frelin of the Sidhe. Your arrogance might just get you killed. Lord of Ice, you now have a were's wrath upon you. Beware, for the Black Death stalks you now.*

She brushed off her own feelings about her helplessness while she'd taken his ministrations. As both were and warrior, she knew that, sometimes, it was a matter of letting your opponent feel they were in control so they'd give you some knowledge of what you faced. In this case, Taja was sure that Frelin was trying to keep her off-balance by constantly coming after her sexually. She knew from speaking to one of the other weres at the negotiations that Frelin had distaste for anything "furry."

Reluctantly, she followed him to the inner court area of the Seelie realm. The court was made of white and gray marble. Taja remembered Frelin's comments about purity and such for the fey. She knew the history of the fey. Among mortals, they were called faeries, brownies, sprites, and wee folk. The Seelie court consisted of pureblooded faeries, sidhe, sprites, brownies, and bainsidhe. All else were of the Unseelie court. Taja had visited the Unseelie court many times as a child. Anyone could go there to see friends, as the Unseelies were a bit more amicable.

As they approached the court itself, Taja saw other fey talking quietly while waiting for her arrival. She walked with Frelin toward the dais and they all turned to look at her. Their glances took in her warrior clothing and her exotic looks. She knew she didn't look like their perception of a were-creature, but, then again, most weres didn't look like anyone's perceptions. It would be a skill the fey needed to learn for their survival.

She saw the king and drew in a breath. His beauty was uniquely fey and otherworldly. His long black hair covered his upper body but also let her see the strength in him. His black eyes looked deeply into hers.

Without a flinch or a smile, Taja bowed before the king. "I greet thee, mighty Seelie king, Alterran. I bring blessings from the were reina, Reina Kai. I'm here to see if indeed we

weres can learn the art of magickal defense from the masters. In turn, I shall teach yours how to go about the mortal realm without causing an uproar.”

The crowd muttered slightly at her bold comments, but, in truth, they all knew they couldn’t refute them. She looked into the king’s black eyes and smiled. Alterran bowed his head slightly. “Rise, Taja of the Weres. Welcome to the Seelie court of the fey. I see you’ve met one of your escorts, Frelin. The one who will be training you will be here shortly.” The dark eyes of the king moved to the left as someone entered the court. “Ah, here he comes. Please meet my heir, Adrastai. He will be the one to teach you some of our magick.”

Taja nodded, then turned to see the fey walking toward her. He stood taller than most fey males, even among the sidhe. His hair was also the ritualistic waist length for warrior-mages. However, what surprised her was how his hair seemed to have more than one shade in it. His hair was like hers, dark black, but in it were hues of deepest blue and purple. His eyes were also dark, the deepest of midnight blues. His broad shoulders showed that he indeed had fey warrior training.

Taja instinctively drew up to her full height of five foot seven inches. Though the sidhe named Adrastai stood above her, she wasn’t going to let him have a psychological advantage over her. If he were anything like his brother, she’d have her work cut out for her. As he approached her, she noticed he didn’t smile. Not a great start for someone who supposedly was going to be her teacher for the next six weeks. She extended her hand in courtesy, as was proper for many creatures.

He looked at her hand and lifted a dark eyebrow at her. “I’m Adrastai. You may call me Adras for short. Most non-fey have trouble with the sound.”

“Adrastai, I fear I’ve no trouble with your name. It’s easy when one has learned Gaelic growing up. Then again, since most royal sidhe fey don’t walk the mortal earth, how would you know?” Her eyes flashed in anger, realizing as she did what game this one wanted to play. She had no time for this. None. Did they not realize that time was ticking down for all of them? In less than three years, the gateway to the fey realm would be apparent to mortal eyes and all hell would break loose.

Adrastai gazed at the woman and smiled. She looked at him with those jade eyes, and he felt something pass between them. Unsure of what it was, he took a deep inhalation to regain his equilibrium. He smelled her essence and knew, even without the enhanced senses of the were, that she’d been captivated by the Lovers’ Blossom.

He felt the tension crackle between him and her, realizing that everyone else in the room sensed it as well. She was a feisty creature and would be entertaining to teach, he thought. Adras reached his hand out to her. She took it gingerly, like a Seelie warrior -- cautious. “I’ll show you to your room, Taja. After you get refreshed, I’ll have one of the servants bring you one of our meditation robes. We’ll begin right away,” he said, his voice low and persuasive.

“Are all of you fey so formal in speech?” she queried as they walked beside each other.

He smiled. “No, only while we’re in court. Outside of that arena, we’re pretty much like other races.”

He guided her out one of the side doors of the court. Adrastai led her along to some small villas. Once at the door of one marked in fey glyphs to mean “stranger,” but which he told her was “visitor,” he let her go. As he watched her walk into her Seelie-based home, he realized she was a tempting morsel. Too bad he wouldn’t play with her while using fey magick. Spotting his brother in the distance, he nodded at Frelin. She would be protected while he wasn’t around. Adrastai left to speak with his father and the council.

Once back in the court, he noticed it had cleared of all but the main council of the Seelie. “Well, Father?”

“She seems unlikely to be able to protect herself, much less be a force here in Seelie.”

The king looked at the outspoken councilor and nodded. “Yes, she does seem a bit less than I had hoped. However, the queen puts full trust in her. There must be something there that’s not readily apparent.”

Adrastai chimed in. “She picks up on more than we think. The formality of our court speech, for instance, is something she saw right away. There is a flair about were magick that’s definitely palpable.”

Alterran smiled at his heir. “You would notice that more than us, Adrastai. I’m more concerned that this purity faction seems to be growing in threat. I’ve alerted Reina that there might be some problems, but we need to discover who is behind it.”

“Agreed. I’ve assigned some men to look into it,” replied the security advisor.

Alterran dismissed the Council with a wave of his hand. “Adrastai, you must prepare your first lesson. We shall reconvene next week to see what more has been discovered.”

As they left the main hall, no one noticed that one of the councilors didn’t head home, but instead drifted toward the outskirts of the main city area. The news he brought would be of interest to the faction, especially the assessment of the latest threat to their plans.

## Chapter Two

Taja looked at her villa as she leaned against the door that separated her from Adrastai. Her body thrummed with the energy between them. Tendrils of her hair clung to the side of her face. She took slow, deep breaths to return the control she had almost lost. Damn, who knew that a simple walk to her residence would make her desire such a gorgeous male?

“That man would tempt the Reina into changing forms while tasting his body deep within her,” she muttered as she begun to take in her surroundings. “Then again, it could be part of my heritage that makes me want him. Damn it.”

She walked around the villa and found a small kitchen area, a large bath, a sitting area, and a large bedroom. All were roomy, airy, and painted in the palest colors of sunshine. However, the bedroom was definitely done in sidhe fashion and textures, all meant to induce a sensual response within a person. Taja gritted her teeth. She wasn’t here for sex; she was here to learn magick. She removed the rucksack from her back and unpacked what belongings she’d brought with her.

She followed that with a shower to revive her after her journey to the forestlands of Wisconsin to come to the Seelie court. It always amazed her that so few humans stumbled into the gateway between the fey and mortal realms. Then again, Taja knew the fey magick was quite strong. It was why her reina sent her to them, to learn how to access that magick.

Though wet from her shower, Taja stood naked as she chose her clothing with care. Although she knew that fey hardly ever wore clothing under their robes, her concern was for her safety. Finally, she selected a deep blue, sleeveless leotard in a matte finish.

Slipping it up her body, she chastised herself for wondering what Adrastai’s hands would feel like on her body. *Get a grip, Taja Drevin. It’s not like he’d be able to handle a were in the full throes of passion.* Once she felt secure in the leotard, though she really wanted to wear nothing but her leather suits, which allowed her freedom of movement, Taja

began strapping on her arm and thigh sheaths for her daggers. Her mind knew that the fey wouldn't understand her need for precautions, but regardless, she would be armed.

Carefully, she slipped on the deep blue robe of a fey student. She cut a slit into the pocket of the robe so she'd have easy access to her weapons. Hearing a loud knock at the door, Taja finished braiding her hair, securing it with a leather thong before going to answer the obvious summons.

She opened it cautiously after smelling someone new at her door. Before her stood a naked male Seelie fey. In his hands were bath salts and a Lovers' Blossom. Taja's eyes widened in shock and hidden amusement.

"What are you doing here?" she asked lightly.

"I'm here to make sure you're well rested and mentally balanced to start learning the art of fey magick, Lady Taja," the servant said, his voice low and soothing. He stepped forward into the cottage.

Taja felt a slight mental urge to let him lead her back to the bathroom, but stopped herself. She could feel the fey's heart racing and smelled the scent of fear as magick emanated from him.

"Stop. I know you're trying a fey mind trick on me, and it doesn't work on weres. Who sent you?"

The male looked at her nervously. "Lord Frelin did, milady. He said that the were-panther would need to assuage her sexual needs upon one as myself. As one of those versed in pleasure magick, I'm here to make your stay comfortable."

Taja's eyes roamed up and down the fey. From his shoulder-length caramel hair to the chocolate brown eyes, he was very similar to some of her fellow were-mates. Though more slender in build, she could tell he possessed a wiry strength and could wield his magick effectively. It appeared that Lord Frelin intended on distracting her from finding out why she was on someone's assassination list.

Taja's dark eyebrow lifted. Oh, yeah, she and Frelin would be chatting about this. He'd pay for his assumptions. She drew in a breath and let it out slowly. *Step politely, Taja. You can't alienate the Seelies right off the bat.*

"Thank you, but I've already attended to my needs. Perhaps you'd like to prepare the bathing chamber for later? I can decide then if I require your services."

The male nodded in compliance before heading into the bathroom while Taja walked out the front door. Displeasure slid down her lower spine as she walked away from her cottage. An aroma, familiar to her, assailed her nose. *Frelin*, she thought smugly. Turning, she came face to face with the man. There was no one alive who could mask their unique scent from her, especially when they were trying to hide their own reactions.

"Something the matter, Frelin?" Taja asked cheerfully as she noted his displeasure.

“You were to be bathed by one of the servants,” he growled. “You refuse our Seelie hospitality?”

Smirking, Taja leaned forward and whispered so only Frelin could hear her response. Caution dictated that he had one of his confederates nearby to report any breach of protocol. “One of your choice, so you could kill me? I don’t think so, little man. Nice try, though. I do believe Adrastai is awaiting me. I’d hate to tell him you kept him waiting by trying to murder me, wouldn’t you?” she purred, letting the panther growl she released travel down his body in warning.

Amusement trembled through her as Frelin unconsciously rubbed his arms in reaction. She made sure her features were neutral as she gestured for him to lead the way down the white cobblestone walkway. The tree-lined path gave way to a preserve of some kind. There were gates before them, and high fencing that seemed to surround it in both directions. Here, she could sense a feel of magick. Part of her soul cried out in recognition of it. She tamped that part down and strode forward. At the gate, she stopped and listened.

Frelin stood beside her. “Afraid, were?”

Opening up her senses, Taja scanned the area. Her hearing and eyesight went beyond the human range. There was a distinct lack of noise and movement that normal forested areas possessed. There was something more, but Taja couldn’t put her finger on it quite yet. She rolled her eyes at Frelin. “Actually, I was listening. Something is a bit off here. There aren’t as many animals moving or speaking here,” Taja said.

A soft rustling behind her alerted her to another presence. She spun as Adrastai came into view. “Indeed, you’re correct, Taja,” he said, his visage one of power in the silver robes of a master mage. Taja swallowed at the manly image he projected. He reminded her of a large panther -- graceful, but powerful, in one erotic package. “The animals in here are kept for training purposes and don’t speak often. When not in active use, they’re kept safely restrained, so no one’s hurt.”

“Are you cruel to these animals?” she queried, looking into the dark, swirling depths of his eyes. “No were tolerates any kind of mistreatment to animals whose form they can take. You’d do well to remember this.”

“No, but they do learn to obey a master’s will in all things, or suffer discipline. We do not harm them, but care for them. Eventually, some here feel the pleasure of the magick,” Adrastai addressed her as he nodded. “They’re our permanent residents in the grove. The pleasure within the confines of magick keeps them here willingly. Come. Let’s enter and see how you fare, were-panther Taja.”

With a look, Adrastai dismissed Frelin, who frowned. Taja held back a smile of mirth. Adrastai took her hand as he entered the park. She walked beside him, her senses active. A familiar scent tantalized her as they progressed on the small path in the woods. Taja bristled with indignation as she pulled her hand from Adrastai.

“You hold some of the creatures dear to my were-circle here. Are they hurt or held hostage?” Taja demanded harshly. How could this fey, a sidhe supposedly knowledgeable in her people, allow her own kind to be held here?

Adrastai shook his head, his hair swaying around him like a living sheet of silk. “No, they’re not. They chose to be here and experience magick. They’re in a sense addicted, and we care for them. You’ll see them after we see if you can master the child basics.”

Taja’s mind raced as she separated the pheromonal scents from the panther and white tiger. Her heart tripped at the thought of a panther trapped. When Adrastai directed her away from where the smell originated, she raced down the other path, knowing Adrastai would follow her. Taja hoped she could do what needed to be done to help the big cats.

Adrastai groaned as he trailed Taja to the animal compound. He wanted this training over with. He truly didn’t think that the weres called upon the same Earth magick that the fey did, but he had promised to try with their envoy. Granted, she was one of the most compelling to ever visit Loreth, the Seelie court capital, but he didn’t see how she could learn their magick. There’d been no evidence of anyone not fey learning the fey magick.

The moment Taja spotted the panther in a cage, she let out a loud, inhuman growl. She ran swiftly to the cage, unlocking it and freeing the animal. As Adrastai watched, the panther pounced on Taja and knocked her flat on her ass. Taja laughed aloud as she punched the animal on the side of the face. A pale green glow enveloped her and the cat as they engaged in playful combat. The panther countered with its paw, hitting Taja on the chest. After several minutes of wrestling with the big cat, Taja brushed herself off and stood up.

Adrastai came to her side as the panther growled at him. He looked into its golden eyes and it backed off. Taja glanced first at Adrastai, then to the panther. She placed her hand on the cat and it paused. “You will not do that to this creature again. Do you understand me, fey mage? You hurt him again; I will make sure you feel my anger.”

Her eyes glowed with restrained were power. Watching every nuance play across her face made him consider the possibility that she could access the power of Mother Earth, Gaia. As her eyes faded from their glowing color to the deep jade green, Adrastai sensed when her initial anger abated. Even the score marks on her arms were fading slightly.

The panther sat beside Taja. Patience and watchfulness seemed to be its focus now. Adras drew in a deep breath. “What did you do with him?” Adrastai asked as he walked toward the cat and it growled again. Standing his ground, he refused to back off from the animal.

“I released him from his reliance on magick. The dependency created within him prevented him from hunting. He can no longer be fed by magick alone,” Taja retorted as she ruffled the dark black fur of the panther.



Adrastai watched her stroke her hand up and down the cat's pelt. He saw how her face relaxed and seemed to glow with the touch of the animal beside her. "Would you claim him as your pet?"

Taja lifted an eyebrow to Adrastai. "You've no concept of were beliefs and living patterns do you? Animals are partly who we are; plus, we're their caretakers. What part of stupid did they raise you in?"

Adrastai took a step to grab the impertinent female, when the panther blocked him. He stared at the cat, willing it to move, but it didn't budge. Taja placed a hand on its tail, and it moved back to her side. Adras's jaw dropped at how the cat responded to Taja's subtle, almost nonexistent commands. There was a oneness that didn't exist among his people and the creatures that were wild in their lands.

"Perhaps no one warned you who you'd be training, I take it?" Taja asked with a wicked smile.

"You're Taja Drevin of the weres. Reina Kai sent you to us for training. There is nothing else to know about you, is there?" Adrastai said, his tone getting icy and cold.

Taja threw her head back and laughed. Reina hadn't told them anything about their student. *Goddess*, she thought, *they're going to blow gaskets left and right*. She tried to hold back a snicker. Her eyes rested upon on a white tiger in a different cage. With that glance, she knew the restless female cat was wild, not tempered by magick.

"Adrastai, release the white tiger. Keep yourself out of her way. I'll show you how *nothing* I am," Taja said, as she motioned the panther to sit off to one side. "Oh, you might want to warn Lord Frelin, my murderous unprotector, that he best move out of the vicinity. The white tiger might eat him. I can smell him from here."

They both heard a snort in the distance. Taja smiled at Adrastai, and he responded in kind. He sensed they shared similar views on his brother. Bonding on some common ground was good in most teaching capacities. Adrastai strolled to the cage. The white tiger growled and pawed at him. He used his magick to pin her in place while he unlocked the cage door.

The huge cat leapt out and rushed at the nearest prey -- Taja. Adras could only watch in shock, as she stood her ground with her legs wide apart in the robe. The white tiger coiled to jump, when Taja growled something at her. It lowered its head, then sat in front of her. The change from predator to docile, obedient animal was astounding. *How is this possible?*

Taja smiled at the creature as she knelt down. Heedless of the robe's limiting nature, she maneuvered to a cross-legged sitting position. The tiger licked her hands as she petted the dappled fur. After she let out a low-sounding growl, the cat leapt into her arms. They started playing around. The panther joined in and, within moments, Taja removed her robe.

She wore her blue leotard underneath, which covered the basics and nothing more. Adrastai was amazed at how lithe and toned Taja's body was. He'd never known any woman

who'd show her body off in such a bold manner before. He found it exciting and a bit disconcerting.

As she tangled with the two wild cats, Adrastai just watched in fascination. Something happened between the white tiger and Taja, but he wasn't sure what. It looked like magick -- but, then again, it could've been some were specialty because of the animal nature within them. Adrastai waited until the big cat slashed at Taja's chest and drew blood. "*Kroykayah!*" he yelled. "Stop!"

Taja and the two cats sat back and looked at him. "Problem?" Taja asked quietly. She knew what she was doing, but to one not were, it could look quite deadly.

"You allowed that animal to hurt you. You didn't correct it or anything," Adrastai angrily spat out. "This is not how one learns magick, by letting animals hurt you."

Taja said nothing but began to hum. Within a minute, a light, shadowy fog enveloped her as she changed from human to feline. When the fog cleared, she was a panther, glossy black with green eyes sparkling in the sun. She looked into Adrastai's eyes. She telepathically spoke to him. "*How can they truly hurt me when I'm like them, wild and free? What Reina of the Weres never told you was this,*" she said, as she morphed back into her human form with the cloud covering her again. She knew that she hadn't been that solicitous of the guards, but this was someone who could report her behavior back to her queen. "I'm known as the Lady of Cats within the weres. I rule all were-felines. I'm the one who speaks to all cats. They all obey me over any other master. So now you know about me," Taja said with a brilliant smile as she pulled on her robe, which was a bit dirty and dusty from rolling around in it.

Adrastai pulled her to her feet. "Seems I wasn't told enough about the were envoy. Why didn't you let us know? Why didn't Reina tell us?"

"My royal position isn't a fey concern, really. It still isn't. I've only told you so you understand that we weres do have our abilities and ranks. I can take care of myself. You fey are not the only ones with magick and skills."

Adrastai held her hand and kissed the palm softly, his tongue tasting the salt of her skin. He sensed her magick, and something infinitely more seductive, under her skin. The feel of her skin was soft, yet strong. Her magick was strong and powerful. It reminded him of fey abilities, but subtly different. She pulled away her hand and looked at him. Their gazes locked as something sizzling and emotionally charged passed between them.

"I believe you wanted to teach me the basics of fey magick. I shall have Maja and Kai with me as we learn." She nodded at the panther, then the white tiger. "They're my companions while I'm here. They'll protect me while I'm here in the Seelie court."

Adrastai's eyes opened wide at Taja's comments. She effectively dismissed her fey guards with her statement. That just wasn't done in Seelie court. *And she knows it, too.* Nevertheless, he felt obligated to warn her. "Taja, you aren't letting your fey guards go, are you?"

“Hell, yes, I’m dismissing my fey guards. Lord Frelin wants me dead. Why? Because I might make pure fey crave a dalliance with a were? Because any resultant births would make them of the Unseelie court? I see I’ve shocked you, Adrastai.” His expression was of disbelief, and, somehow, she felt disappointed that this intelligent Seelie somehow underestimated her people and her. “You didn’t think I knew the laws concerning purity of the courts. I’m not a dumb were, no matter what Freezer Ass Lord thinks,” Taja said as she turned away from Adrastai. She knew the name-calling was impolite, but she was angered that he seemed to lack understanding of her feelings.

Adrastai turned her back. “By refusing your fey bodyguards, you insult the king and the Seelie court. You’ll cause an incident between our realms if you do this, Taja. Think about that.”

Taja growled angrily. *He’s right; if I refuse, I show lack of hospitality. But I don’t trust my guards to truly keep me safe, if they’re anything like Frelin.* Fisting her hands at her side, she looked up at him. “I’ll accept the fey guards, since I really don’t have much choice. The cats are extra protection, as well as companions. However, let me make this plain for you, Lord Adrastai. If there are any attempts on my life, or I hear of any more attempts being made, I shall kill any fey who attacks me. Understood?”

Adrastai smiled at Taja. “Understood, Lady of the Cats. Now, shall we begin our first lesson in fey magick?”

Taja took his acceptance with an internal smile. She knew that he couldn’t deny she’d guessed right; nor could he deny the fact that these attempts were part of the peace process. Then there was the simple detail that assassinations and threats were part of Seelie and Unseelie court politics. The fact that he hadn’t seen fit to enlighten her proved that perhaps he understood that she knew more about the fey than they did the were.

Finally, they approached a grove of willow trees. Once there, Adrastai motioned her to sit on one of the benches. As she sat, she felt a heaviness wash over her. The waves of magick battered her, almost knocking her off the bench. Mentally, she strengthened her shields. Adrastai spoke in the ancient tongue of the sidhe fey. Her brain could recognize only a few phrases as he spoke them with barely a sound. She felt his magick poking at her elevated defenses.

Feeling a bit irked about this type of magickal testing, Taja pushed back against the waves. Carefully, she directed it up and away from her. Adrastai stared hard at her. She knew this was a basic magickal offense and defense test, to see what she knew. *The last time I was tested like this, I was all of ten years old. Sheesh, this is so elementary. I’m not completely without magick, duh.* She rubbed her hands together so she wouldn’t give in to the temptation to bitch-slap the warrior-mage. Gods knew she wanted to, badly, for his thinking so little of her and her kind.

The magickal waves slowed, then finally stopped. Adrastai sat on the bench opposite hers. "You know of basic shielding and magick. That's a fine level from which we can progress."

Taja rolled her eyes. "Any were who shows any magickal potential gets basic training. It's the more in-depth training that is elective. Not all aspire to be a mage."

Adrastai looked askance at Taja. "I take it you're not the mage type?"

She watched the play of shadows across his lean, classically featured face. The shadows emphasized his straight, aquiline nose, his strong jaw, and deep-set eyes. Though he wasn't overly muscular, his body held the type of strength Taja craved most to be wrapped up in. Carefully, she pushed away that train of thought.

In response to his comment, Taja laughed, her voice playing along Adrastai's spine. "I refuse to answer. You'll find out as you teach me the ways of the fey. You can then decide if I've enough skill to teach the Master Mage-Warrior of the Seelies about were glamour magick."

"Can you show me how to shift into an animal form? I know it's not part of the deal, but I will personally compensate you if you will," Adrastai stated softly, his eyes fastened on her.

"Only if I change you into a were, Adrastai. Not many mages exist who can shape change. I can turn to any cat form, but that's my gift as Lady of Cats. Why would a sidhe fey wish to change shape?"

She felt his magick pull at her again. The amount of power at his command was impressive, just like the physical package. Realization hit like a ton of bricks. If he could shape-shift, he could begin to wield more magick, and increase his personal power in the Seelie court, as well. Supposedly he was Alterran's heir, which would mean that if he knew the ways of the were, he would be a blessing and liability with that skill.

Taja tamped down the part of her that wanted to respond to his seductive magick. Feeling his magick calling like a siren spell to her hidden Unseelie talents, again she forced herself to deny that part of her heritage. This was neither the time nor place to reveal how easily she could use sidhe magick, given a chance. No, she would abide by the agreement she and Reina had set forth. She had to do this using only her were abilities.

"If I were to try to teach you how to shape-shift, what extra magick would you show me?" Taja queried. Although she was aware of basic fey abilities, such as levitation, plant growth, sexual charm, and invisibility, Taja was aware that sidhe feys had their own personal magickal skills as well.

Adrastai sat back on the hard wooden bench. The wench had the nerve to bargain for her own personal gain, too. Could she be a were mage? No, she would've bragged about it. Most people who were wore badges of that position, since it was so rare to find them outside

of the fey. His eyes roamed over Taja, looking for signs of duplicity. There was so little knowledge of how the weres dealt with magick. He wished there were some way of independently confirming things, but until he could verify it on his own, he had to accept her word as true.

His highly honed empathic skills were curiously silent when it came to Taja. Not many of the sidhe were as empathic in nature as he was, which is why most didn't know he was the *Qua'ar Tuatha*, the Silent Healer. The machinations of the Seelie court were enough to make him want to reject his inheritor status, but listening to this woman ask him for the same things he asked from her, he wanted to trust in her. *Why should I trust in a woman I barely know? Gods know that beautiful women who thought to use my gifts against me have burned me in the past.*

His sidhe abilities sensed a rise in heat within the area, and he placed his hand in his robe pocket. He fingered his dagger, planning on using it if necessary. Taja leaned forward and sniffed at the air. "Well, Mage? Do we have an agreement?" she asked. Her eyes shifted, searching for something, perhaps the same thing he sensed. That would be a true show of magick, in his book, if that were indeed the case.

"I suppose we do. Please call me Adras or Adrastai. 'Mage' is too formal for the type of training we'll be doing." Seeing her movements, he paused. "What's wrong, Taja?" he asked. He watched her eyes shimmer a deeper green and become more feral in nature. He felt the heat shift to Taja's left, but behind her. He could see her muscles tense, as if she were ready to pounce on whatever was there.

"There's someone or something out there. I can feel it. It's trying to cover its scent, but I can tell there's something familiar about it," Taja answered, her body turning slightly on the bench. She motioned with her hands to the cats at her feet. Adras could sense her were power crackling beneath her skin. "Maj, Kai, search and subdue."

The two cats loped off in the direction Taja pointed. She was pointing almost congruent to where the heat source was. Perhaps he was being hasty in thinking she had accurate abilities. It could be that she had rudimentary talents, but as of yet undeveloped. Her eyes dilated, and then narrowed, as if she were concentrating fiercely. Adras waited for a second longer before kneeling next to her.

Placing his larger hand on hers, he whispered, "Taja, talk to me. What are you doing? What's going on? Explain this."

When she didn't seem to hear him, he leaned closer. He could inhale her fresh womanly scent mixed in with a dose of dried sweat and something sweet. A bolt of desire shot through him. Resisting the urge to pull away, he ignored the scorching sensation traveling throughout his body.

"Taja, what are you doing? Tell me. I need to know if I'm to help you," he whispered in her ear. She looked simultaneously delicate and seductively fierce.

She blinked, then turned her head. Their lips were only a breath apart, while their gazes locked once again. Something dark and hungry passed between them, something so elemental that he felt as if their souls were bonded together in that moment. Then the hungry, feral look faded from Taja's eyes as she softly answered him. "I've sent Kai and Maj to surround whatever it is that's watching us."

Adras barely shook his head in the negative. "You sent them to the wrong area. The feeling I got was that it was behind your left shoulder in the woods."

Taja arched her eyebrow in question. "It would be stupid to attack directly when one wants information and surprise to be on one's side. Didn't you ever learn strategy?"

Her sweet, plump lips were almost distracting enough to cause him to miss the insult she hurled at him. Although he had this sudden need to kiss her lips and see if they tasted as sweet as her scent, he couldn't let her comment pass by without setting her straight.

"We fey do not play games often. If we can confront our enemies, we do so."

"And you all wonder why the humans try to kill you every millennia?" Taja retorted, her unladylike snort breaking the sexual tension between them.

His hand slid up into the arm of her robe. "Just because we believe in directness doesn't mean we do not use subtlety. It means we employ stealth in such a way that it's never detected. Kind of like how my thigh is now wedged between yours without you reacting to my touch."

Sure enough, Adras had slid his large muscular thigh between her legs. Taja had not paid heed because his hand slid up and down her bare arm, causing her to shift awareness to the warmth of his touch. She cursed herself silently. She knew better than to fall for such a strategy. How could she have let this male distract her with only the touch of his slightly roughened fingertips, when his huge thigh parted her legs and she never once noticed? Adras was gorgeous, granted, but she was a trained warrior, who knew better than to let a pretty face keep her from her task.

"A direct attack can hide other more insidious ploys," he whispered as his body pressed closer toward hers.

The heat of his body warmed her as his scent and attitude changed into something a bit more dangerous and sensual. Taja wanted to lean into him and absorb his warmth into her. A niggling memory rose from the depths of the darkness where she'd shoved it down, and, in that second, broke the attraction she was allowing herself to feel.

Her other hand pressed against his muscular chest. She dry-swallowed before speaking. In her mind, she could hear the two felines relaying to her their success. Trying to get both her thoughts and her hormones under control, Taja took a shaky breath. "Look, Adras, we barely know each other. There are more important things to worry about, like who is out there. This game of one-upmanship can wait for another time."

Adras took a deep, even breath to slow the racing of his heart. Silently, he willed his libido to lower a notch. No woman had ever caused his desire to soar as quickly as Taja did. With just the touch of the palm of her hand, he wanted to rip off her clothes and plunge into her.

Unfortunately, she was right -- there were other things more important than whatever was affecting them both. What had his father mentioned in passing about Taja? Oh, yes, something about her also being considered a warrior for her people. He wasn't sure what Alterran meant then, but he was beginning to get an inkling of how accurate of a statement it was. Who would really expect an envoy to be a true warrior? The weres must be the only people who would make sure their envoys could take care of basic defenses for themselves, he thought with admiration.

Shifting his focus, Adras realized the heat source had grown larger and was considerably closer. "It's grown. How is that possible?" he muttered to himself.

"Anything can happen when you don't pay attention," Taja said, a hint of sadness in her tone. "However, you might be sensing Maj and Kai. They've got the thing surrounded."

Just as she said those words, a loud, annoying voice carried toward them. The voice was well known to them both.

"Oh, Pussy Princess, wanna call off your dogs so we can split this joint and go fuck?"

### Chapter Three

Adras stood to his full height. His body shook in contained fury as he maintained a bland facial expression. How dare his brother continue to harass Taja? What the hell was Frelin thinking in pulling this stunt? *Was* he even thinking?

Taja whistled loudly with a quick melody of notes. The nearby growling of the cats assured both of them that they were on their way. From the copse of trees, Frelin emerged with the white tiger and the panther boxing him in securely. Satisfied Frelin wasn't pleased with his bodyguards, Adrastai waited silently.

He glared at his half brother, once he was near them. "Don't you have other things to do, *frertiere*? I don't think Taja Drevin likes your company."

Frelin glanced at his *frertiere*, his blood brother, then to Taja. "Feeling protective of this were-kitty? Her skills are useless compared to the fey. She's not worth protecting, for she can show us nothing," he sneered, disdain apparent in his tone.

The surrounded male leaned closer to where Taja seemed to be casually sitting on the bench. He inched closer and closer into her personal space. When his harsh breath blew into her face as he towered over her, Taja gave him a brilliantly cold smile. Before anyone could stop her, she toppled Frelin to the ground with her dagger at his throat.

"I'm getting tired of this game, Ice Lord. You keep telling me you want me dead, but not why. Why must I die, Frelin of the Seelie fey?"

The fey's eyes opened wide in surprise, then narrowed in suspicion. Taja contained her amusement as she let Frelin scramble to his feet.

"You go too far, were. One day, I will get my revenge. This treaty will be broken. We don't need your or any other race's help to survive when the gateway emerges. You think to



make us weak by crossing our blood and our magick. It will never happen, this I swear,” he sneered.

Taja slid her blade back into its sheath as she measured Frelin’s words. Perhaps her reina had underestimated the xenophobic reaction of most fey, if Frelin was any indication. The work ahead of her would be an uphill battle. She’d promised her ruler and friend that she would do everything possible to make this treaty work.

The only thing she hadn’t counted on was the lack of support from the fey themselves. *Shit*. If they, as a race, weren’t willing to respect the treaties in play, they’d end up extinct. Only memories of what they were. *Oh, yeah, and Reina sent me to fix all this. Joy.*

“We don’t wish to take over your magick, nor your blood. Whoever is telling you these things is lying to you,” she uttered carefully. “We have plenty of our own magick to learn and control. Why would we need yours?”

She could smell his determination and fear. Frelin’s hardened stare bore into her, but she took it unflinchingly. This game was played many a time where her father lived. At an early age, Taja learned to master the skills of staring and intimidation. Not even her father could beat her when she was in this kick-ass mode. Finally, after several moments, Frelin looked away.

“I don’t trust in your words, were. Though you might speak truth, I don’t trust you.”

“Feeling’s mutual. Lack of trust happens when you attempt to kill the visiting envoy. Our governments kind of frown on that behavior,” she drawled sarcastically.

Adras broke into their verbal sparring. Acting every inch the heir to the Seelie throne, he addressed his brother. “Frelin, it’s obvious that Taja and yourself have issues that won’t be solved right away on her first day’s arrival. Now, go. I’ll take care of her while you go do what you need to.”

His brother turned to leave at Adras’s commanding tone.

“Know this, Frelin. Our father has declared peace with the were community. Whatever you and your self-righteous friends are up to, remember that by hurting Taja and breaking the treaty that you’ve condemned yourself from the Seelie court, if caught. If necessary, I’ll kill you myself to rid the stain of your stupidity from this family.”

Frelin stopped momentarily, and then continued walking away from them, rigid with anger. Once he was out of sight, Adrastai turned back toward his charge. Her green eyes were slightly feral looking, but also erotic. He watched as they lost the slightly animalistic glow about them.

Taja released a sigh. “I’m sorry about that, Adrastai. I shouldn’t let the opposition get to me like that, but their devotion seems blind in regard to long-term consequences. Something about Frelin’s fanaticism seems strange.”

Adras nodded. "My father and I are looking into it. Since the treaty was announced to the Seelie court, the increase of anti-were sentiment has grown."

The fey prince reached his hand out and captured Taja's left hand. Turning her palm upwards, he traced runes onto her skin with his fingertip. A chill shivered deep within her body, its icy grip tugging at the restraints she'd placed against using her father's family magick. Each rune increased the bone-jarring cold until she was ready to scream, when it halted.

Her brain tried to process the runes, but the sensations had been almost too overwhelming. Focusing on keeping her breathing even, Taja slowly regained control of her magick. She closed her eyes to center herself. Though it pulled at her magick, she wasn't sure it had removed the blocks placed there. She opened her eyes and looked at him for an explanation.

"It's a child's test to gage the sensitivity to magick being used. I could tell you were sensing it when you started shivering."

Taja snorted. "You think? Those weren't kid runes or even testing runes. What were they? I only recognized *Nummiz* and *Illaelog*."

The "I've been bagged" grin he shot her made her smile back. "They were the runes of magick, sex, love. Also, desire. I wanted to check your response to some of the key magickal issues with the Seelie."

She tried to yank her hand back. Taja realized how the runes had affected her. He'd released the tightly held control she possessed on her sexual hunger. Her body began to tremble with long-suppressed desire and cravings. There was no way she'd be able to let her animal lust out in this realm.

She leaned forward and captured Adrastai's lips with her own. He tasted of mead and magick, of need born and made. Her body wanted more of him, and he seemed to want more of her, as well. His arms grabbed her and pulled her to him. Against his chest, she could feel the pounding of both their heartbeats. She knew that normally she never acted on momentary attraction. The risk of losing control was so great and something she'd never let happen under any circumstances. Feeling the beast within roar, Taja jerked back.

"I'm sorry -- that shouldn't have happened. I know that the runes you used had something to do with this, but for the life of me, I can't think why. The runes seemed familiar, though," Taja rambled as she sat back on her bench.

"You know of sidhe runes and their meanings? Not many do. What did you feel, Taja?" he asked quietly, while regaining his own composure. Never before had he felt a flare directed at the person being tested, as he had with her. He wasn't sure what it meant, but with time, he felt confident he could handle it and the attraction they shared.

“What kind of runes were they, Adrastai? Tell me you’ve not invoked runes that can’t be easily controlled,” Taja said, her eyes narrowing. Smelling the scent of guilt upon him, the two cats surrounded Taja and growled at him. “How dare you do this to me? I knew they were runes of magick, but one doesn’t mark them on someone else when using them. I know tracing them on the person isn’t regular.”

“You’re right. I shouldn’t have done that, but somehow I needed to know how you reacted directly. You have magick, more so than any other person I’ve tested from other realms. I don’t know what came over me. However, I will not apologize for the kiss we shared. There will be other times when we share more than just a simple kiss.”

Taja stared at Adrastai in shock. She thought she’d heard him say they’d kiss again. She could have sworn she’d told him it was a mistake. Somehow, they crossed wires. “Um, no, I don’t think we’ll be doing that again. The kissing part, I mean. I understand the testing, but the other won’t happen again.”

Adrastai smiled at her. It almost devastated her senses, it was so sexy a smile. “Taja, let me explain. I will kiss you again. You will kiss me again. Moreover, I think we might become lovers to explore that magick thoroughly. Yes, I think you need to know the feel of a sidhe fey in you and making you feel the pleasure of being with one not of your kind.”

Taja looked at him. Her mouth dropped open in disbelief as he leaned forward and smoothed his thumb across her passion-swollen lips. She snapped her mouth closed, almost biting his thumb.

“I am not here to have sex with any one of you fey. I’m here to learn magick. Nothing more, or less. What the Hades seems to be your family’s problem with wanting to have sex with me? First Frelin, and now you.”

Adrastai stared at her intensely, causing her lightly tanned skin to blush. It was a stare of a man bent on possession, possession of all of her. It shook her soul.

“My brother is a foolish ass. He doesn’t know how to please, but how to cause pain. I, however, will bring you pleasure the likes of which you’ve never experienced before or will again. Being a sidhe fey’s lover is like none other. It’s also one of our magickal inherent talents.”

Taja groaned. “Now you tell me. Adras, you’re handsome, you’re sexy, but I’m not going to have sex with you. I’m not.”

Adrastai leaned forward and captured her chin in his hand. “But Taja, *hajibi*, you are going to be my lover. I’ve decided.”

His lips claimed hers, and all of her objections were vanquished with the kiss.

## Chapter Four

After that intense, demanding kiss, Taja stalked off toward her cottage for the night. Adrastai wandered, once he was sure the object of his sexual desire had left the area.

Running his hands through his loosened hair, Adras took a couple of deep, cleansing breaths. He was attempting to get her scent out of his system, though he knew it'd be practically impossible. After binding his warrior-length hair into a queue, Adras called forth his sidhe magick to help him regain control of his senses.

Adrastai focused on causing wind bursts to move fallen leaves and ruffle the varied grasses. Ever since his father had declared the treaty with the were folk as binding, and for the good of the Seelie court, the opposition had grown in its verbal disdain of mixing races even for the acquisition for knowledge. *There's nothing wrong with trading knowledge, skills, or progressing deeper in intimacy. We've got to find a way to stop their attacks on Taja before words gets back to the reina. We can't afford to be left defenseless magickly before mortals again.*

Adras ceased his wind technique and moved into creating the renowned faerie lights, causing them to move in concentric orbits between two rowan trees. As part of his mind concentrated on the orbs, he continued his thoughts regarding the treaty.

"By restoring the lost knowledge we had of individual glamour, we can blend in with the mortals when the gateway appears. Why on earth would anyone want to risk more Seelie and Unseelie deaths by not agreeing to the terms of the treaty?" he mused aloud.

Brightening the navy blue sphere into a pale, sky blue, he continued trying to plot out the facts. "By allowing more pain and possible deaths, whoever's behind this conspiracy can wrestle for control of the Seelie court."

Adras nodded as the crimson red sphere burst into faerie flame. Aiming carefully, he mentally hurled the fireball at the deep green ball. They exploded on impact.

“With control of the Seelie court, they can negotiate with the Unseelie court and cause utter chaos. If they’re going for this purity mess, as Frelin’s spouting, then they’ll be able to declare war on any and all races and half-breeds in order to secure the purity of the Seelie and Unseelie *philae*, sub-races. No matter what, it’s going to be the sidhe warriors who do most of the battling for the Seelies.”

The four remaining balls kept circling in their orbits while brightening and darkening depending on Adras’s mood. He whispered the release word, and the orbs disappeared with a popping noise.

Adras decided he needed to make plans with his father for ensuring his student’s safety. The idea of Taja being hurt or even killed by these people made him burn with deep anger. Even taking in the political aspects, there should be no reason for Adras to feel this deeply about the queen of the cats. Yet, there was something between them that called forth even his most private desires.

He pulled out a piece of rock crystal that had been tuned millennia ago to the throne room of the Seelie court. “Father, we need to talk. Things are getting worse, and Taja Drevin is caught in the middle of it.”

His father responded from the crystal that sat next to the chair he occupied. “Worse how? I do know your brother insisted that the envoy has slandered his good name.”

“As if. She put him in his place when he tried to use Seelie sexual intimidation. I’m not sure she’s immune to the magickal components that comprise the family talent.”

Adras continued to walk out of the park, casually nodding to fellow Seelies. They stayed out of his personal space, as he preferred “This secret alliance who wishes us isolated is making attempts on the Lady of Cats’ life.”

Alterran nodded, and Adras noted his father’s acceptance. “So, Taja let you know who she was, then, in regard to her position among the weres. The fact that she came without escort and with minimal defensive weapons shows how sincere the weres are. They want this treaty to work just as much as the lead council members of the Seelie court.”

A brief movement to the left caught Adras’s attention. “Kroykayah. Hold a moment, Father.”

Sliding his dagger from his boot sheath, the warrior-mage silently made his way to where he’d seen the flash of something. Once behind the building, which housed some of those in training for warrior-mage status, Adras called forth his protective magick.

“Whoever you are, come forth. *Tól acharn*, vengeance comes if you don’t respond,” Adrastai called out. He held his dagger in a defensive manner. His face was a fierce, intense mask of concentration.

Out of the brush to his left leapt a faerie, his dagger coming down for a killing blow. Adras dove to the side, then swung his dagger up to block the descending blade. The male faerie crouched before Adras, his eyes glittering with anger -- and perhaps a touch of

madness. His wings were folded almost flat against his back, to prevent harm during the duel, and his matted hair made Adras curious as to how long the fey had been hiding out in the woods.

“*Rhaug!* Demon! You allow yourself to mingle and share small intimacies with one below you. How dare you pollute the Seelie lines with the likes of that creature?” the faerie exclaimed as he attacked Adras.

Adrastai called forth the *tiene sith*, the faerie fire, aiming it at the faerie’s wings. As the fire began to eat away at the magickal essence of the wings, the fey denizen screeched in agonizing pain. The prince allowed himself a split second to acknowledge his success with a smirk. With a roundhouse kick, he knocked his attacker down, the dagger falling to the ground.

He uttered the words to undo the *tiene sith*. Grabbing the somewhat bent and misshapen wings and pulling fiercely, Adras forced the man to look at him. The man’s gasp of pain told him that he struck the right nerves within the wings.

“Who are you? Why did you attack me?”

“Caerwydon commands, and I obey. In her graces and arms, I find completion. She demands that we Seelie remain pure. Without purity, we will lose what magick we possess. You mock her, and you shall die, along with your were-whore,” the Faerie said in a high-pitched, singsong voice.

“What is your name, Fey?” Adras demanded, shoving the cackling faerie against the building. “Tell me where to find this Caerwydon.”

The fey laughed as bloodstained spittle came out of its mouth. “Call me *tercáno*, herald of your impending death. Caerwydon is everywhere, and out of your reach, son of Alterran. We are too many to stop. We will have purity by acquiescence or by force.”

“*Tercáno*, you will tell me where Caerwydon is. I command it!” Adrastai demanded as he shoved the fey to emphasize his point. He wiped the spittle from his cheek, making sure to use his captive’s wing as a cloth. The man cried out in pain as Adras wrenched the wing a bit more out of its socket.

The faerie shook his matted head slowly, all the while smiling grotesquely at Adras. “So we begin, and you lose this round. In the bosom of purity, I lay.”

The fey slid a rapier-thin dagger out of a hidden wrist sheath. Before Adras could grab it from him, the faerie plunged it deep within his own chest, instantly stilling his heart. Adras swore as he let the dead body drop.

Retrieving his contact crystal, Adras updated his father, then directed three of the court guards to come fetch the body. After notifying the healers to examine the dead faerie for clues, Adras headed toward Taja’s cottage. His mind pondered who this Caerwydon might be. The name sounded familiar to him but he couldn’t place exactly from where. Then

his mind shifted to Taja. He increased his pace as his thoughts churned. Who knew what trouble she could be in?

The white and gray cottage was one of five guest cottages the Seelies had for visiting dignitaries and other nobles. Adras noted the lights on in Taja's as he stealthily made his way toward the nearest windows. After her trip to the Seelie court and everything else, the woman didn't deserve to be attacked in her own sanctuary amid the fey.

He heard her melodious voice as it addressed someone unseen in the cottage. Inching closer, Adras peered into the room. Taja undressed guilelessly in front of her new protectors, the wild cats she'd rescued. His breath hitched as she turned toward the window and seemed to sense him.

Adras couldn't pull back even if he wanted. Taja's bare breasts were rounded, full-tipped, with dusky rose nipples. Her lightly tanned skin accented the play of muscles as she poured bath salts into the Jacuzzi. What caught his attention was the dark thatch of curly hair between her thighs.

In his mind's eye, he could see himself entering through the window and approaching her. He'd note her surprise with another mind-numbing kiss, then he'd sink to his knees before her. Adras imagined himself parting her legs and, with his long tongue, sliding to where the core of her wetness emanated. Then he'd use his fingers to plunge deep within her tight warmth to ready her for his thick erection. Only when she'd come and he'd licked her clean would he allow himself the joy of sliding deep inside her.

Adras bit back a groan at the idea of him ramming himself deeply into Taja as she moaned and whimpered. He had to clear the thought of him and his student together. It was unheard of for a teacher to take a student as a lover until the student had proven capable of handling the sex magick that would be evoked. His hand rearranged the huge bulge in his pants.

Yet, the whole time, his eyes never left Taja. She instructed her two cats to leave the bathing area as she slid herself into the water. The heat of the water made her gasp, then sigh. He knew that the salts she used were to ease muscle aches and to increase healing. He watched as her body began to relax.

She had his rapt attention as Taja took the sponge and washed her skin, starting with her arms. With slow, large circles, the sponge cleaned her upper extremities especially taking time around her breasts. Adras's mouth went dry as he watched Taja caress each one, causing the nipple to pucker like a bud.

He wanted desperately to taste those dusky tips. His mouth wanted to suckle hard on them, his teeth scraping them lightly so his lips would then have to soothe the peaks with his cool breath. Adras's hand slid back to rearrange his throbbing cock again as arrow after arrow of lust, desire, and something else exploded within his body.

When Taja's hands slid under the water to wash her genitals, Adras bit back an oath. He tried to walk away, but was glued to the scene, as much as a Peeping Tom would be. He

knew that she was caressing herself to bring herself to release. By gods, he wanted to be the one to do that, though watching her stimulated him just as much.

He undid the stays of his pants, freeing his erection from its restraint. As Taja lifted her hips to allow her fingers access deep within her, Adras slid his fist over the head of his cock and began stroking himself in long, hard motions. He heard her whimpers and mewls of pleasure as he continued to masturbate to the sight of her touching herself.

Taja's body bowed as her fingers thrust hard and deep within her. He felt his body shudder as his climax matched hers. Suddenly, she yelled out something in the were tongue, but with his name, as she came. He bit his lip as his balls tightened painfully and his cock reacted to Taja's outburst. Just as quickly, he went over the edge.

Adras took deep gasping breaths as he fought to recenter himself. His eyes focused back on her as he began refastening everything. He watched her wash her mons again, then languidly stretch out in the sunken tub. He could hear her whisper, "If it wasn't for duty, I'd have Adras in an instant. Damn duty is going to have me masturbating every day."

A huge smile took over Adras's face. *She wants you as much as you want her. There's something there. Find a way, Adras -- around the student/teacher thing, as well as the treaty. Then seduce her senseless.*

Releasing his breath slowly, Adras glanced once more at the relaxed Taja, and then retraced his steps away from the cottage. She was safe from whoever this Caerwydon was, for the moment. When he was a safe distance from the cottage, Adras contacted the guards to see if they'd retrieved the body yet.

Upon the affirmative, Adras announced he'd be there once he cleaned up and had something to eat. Darkening his crystal and storing it in his pouch, Adras said aloud, "Now to figure out how to act on this mutual attraction and keep to the treaty, as well. In time, Taja of the were-cats will be my lover."

The idea felt right to him. Adras wasn't sure why deep inside he liked it, but he knew that for some reason his sexual talents responded to her fiercely, whereas other Seelie women didn't arouse such a need to use them.

*First things first, though, Adras. Concentrate on teaching her how to use Seelie and sidhe magick, and learn hers. Then you can claim her for your lover.*

Plans swirled in his mind on his conquest of Taja, alongside his plans to teach her his people's magick. Adras grinned for the rest of the evening, even when they couldn't decipher how Caerwydon managed to have such mind control over the dead faerie.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three days later, Taja and her animal companions found themselves in the park where they'd met. The animals had hunted and were now resting quietly at her side. She sat next to one of the many water fountains she'd discovered, her hand lazily passing through the water.



For three days, Adrastai had spent time teaching her the fundamentals of fey magick. Taja realized a truth that he had mentioned before in passing. Sensuality was part and parcel of fey magick. Images of Adrastai -- in his robe and out of it -- filled her thoughts. She licked her lips as one particular memory came forth.

Adrastai had worked her hard on defensive and offensive spells that the Seelie -- in fact, that all fey -- used. As they continued through the hottest part of the day, Adras had stripped off his robe and his shirt, exposing his gloriously creamy skin to her gaze. She'd fought against jumping his body and having her wicked way with him. It'd taken another warrior who needed to speak with Adras to break the sexual tension mounting between them.

Taja could feel that tension rising, as well as something more. It'd taken her twice as long last night to find her release. Once she did, she'd realized how much sexual magick the sidhe possessed and held back from others. She sighed as she realized that she'd have to learn that part of magick as well. *Damn it all to Hades.* She grimaced in frustration as she splashed water onto the cats deliberately.

*How can I do this? How can I allow myself to sink further into learning this magick without acknowledging the fact that I have sidhe fey blood within me?* Taja let out a deep sigh as she pondered her fate. She lifted her head and sniffed at the aromas of the forest, then lay back as nothing set off her senses.

Adrastai stood within the woods and watched Taja through the foliage. His eyes took in today's outfit. Taja declined to dress in the silks and satins of the fey. Her refusal to be a frilly fey amused him. Instead, she wore her leathers, or jeans and tank tops. Today she wore a swimsuit made of deep blue Lycra. The color of it enhanced the honey tone of her skin.

Over the past three days, he hadn't kissed her or done more than casual touches for training. His thoughts, however, were nothing but carnal ideas on how to make love to her. As his eyes followed her long, bare legs, he felt his lower body tighten in desire. When she lifted her leg into the air to draw a rune he taught her in this morning's class, Adrastai's eyes followed the long leg to where it met her hips. He wanted her badly. He needed to sink his constant hard-on into her before too much more time had passed.

Before he realized what happened, he stood before her. She looked up at him. Her eyes were heavy-lidded from talking to the cats. Within their depths, he could see desire and lust that matched his own. He leaned over her, his hands catching the bench seat that was near the fountain.

Neither cat moved from her side except to give Adras room next to Taja. It was obvious that they were used to the two being close while learning magick, and to them this was no different.

Adrastai bent down and his lips met Taja's. His tongue delved into her mouth, tasting the honey and mead she had enjoyed earlier for lunch. *I could taste her and never tire of it.*

*Her lips are so soft and giving.* He groaned as she teased her tongue around the roof of his mouth, creating sensations that caused him to shudder.

Adrastai drew her close to him, allowing Taja's arms to encircle his neck. Her fingers slid up his jaw until she finally touched his hair. As she played with it, she noted its softer-than-silk texture, as well as its thickness, since it was pulled back from his face with a leather thong. Taja moaned as her mouth was assaulted by sensations she'd never experienced through only a kiss.

As he lowered himself on her, her body arched to meet his. His leather-encased thighs slid against her bare ones making her shiver at the contact. She wound her legs around his as his hands cupped her ass, bringing her mons to his hips. His obvious erection grazed against her repeatedly until finally he rested his hips against hers. The shock of his arousal caused her to mewl with cravings that were purely for Adrastai.

Her hands fisted in his hair as Taja pulled him down for yet another kiss. Her mouth devoured his. Her tongue tasted his pure male power. She craved more of him, desperately needed more of him, closer, touching her everywhere. His fingers ran through her loose hair.

She reveled in how his touch was so bold, yet so gentle, as he palmed the back of her head to draw her closer against him. All she could think of was having more and more of him now. She knew he could unlock places of hidden sensuality in her that no other lover prior to him had ever let loose.

His hand brushed down her neck to her shoulder. His fingers tugged down her swimsuit strap. As the crest of her breast was exposed, Adrastai moaned with need. His lips gently teased her upper chest with featherlight kisses as her hands wandered down his back. Her fingertips slid down his silk shirt until his slightly rough leather breeches stopped her questing. After a few tugs, the shirt finally came loose from under the waistband.

She rubbed her body against his, her nipples hardening under the touch of his skin, then his mouth. A low growl emanated from Adrastai's throat in male satisfaction. An echoing growl of passion emerged from Taja as he nibbled on one of her darkened, puckered tips. Her back arched to force him to take more of her in his mouth. He peeled the swimsuit off the other shoulder so he could caress both weighty globes.

She fit in his palms perfectly. The gods must have created the fullest, roundest tits to fill his palms. Sending a prayer of thanks, Adras squeezed her tightened nubs together as he licked, bit, and then soothed them simultaneously with his mouth.

"Turnabout is fair play," she huskily whispered as she ripped open his shirt.

Agile fingers leapt across his chest to play with the flat dark nipples. She flicked, pinched, and teased them to hardness with her fingernails. He lifted himself up so Taja could use her wet, hot tongue on him as well. Her mouth suckled hard on his tight nubs. After

tormenting them into a fierce hardness, her tongue then caressed and soothed each nipple in turn.

Adrastai growled with passion as he pulled back on Taja's hair, causing her to abandon her fun. He slid down her body slowly, his mouth trailing hot, wet kisses on her breasts, between them, and lower. His tongue curled around her belly button as he felt her muscles bunch beneath his touch.

Taja let out short pants as her passion increased. Her deft fingers intertwined themselves into Adrastai's hair, which had slid loose from its holder. Stray silken strands of liquid night teased her body like light whips causing her to tremble with passion.

His hands tugged at the swimsuit that was bunched at her hips. *It needs to come off now! I need to taste her intimately. Her scent is driving me insane with wanting her.* She lifted her hips to accommodate him. Finally, he could see her lower half without any encumbrances, water, or any other obstacle preventing a clear view. Adrastai slid his hands under her smooth ass and pulled her to him. He buried his tongue between the womanly folds.

Taja's grip tightened on his hair. "Adras." The sound of his name coming from her throat burned through him. He brought one hand up and cupped her mons as the other began to stroke her arousal along with his tongue. Taja bucked her hips as he pressed her clit with his thumb and lightly blew air across it.

"Oh, my gods, please," she cried.

He could tell she was close to an orgasm. This first time, he wanted to have his mouth sucking her juices as she came apart for him. Putting her pleasure before his felt natural and right to him. Normally, she took mutual pleasure or demanded pleasure, but rarely did they give it without wanting it back.

His tongue delved deep inside her. The taste of her there was more exquisite than her mouth. As his long tongue slid in and out of her, Taja's body tightened around him. Adras grinned as he followed with sliding one of his fingers deep within her. She arched as a sob of pleasure wracked her body. His chuckle of male delight made his tongue and chin rub against the sensitive parts of her body.

"Adras! Please make me come! I can't take more," she sobbed as her hips lifted to meet his wet, waiting mouth.

He stopped for a second, causing her to whimper in protest, and then slid another finger deeply into her. Curling them so they'd fill her, he pushed them in and out of her at an angle, a bit harder and faster. His mouth suckled on her clitoris, pulling it deep, where his tongue could tease and torture her to greater heights of pleasure. Her body began convulsing on his long, curled fingers that glided in her. Adras's erection throbbed in anticipation of her wet juices surrounding him while he thrust it deeply into her -- but only after she came for him, only him.

Adras thrust yet another finger in her tight body and begin to pump harder as her hips rose time and again to meet his thrusts. He lowered his mouth over her clitoris, pressing firmly with the bottom of his lip. The sensations of such sensual torture sent Taja careening over the edge. The wind picked up her cries of his name as she climaxed, her inner muscles clamping on his fingers, milking them as they would his cock.

He'd lifted himself up to cover her body with his when his ears picked up the soft shuffling noises of something closing in. It wasn't the cats, as they were pretending to sleep. His short pants were preventing him from hearing clearly, so he pulled in a couple deep breaths of air, to slow it down.

Taja slid up and reclined against the bench. Her eyes were slightly unfocused, but he could tell that she, too, sensed something. He drew his legs to be outside of her thighs. His erection rested against her mons, almost demanding entrance. Adras controlled the instinct to flex his hips, to be where he had wanted to be from almost the moment he saw this enticing woman.

Taja slid her other leg back into her swimsuit. She managed to get it up around her waist when the first bevy of arrows landed near the cats, awakening them from their slumber. Taja muttered instructions to both cats as they loped off, avoiding the arrows aimed at them.

They were under attack by an unknown enemy close by.

## Chapter Five

Adrastai grabbed Taja and dragged her behind a large willow tree. It provided just enough protection as she finished pulling on her swimsuit. Adras growled into her ear, “I like the way your breasts move when they’re free. If this hadn’t happened, I’d have loved to be deep in you while you were on your knees so I could watch them move with my every thrust.”

Adras felt the press of her warm body against his chest. He still wanted her. His cock was throbbing, begging to take her deep and hard. He craved to bury himself so deep in her that not even the gods could tear them apart. Granted, he should be thinking about who was trying to kill them, but all his thoughts were on finishing what they’d started.

“Now’s not the time, but one day, we will. Have you noticed the wind’s picked up?” she responded. “Adras, there are at least three people armed out there. That’s what the cats have discovered so far. Who would want you dead?”

“Are we sure they’re after me? Or you?” he asked. His thoughts ran through yesterday’s attack and the lack of evidence found.

Taja looked at him as she considered his words. He watched her eyes go from feral to human then back to the larger pupil designating her feral status. “You think it’s Frelin? The cats would’ve alerted me if he were among them. They know his obnoxious smell too well to be fooled.”

Adrastai silently agreed with her assessment. The panther and the white tiger knew Frelin well enough to notify Taja if he was in the area. *Who now has turned against Seelie policy and decided to physically attack the heir to the throne, as well as the were envoy?*

Not one fey came easily to mind. His father, himself, and the head of the royal guard had spent the past couple of days making lists of people who were vocal in their protests against the were-fey accord. Adras couldn’t believe some of the names they’d listed. People

who'd been loyal to the court and king for years now espoused racial purity and closing the fey kingdom from all others who weren't of the pure fey races. Unbelievable that even some of the sidhe were brainwashed into believing this racial purity/increased magickal ability mess. A sigh of frustration slipped from his lips before he could stop it.

Taja took in Adras's appearance. His body still maintained a slight glow from their aborted lovemaking. She sighed softly. The cats had fed from her emotions and now chased the archers deliberately and playfully. She really wanted to question one, but realized it was a futile hope.

"Adrastai, the cats are chasing the three archers. However, due to their sudden playful mood, I don't think we're going to get to them to ask many questions," she said regretfully. A glimmer of an idea began to blossom.

Taja looked over the land before them as the wind whipped about them. Confused about how the wind could suddenly pick up like that, Taja opened her mouth to ask Adras. She then saw Adrastai's countenance. Putting two and two together, Taja glided her hand up and down his arm. "Adras, please. Control yourself. If you make it too windy, we won't be able to track one of them."

"Track them down how?" Adras queried, his puzzlement plain in his voice. "I thought you said the cats are playing games with them."

Instead of answering, Taja smiled at him as her eyes changed to a deep emerald color. Her bones seemed to melt, then shift and lengthen. The chin shortened as the nasal area lengthened and shifted to feline form. Black, downy fur erupted over her body, matching the long tresses that were once there.

Within minutes, Taja completed the transformation. Adrastai stood transfixed. He never once looked away or thought it odd. If she had known how sexy and magickal he thought her change was, she would have rejoiced in the knowledge that he accepted her for what she was.

Once in her panther form, she reached out telepathically to him. "*Can you hear me?*" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes, I hear you fine. Now what, hajibi?"

She loped off in the direction of one of the archers. Adras followed her swiftly and silently. He smiled as her tail swished in obvious delight of the chase. With their mental link, she explained how the cats had left her one to play with, once they knew she'd shifted form. As he listened to her directions inside his head, Adrastai kept tracking the queen of the cats, even though she was out of his immediate sight, but not his infrared range.

Then, in a small clearing prior to the entrance to the park, he spotted her. Taja leapt and landed on the back of a long-, lavender-haired fey. He struggled to throw her off, but in

the end, Taja knocked him down. Out of fear, the sidhe cast an offensive magick spell, which she countered using the techniques Adras had taught her.

Adrastai seized the back of the fey's neck. With a strong lift, he slammed the man against the trunk of a nearby tree. "What are you doing here? Why were you trying to kill us?" he growled angrily.

"I...I...I wasn't trying to kill you, Lord Adrastai. I was trying to kill the were-bitch. She'd corrupt us with her inferior blood and magick. We were informed that we could kill her here with impunity. No harm would befall us," the fey stuttered. "We were promised. She said that we wouldn't be held accountable."

Adrastai's face grew hard as rage flowed through him. Taja observed their exchange in panther form, her body bristling with anger and the need to punish. Her tail lashed side to side, fast and furiously. Adrastai could feel the tension emanating from her. He knew she wanted blood for this. Nevertheless, he had to refuse her. Without more information, they would only be cutting off tendrils, not the head of the organization.

"Taja is a guest of the king. He stated that no harm is to befall her. Were you planning on hiding from the Seelie king forever?"

The fey's eyes opened fully in terror as he realized the truth. His brown eyes filled with unshed tears. This man was really a boy, if Adras admitted it to himself. His memory placed who this sidhe was because of the recent coming-of-age trials. "Go home, Drakken. Go home, and tomorrow go to the king and tell him what was done here. Ask his forgiveness for this near-disaster. I cannot give it to you, as my life was almost taken, as well."

Taja changed back to her normal form slowly. Adrastai watched her body elongate, shift, and form back into the woman he lusted after and admired. "I know you wanted to rip him apart. Thank you for not doing it. He'll be punished by the king, I promise you."

Taja's eyes burned into his. "By were laws, his life was forfeit for attempting to kill one of the *Kahhen*. Death is the only acceptable justice for unannounced challenge to one of the ruling circle."

Adrastai nodded as he pulled her into his arms. If she were harmed in anyway, the truce would be instantaneously ruined. Just when the fey had all the pieces in place for peace, someone had decided to make war on all the realms that could help the Seelie court keep a low profile when the glamour spell went down on the gateway soon. He couldn't let her get hurt or more involved. If anything happened to her, he'd be a raging lunatic.

It had nothing to do with the treaty, and everything to do with how much they had in common. Their daily talks were about each other's realms, daily routines, providing for those who looked up to them, and how they coped with being in charge of others' lives. Their compatibility only enhanced the attraction he felt for her. But how could he tell the queen of cats among the weres that she was not to be involved in this investigation because she might get hurt?

"Listen, Taja. I know your law on this. You've got to remember -- we're in Seelie court now. In addition, if you kill him, we won't have a lead on finding out who is behind this. That's why I let him go. Once he sees whoever he needs to, Drakken will go to the king, then back to whoever his superiors are," Adras explained reluctantly.

"Dammit, I understand that, Adras. It's just damn frustrating when I realize how close I came to death today. That my thoughts, senses, and more were so filled with you that I almost jeopardized us both. It rankles," Taja admitted, turning away from Adras.

Adras cupped her chin. "Look at me, Taja. Don't you think I feel the exact same way? I'm supposed to be your teacher and one of your protectors. They caught us both unawares because we were caught up in the moment in the wrong place. Notice, though, we're both alive and so are your cats."

"True," she reluctantly agreed.

"Let's go back to your place. You can wash up, eat, and try to relax from this ordeal. Tomorrow is a big day, since we're going to be working on the next step of utilizing magick and manipulating elements."

Taja let Adrastai guide her back to her door. He pulled her close and kissed her until she was breathless. The heat flared between them, hotter and more burning than ever before. As he pulled away, Taja let out a moan. That kiss had ignited the beast within her. Once again, Taja was reminded of why she never got involved with men who could tap into her beast. She remembered the admonitions about losing total control with someone who wasn't a were, or couldn't handle the sex magick of the beast within her. Pushing him away would be for the best, but deep within her heart, the thought of doing that hurt.

He bowed before her and she bit back the surge of pleasure that filled her. "Until tomorrow, Taja."

Taja watched him leave before turning to go inside. A faint buzzing sound reverberated in her head, warning her. Thanking Adras for his tips to enhance her natural instinct, she called silently to the cats. They entered the cottage before her, ready to take on trouble.

A crash, then growling, rolled throughout the cottage. As Taja entered, she saw Frelin pinned against the far wall. The flowers she'd picked earlier were trampled beneath his feet. Kai had his thighs pinned and Maj stood on her hind legs to press his back against the wall. Taja shook her head in mild disbelief as she made her way to the royal pain in the ass's side.

Once before him, she moved her forefinger back and forth like a scolding schoolteacher toward a bad student. "Tsk, tsk, tsk, Frelin. When will you learn that you can't best me?" Taja sneered. She let the full force of her aggravation from earlier come out now.

The fey's eyes pierced hers. She felt him try to summon sidhe magick against her. She magickally slapped him down without blinking. Mentally, Taja made the cats release him,



but she kept them as a buffer between them. She could see his anger at being caught, and his frustration at not being able to carry out his plans against her.

"I will see you dead! I will. You're nothing but an animal. You can't even learn proper sidhe magick," he spat at her.

Taja laughed as she wiped the spittle from her cheeks. "How do you think I shut down your magick like that? You think the weres know how to do that? Begone, Frelin. You can tell your friends you've failed yet again. I'm learning Seelie magick quite well. Once I also finish teaching my magick to Adrastai, the best warrior-mage among you, then I'll go home, not before. You cannot have me, nor will I let you hurt what's mine. Get out before I change my mind and let them tear you apart."

Frelin's eyes widened, then narrowed. "I'll leave. Know this, were-bitch, I will have you as my personal pet. Adrastai won't touch you, once you're mine."

With that comment, he walked past Taja to the door. Once he was almost through it, she called out. "But he's already tasted me. He knows how good weres taste now. Unlike you."

The door slammed, and the sound reverberated throughout the house. Taja stood there and grinned happily. Sometimes, it was good to be Kahhen of the cats. At least now her frustration of earlier was erased by this latest encounter with the king's other son.

Grabbing a broom and a magazine, Taja began cleaning up the mess he'd left. What else could happen in the next week before the Beltane festival?

## Chapter Six

It was Beltane, and Taja could've created a brick from the thick sexual frustration of late. Every day that she spent in the company of the warrior-mage, the more Taja found to like about him. Though sometimes he seemed to put her off when she asked about the investigation into the death threats, he easily and willingly shared with her. There was no longer any hesitation to teach or wield the other's magick.

Taja looked at the outfit on her bed and sighed. She didn't want to attend this party. She couldn't bring the cats with her, either, and they weren't happy about it. The glimmering dress was before her, and Taja grimaced at it.

It had been a week since the attack. Adrastai had insisted on her coming to this party. This gathering his father was hosting meant nothing to her, but he said it was something one didn't refuse lightly. Taja agreed then to accompany him. She wasn't going to until she realized it was probably a chance for the king to see how she was progressing.

She had bathed herself again without the pleasers that Frelin and the others had offered her. Taja debated about wearing this gift of Adrastai's as she wondered why he'd offered her such a gift. The shimmering honey-colored dress glittered with the thin silver threads running through it. The sensation of silk against her body made her nipples harden, and her body ached for Adrastai's touch again.

Since the murder attempt, he had neither touched her in that manner, nor done more than kiss her senseless. Taja was feeling put out, and she didn't understand why. She was to the point of taking pleasure from her own hand, however reluctantly, and she knew instinctively that it wouldn't compare to Adrastai's. Her only contentment was that she knew he was feeling the ache of frustration as well. She saw how her nearness made him hard, how whenever they touched in the sidhe ways it had him breathing faster and shallower as he tried to control himself around her.

Taja put on the slippers that Adrastai had provided with the dress. After sliding them on, she went to the mirror and looked at her reflection. What she saw made her gasp in astonishment. She'd left her hair loose and it caressed her body, hugging her back and the front of her breasts. The shimmers seemed to enhance her breasts, curving around them and showing her areolas to those who would look at her. The fabric seemed to cling to her curves.

The dress ended below the gentle curve of her ass and seemed to shimmer more there. In front, it was as if someone had liberally sprinkled the shimmer to say, "Here lies the pleasure center of Taja." She resisted the urge to pull down on the hem. She resisted the urge to rip off the clothing and wear her leathers. Taja knew Adrastai had a purpose in this, but she wasn't sure what it was. But he would be there soon to escort her. Her body tingled at the thought of him there to see her in the dress.

A knock at the door drew her attention back to the here and now. She loped gracefully to the door and opened it. Her breath was taken away by sight of him. Adrastai stood there, leaning against the frame.

His hair seemed to flow about him like a sheet of water, caressing his shoulders and chest. The rich indigo of his open shirt enhanced his dark, midnight irises and his lightly tanned skin. She let her gaze take in his narrow hips and strong thighs encased in matte black leather pants, ending at his knee-high leather boots. She noticed the laces down the front of the pants and had to hold back from licking her lips as she saw how his bulging sex was held back by only one bow tie.

Taja shook her head and blinked to ease the sharp stab of desire that ran through her body. She admitted to herself that she wanted him badly. Her body tightened as the area between her thighs became moist with desire. She wore nothing under the dress, as it would show more than conceal.

She saw the smoldering look that Adrastai gave her. She was tempted to ditch the party and take this man in every way possible. She wanted to have him drive into her hot, hard, and deep and make her growl with passion. She squeezed her thighs together to stop the throbbing, but it only increased the pounding need and hunger within her. She swallowed, then smiled. "You look wonderful, Adras."

"You're edible. How about just letting me dip for a taste of your honey again?" he drawled slowly.

He played with fire and he knew it. Taja's responsive grin was almost his undoing. They had to go see his father. King Alterrán was waiting for them. Specifically, for the queen of cats, Taja. He still couldn't believe that after all this time she still managed to resist him. Keeping her alive was the most important thing. Even though she was there to learn sidhe magick, there were priorities that had to be completed before anything else.

Adras took her hand as he led her to the door of her cottage. His eyes were darker than the night itself. He wanted to throw her over anything and drive his erection hard and deep into her until she screamed for mercy. He even had a hint of her scent, and his body was harder than the fey diamonds used to cut metal. They walked to the court, each enveloped in their own thoughts.

Voices and music swirled round them. The stars of the night seemed to sparkle greater than in the mortal realm. However, Adrastai knew it was only because here the air was cleaner than in most metal cages known as cities. He pulled Taja closer to him. He could breathe in the scent of her. She was freshness, a womanly scent with a hint of citrus. His body shuddered in reaction to her.

Some of the courtiers bowed to them both as they made their way to Alterran. Adrastai's eyes lighted upon Frelin. His half brother was whispering into the king's ear, while the king nodded with a tight smile. Adrastai knew that look. *Damn it all*, Adrastai thought. He knew Frelin was saying something to irk their father once again about those not fey.

As they stood before the throne dais, Taja bowed before the king. Alterran's eyes looked over the woman and smiled in appreciation. Tonight, she could almost pass as a sidhe. The black eyes shifted to his son's. Taja knew better than to try to think on it all. Come what may, tonight was special.

"Taja of the weres, come to me," King Alterran said loudly. Those around him stopped and watched the proceedings. The tone the king used was one not to be ignored.

Taja stepped forward and knelt before the king. As she looked into his eyes, she could feel the magickal pull of them. He was using the sidhe control that Adrastai taught her. She blanked her mind and smiled benignly at the fey ruler. "King Alterran, you're using the sidhe compulsion magick. That never worked well on me before, but less now that I know what to look for," Taja replied softly.

The king nodded with a soft, quirky smile so like his son's. Taja's response was to smile in kind. She could feel Adrastai's pleasure with her answer. "King Alterran, may I speak of what I've learned?"

"Yes, please do, Lady of Cats," Alterran purred.

"I've learned so much about how to call upon the elements of the universe to wield what is sidhe magick. I have so much more to learn, it'd take a lifetime to understand even half of what you know. However, I do know that some of these skills will be of use to my people, the weres. We mostly need magick to help us to disappear, as well as to defend against magickal spells. The other magick is just a bonus. Not all of us will be able to wield this new magick easily. The fey will still be masters of earth magick. We weres will be only children in it. This I've learned so far," Taja explained for all to hear.

“Then you’ve learned more than most who have come to learn the magick of the sidhe. I know that Adrastai has shown us how to effectively use the glamour magick we need to walk among the mortal realm without coming to harm. There seems to be a balance required in order to maintain it. With time and practice, I think we can move among the mortals without being hunted as easily. Thank you,” King Alterran stated regally.

The music continued then. The world coalesced into the starry points of magick. Taja had played her part in this as she was told. She and the weres would benefit, as would the fey in this truce. Adrastai took her hand and danced with her among the other sidhe.

They moved together, their rhythms complementing each other as their bodies touched and melded. Adrastai held her flush against him, his erection snuggled between her thighs. The heat of her body made his skin tingle in desire. Her hips undulated against his. Her cadence mimicked the act of sex with more grace than any woman he had ever known.

Adrastai danced her into the courtyard among nature’s beauty. The perfume of the blossoms combined with her fragrance, creating a heady sensation for him. He felt his control slipping. There was something about Taja tonight that was sensual, giving, and openly sexual. Tonight would be it. There would be no going back. His hand plucked one flower without looking at it. He knew which one it was by the scent alone.

Adrastai took the red flower and drew it between them. The moment the petals touched the top of her breasts, Taja moaned in need. Adrastai’s mouth followed the petals, heating her skin in hunger. The Lovers’ Blossom began to weave its magick upon them. The scent enticed them more and more as his mouth followed the petals down to the tight buds of her nipples.

His right hand clasped one of her breasts while his mouth claimed one of the pointed tips. His tongue swirled around it as he sucked on it, drawing it in further. She gasped at the intensity of the sensations he gave her. Her body arched as she pushed her hips to cradle his shaft against her more. He knew she needed more; she wanted more. Her fingers played with his hair as his mouth tortured one breast, then the other.

His other hand slid under her dress and kneaded the firm flesh of her bottom. He ground his hips against her, placing his erection at the juncture of her thighs. He could feel the warmth of her feminine center. Adras wanted to take her now, but there was more to do first to get her to the edge. Adrastai wanted her to scream the moment he plunged his almost painful erection deep into her warm, wet sheath.

He lifted his head and gazed into Taja’s darkened eyes. Adrastai could see the sexual hunger in her eyes, too. He claimed her mouth hard as his tongue plunged to mimic the movement of his hips, thrusting hard until she purred.

The Lovers’ Blossom pressed into her abdomen, almost crushed between them. Adrastai maneuvered them to a small room at one side of the courtyard. Closing the door

behind him, he could still see her in the slivers of moonlight. Her hair was like the night sky. Her body was the stars in the heavens and he was determined to soar there tonight.

Adrastai kneeled before Taja. Her legs were slightly apart, giving him access to where he wanted to touch her most. Sliding his hands up her thighs, Adrastai made sure the flower grazed her inner thigh until the crimson softness caressed her labia.

As the blossom reached her feminine folds, Taja gasped. She leaned back on an animal statue in the room. The roundness of the statue's head allowed her to bend back, making her breasts rise before Adrastai's gaze. She opened her legs further, making her glistening folds part just a little more. He could see she wanted more. Much more, and she wanted it now. She mewled as his lips traced the path of the flower.

His mouth captured the lips of her labia. His teeth gently nipped the sensitive area. The rasp of his teeth caused her to growl in passion. Her hips rose to meet his face. His tongue slid between her labia and found the nub of her clitoris. As it rubbed against it, Adrastai's teeth tugged again.

Her hands grasped at his long hair. The pain of her pulling on him drove him over the edge. He suckled hard against her clitoris making her scream his name as she began to come. "Adras!"

He removed her hands from his hair as he stood before her. His hands quickly undid the tie that held his hot, throbbing cock behind the leather pants he wore. Once his cock was freed and jutting hard against her thighs, Adrastai turned her around. He pulled up her dress to her hips. He leaned down and bit the swell of her buttocks hard. Her gasp of pleasure inflamed his desire.

He pushed her over the rounded head of the statue. Her ass perked up toward the head of his erection. He parted her cheeks and saw the glistening wetness that coated her pussy. He slid the tip of his erection between her folds over and over, letting her musky wetness coat the tip of him.

Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. Her mewls of need called to him. Adrastai plunged his long, hard erection deep within Taja's hot, tight sheath. As he entered, he growled with pleasure. Never before had he wanted to possess a woman like this. It was almost a violent need to conquer her. His hot, throbbing cock filled her, making her whimper. Her body tightened around him as he slid harder and harder into her. She tilted her bottom up so he could fill her completely. His hands were tugging her hips against him.

As the pressure of the pain and pleasure mounted, Taja felt a surge in her magick. Adrastai's magick called to her deeply hidden sidhe side, the combination of the two triggering her were talent. Adras must have felt the magickal shift in her. He no doubt saw her body shimmer as it began shifting. As her skin darkened, his body tightened in reaction. Taja felt his surprise, and suddenly her control of her were talent snapped back into place. Adras muttered endearments as he kissed the middle of her back. His magick called to hers as

his body began to be of the elements: earth hard, fire hot, slick with wetness, and yet like a caressing breeze.

As the sidhe magick enveloped them, the pull upon Taja's fey heritage almost exploded at the touch of another sidhe. With their combined joining, the were magick bowed before the elemental magick that was sidhe. The power of the elements flowed through Taja's body, sending her back to her regular form. Then the sidhe magick called to that aspect of her was sidhe.

Adrastai pulled his hard cock out of her body then slowly eased it in. He let the elements flow over her in turn. Then, he noticed her body glowing. Glowing without the hint of glamour. Taja screamed as she came again. Adrastai saw her as she fully was. Were, with sidhe heritage in her.

Taja panted, "Adras, please. I need you more. I need you to give to me the full sidhe of you. Oh, gods, Adras, please possess me in all the ways of our people."

Adrastai looked up at her. She turned her head to look into his eyes. She wanted him fully -- as a full sidhe. The pain and the pleasure would mingle until neither would be separate or together. He nodded as he felt the magick call to him. It wanted him to possess this woman before him. To make her his woman in the way of his ancestors.

He withdrew from her and spun her so she faced him. Leaning her back, his mouth claimed her breast as his cock slid home into her throbbing womanhood. The sensation of his erection sliding into her at that angle, as his body rubbed hard against her clitoris, made her gasp as the pain and pleasure merged to a new height.

Taja's hands raked up his body. Her nails dug lightly into his skin, then harder, as he thrust himself deep within her womanly sheath. When he suckled her breast, it almost sent her over the edge again. Her legs wrapped around his hips.

Adras grabbed her thighs and began to slide deeply in her. He could feel the tip of his shaft collide inside her. Her muscles squeezed him as the friction of their flesh drove their passion higher and higher. He knew he wouldn't last much longer. He began to suck hard on her nipple while biting it.

Taja arched at the overload of sensations. The pain, the pleasure, the hunger overwhelmed her. Never before had it been like this. The hardness of his body possessing her, never relenting as his erection buried itself over and over in her body. Her body clamped down on his cock, wanting to milk it and draw fulfillment, as well.

Energy built up as their desire began to escalate. Adras cried out as the power seared through him. Taja felt the magick surge through her. As they both slammed into each other, they went over the precipice into oblivion. The combined power of sidhe and were melded, then exploded around them. Adras thrust his cock deep in Taja once more and exploded his

seed inside her. Taja's body convulsed around him as she orgasmed. Her body shuddered beneath his, over and over.

Adrastai was the first to catch his breath. He kissed Taja's neck and up to her lips. "Taja, hajibi, are you okay?"

Taja's gaze focused onto his midnight blue ones. "I think I might be more than okay. Then again, I might never walk again," Taja teased lightly, as she bit his shoulder.

"Walking? You planned on walking anytime soon?" Adrastai chuckled. "I was hoping to keep you off your feet for a long time."

"If it's anything like this, well, I could be amenable," she responded, while running her hands up and down his back. There was much more to this man than she ever had considered. Something about him called to her. Could she risk seeing what it was?

Adrastai moaned at her touch. It was addictive and somehow utterly arousing. If she kept it up, he knew he'd take her again, right here, right now. But there was something more. If they'd felt the power of their magicks joining, then so did the others here at the party. He wasn't sure what to think about what had happened, but he knew he wasn't leaving her alone for a while.

He helped her to get dressed while her nimble fingers played with the string to his pants. After getting a reaction, she finally tied it closed. She was more playful after sex, and Adrastai liked her this way. Her hands skimmed his body just as his hands moved from her shoulders down to caress her ass. He leaned against her and kissed her deeply. Her tongue caressed his. Slowly he pulled back.

"Let's go say our thanks, and go back to your place or mine," he whispered against her hair.

"Sounds like a plan to me," Taja agreed.

They walked out of the side door into the garden. People were mingling. As they walked by, the others began to stare at them. Adrastai mind-linked with one of them to see what the problem was. Once he got an answer, he began to swear.

"Taja, we have to speak to Alterran."

"Why? What's wrong?" Taja asked.

"Hajibi, the magick called to him. It also affected everyone here at the party. They all felt the pull of the sidhe magick, plus some of yours," he whispered.

"Oh, gods, what have we done?" Taja blurted, her mind obviously racing on how to deal with this new issue. Straightening up, she took a deep breath. "Let's go see the king. I've got a feeling it's going to be a long night."

Adrastai took Taja's hand within his and walked with her to the chamber of King Alterran. He knocked at the door. When he felt the mental "*Enter*," Adrastai led Taja inside.



## Chapter Seven

The king sat on his white throne in the quiet room. It was used for private audiences. Alterran looked from Adrastai to Taja and back again. "Come here, you two, and be seated."

He motioned to the two chairs in front of them. As they both took their places, Alterran began to make a place above their heads turn into a fog. Pictures of their lovemaking began to play before them. Taja reigned in her anger. *How dare he snoop and show us this*, Taja thought.

"You forget, Queen of the Cats, that I am the Master of Illusion here in the Seelie court. What you two shared is your private business. However, the fact that those near you were affected by the sidhe sexual magick is not acceptable. There should have been no way for them to feel the passion between you two. Usually only two sidhe could set off such magick. So the question is, how can this be?"

Adrastai spoke first. "Sire, I know that the were magick is potent, indeed. I've seen two weres making love, and the sexual power given off by them was enormous. I don't see how it could be any different between us. We understand that sidhe fey sex magick is intense, and combined with were magick, it became more so."

King Alterran shook his head. "It's more than that. Yes, the weres have high sex magick, but this was like two sidhe with a were overlay on it."

Taja bowed her head. The time for eventually was now. She took a deep breath, then looked up. "I'm not a pure were."

King Alterran nodded. "Continue."

"My mother was a were. My father is Meleion Drevin. He's of the Unseelie court. He is part sidhe and part sprite. He was sent to live in the Unseelie court once he was weaned. My mother brought me to him every winter to be partially raised there. I don't look sidhe, nor do I act like one. I've always been were."

Adrastai looked askance at Taja. He'd never guessed she had sidhe blood in her. He looked at her and could see some aspects that could be thought of in either way. Part of him felt betrayed, but there was another part of him that understood why she had said nothing.

"Taja, were you accessing your sidhe side to do the magick?" Adrastai asked.

Taja shook her head. "No, I know how to block the sidhe side from coming out. I've found if I use them both at the same time, neither magick is effective. The only thing that makes it unusual is that I can understand the magick better because of my sidhe side."

Alterrann nodded slowly. "So you can separate your were and sidhe natures at almost all times?"

"Yes, I can. The only time it becomes a problem is during highly passionate sexual moments. That's when my were magick wants its out, as well as the sidhe part. Usually I avoid any highly sexual situations, so that doesn't happen. It's not something I advertise."

Taja obviously wanted to pace around the room, but that wasn't feasible at the moment. Adrastai could see her muscles bunch and release as she held herself back from moving. He loved how her muscles played under her skin. It made him want her all over again. He now understood more of the connection he'd been feeling with her. His sidhe soul called to that part of her that was also sidhe. He wanted her like no other woman.

The king looked at them both and nodded. "I understand. So what happened tonight with my son let loose both aspects at the same time."

"Yes. First one part took control, then the other. I think Adrastai's magick helped to balance it, as I couldn't control any of it myself," Taja murmured.

"I felt her change beneath me, Father. The power and the magick emanating from her was even more of an aphrodisiac than I can express. Then there was a change. It was when my sidhe sex magick hit hers. Next thing I know, she's not a panther anymore. She's flesh and blood, and I couldn't stop myself even if I wanted to."

"I see, well, we'll not advertise it that Taja Drevin is indeed part sidhe. We'll leave it stand as magick overload from both powers," the king said with a smile.

Adrastai escorted Taja from the room. As they left, Taja leaned against him. "I thought it was going to be worse than it was. Thank you for being with me."

He wrapped his arms around her, and his hands slid under her the globes of her breasts as he rubbed himself against the back of her ass. He wanted to show her that he found her attractive and still wanted her, no matter what. Adras felt his cock growing hard and stiff as it slid up and down the crack of her ass. He wanted in her, and he wanted in her now.

"I didn't mind being there with you. It was both of us together that caused the commotion. I wouldn't have let you face it alone." He moved her down the path toward his cottage. He wanted her, but he wasn't willing to walk the distance back to her place.

Once they arrived at his home, Adrastai made the door open as he picked up Taja. The door slammed shut behind them as he walked with her to his playroom. He called forth the faerie lights and the soft glow lit up the room.

He kissed her deeply then. Slowly, Adras stripped off Taja's clothes then licked her with his tongue. As each piece of clothing was removed, his mouth covered the parts that were revealed. As his hot lips covered one of her breasts, he could feel the power of her magick shimmer against him. He knew she needed him as much as he needed her.

Taja deftly undid Adras's pants. When she finally freed his erection from his leather pants, she sank to her knees and kissed him on the base. Adras moaned as Taja's teeth raked slowly up and down his throbbing erection. His hands fisted her hair as he guided her. Her mouth swallowed the tip of his hard, wet cock, and Taja moaned at the taste of him.

She took him into her mouth. She could feel him pulsate against her tongue. He was so hard, so ready for more, that Taja could taste his wetness at the tip.

He pulled her back and dragged her face up to his. As his tongue thrust hard into hers, his hands took hers and loosely tied them with a piece of silk. He adjusted the knot, and pulled back. "Taja, hajibi, I've got to have you now, my way. I want to share the full passion of being a sidhe."

She nodded while licking her lips. To taste a sidhe's sex magick without having to worry about her own talent responding -- the idea positively thrilled her. Adras let out a moan that sounded more animal than fey. His hands grasped her nipples, tugging them to a hard stiffness. Her gasp sent an answering shiver of hungry need down his body. "Taja. Gods, I'm going to make you mine." His mouth grabbed one nipple, teasing it until Taja panted for mercy.

Adras looked up and smiled wickedly. His mouth moved to the other nipple as his hands parted her soft thighs. His one hand found her protruding clitoris. It was waiting to be teased and taunted. His thumb caressed it, making her body arch against him. She wanted to move away, while at the same time have him make her come.

His one hand cupped her rounded bottom while the other hand continued to taunt her clitoris with flicking motions, then soft rubbing touches. Taja's head lolled back as Adrastai licked his way down her body. His tongue circled her belly button, then dipped into it. She begged him to stop, then begged him not to stop. His lips hovered where her clitoris eagerly awaited his tongue. He gently exhaled. She arched, placing one of her legs on his shoulder.

"Please, Adras. Please."

"Please what, Taja?" he asked huskily, his breath making her shift her hips while he saw her glistening softness. The scent of her was driving him mad. He had to taste her -- to suck on her wetness, and dive his tongue deep within her, and taste the honey of her. But he

waited until she told him what he wanted to hear. What they both knew they wanted. He knew this woman almost as well as he knew himself.

With her arms tied over her head, Adras knew she trusted him enough to allow him control over what happened. Having her at his mercy turned him on as much as knowing she trusted him. Her breasts were thrust out and taunting him. Her nipples were wet with his kisses and suckling. She looked every inch a sensual earth goddess in his bed.

"I need you to touch me. Please, Adras, make me come," Taja begged. Her hands pulled on the ties, but it would take some effort to undo them. Adras knew, in her heart, she didn't want to get loose. She wanted to lose control with him, just as he was losing control -- letting the magick fill him.

"Yes," Adras hissed as his mouth latched onto her clitoris and he suckled. She tried to pull away, but he pulled her hips tightly to him, so her warm wetness was against his entire face. He rubbed his chin on her sensitive lips and felt her begin to tremble in reaction. He took her hardened clit between his teeth and gently pulled. Taja screamed as she began to orgasm.

His tongue slid down further until it felt the wet opening. He stuck his tongue in deeply, making sure she felt him enter her. She lifted her hips against him. The scent of her was overwhelming now. He needed more. He needed to take her and make her see how it would only be him taking her honeyed wetness.

Adras slid his fingers in her warm sheath. Her inner muscles clenched against them trying to milk them as he shoved them in and out of her. The rhythm was slow, then fast. Then, when she would get the rhythm, Adras slowed it down and would lighten his thrusts. Taja was getting closer to another orgasm. He could feel her sidhe power sluice over his naked body. The air seemed to shimmer with the energy being created between them. Neither of them noticed the colors within the glimmering aura that surrounded them, showing how they were joined not only in a physical sense, but in the soul, as well.

This was enough torture for them both. He motioned to a small cushioned ottoman. While it slid across the floor to him, he got to his knees and buried his face against Taja's mons. He opened her thighs wider in order to fit his face over her clit and stuck his tongue deep into her. He could feel her try to clamp onto him. A low chuckle emanated from him as he withdrew his tongue. She whimpered as his laugh vibrated against her sensitive area. "Adras!"

"Yes, lailmi?" Using the fey word for darling seemed appropriate in his mind. She was darling, even when she argued with him. "I promise to ease the ache, Taja."

Then the ottoman hit against his legs with a soft thud. As he stroked her soft body, Taja twisted and moaned loudly. She was losing control and he knew it. He loved hearing her mewl like a kitten. Her legs were so soft, yet so powerful. He climbed onto the ottoman and used his magick to prevent it from moving.

He levered himself so his mouth closed over her nipple and his body covered hers. As he slowly bit down, he slid his throbbing cock deep into her in one swift stroke. He let out a moan as he felt her take him so deeply that her muscles clenched tightly around him.

With his thrusting, Taja moaned until a purr emerged from deep within her body. Her head thrashed from side to side in order to try to keep control. She was his to do with whatever he pleased, and they both knew it. Adras let out a matching moan as he slid himself almost out of her, then drove himself deeper in again. He felt her give in to her desire, declaring him its owner. The magick of the sidhe poured out of him and combined with hers as their rhythm picked up pace. Both felt they could touch the sky and the center of the earth in that moment.

Taja whimpered, "Please Adras, I can't take more. Please let me please you."

He lifted his head so their gazes locked. "You please me like you are. I want you mine. Feel me, Taja. Let go and feel me in you, around you, our magicks combining so we both can share the ultimate in sidhe enchantment."

His buttocks tightened as he thrust into her once and let loose the magick of the sidhe within them. Taja screamed as her body shuddered with the force of it. Her were talent intertwined with her sidhe magick. Her energy rose up and collided with Adrastai's in such a way that caused them both to pitch over the edge of pleasure. Not once did they look away as they each whispered the other's name.

Adrastai moved them so they lay side by side on the soft carpet. The dark blue pile showed how pale her skin truly was. He stroked her soft, damp skin as her scent and his mingled together. As with her people, he had marked his territory, and a lazy feral grin crossed his face. When they both had climaxed, something had happened to him. It was as if he had a glimpse into her being, saw the were energy and how it fit with the sidhe power.

They lay there in contentment. He was aware of her drifting off to sleep. Adrastai stroked the hair from her face. Taja was the first woman who didn't cry for him to stop at the height of lovemaking. She'd taken everything, didn't deny him, and had asked for more. He was falling for this woman and, for the first time in his life, he embraced the idea willingly.

Even as he started to drift to sleep, he knew there were still other things that had to be dealt with first, before they could think about having a long-term relationship. There had to be a way to stop those wanting her dead. Somehow.

## Chapter Eight

Adrastai twisted in his sleep. Why he couldn't get comfortable? His eyes tried to focus as they popped open. Then he realized he was looking up at the ceiling and his hands were over his head. He felt something cool being drawn up his legs. Lifting his head, he saw Taja dragging his silk shirt up his knees, then his thighs, until it touched his erection. He couldn't move. She'd restrained him while he was sleeping.

Taja grinned at Adrastai, letting him know how she felt when she couldn't do what she wanted to him. The fabric caressed his naked, aroused body, and her long hair followed. He lifted his hips as her tresses caressed his fully aroused cock. She smiled at him through the strands.

Her warm breath stirred over his erection. She watched it jump, but continued past it. His chest was next. She gently latched onto one nipple. She licked and sucked on it as her hands teased the other nipple into a tight bud. Her fingers flicked the tip, making Adras moan and arch against her.

"Good morning, Adras," Taja whispered huskily as she brought her lips over his. Her tongue slid against his. Her mouth was hot and wanting him more.

"What are you doing?" Adras rasped as her lips slid over his jaw, then down to his other nipple. "Taja, you're driving me insane."

"Only starting to, hajibi. Only starting," Taja murmured against his warm skin. With those words, she proceeded to show him just why she was a queen among her kind.

After their morning lovemaking, he held her in his arms while she snuggled against him.

"You didn't need to wake me up that way; all you had to do was tap me on the shoulder or something," Adrastai remarked to the smiling Taja.

"I kind of liked waking you up that way. You got to feel what you did to me last night," Taja responded with a soft kiss to his full lips.

"What are we going to do today?"

"Shower? Then perhaps work on some more magick?"

"Sure, hajibi. Come with me and we'll help each other to clean up," Adras said playfully.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hours later, Adrastai and Taja walked, holding hands as they headed to the park where Taja had let the two wild cats roam the night before. She had changed into one of her smaller leather outfits. Smaller, of course, was how Adrastai defined it. The white leather outfit looked like it was poured on her. The shorts ended right at the edge of her bottom, while the top barely covered the swell of her breasts as the halter straps were tied together behind her neck. When he complained about her needing more clothing, she showed him how the slits in the leather let her move and do things. He chuckled as he recalled the eyeful he got while she demonstrated that she had full flexibility.

Taja picked out his clothes. The tight leather pants cupped him so it left nothing to the imagination. There was also a simple pullover top, in a deep blue to match his eyes, that she demanded he wear. The white leather pants and matching boots made him look like the prince he was. He hadn't quite heard her comment when Taja saw the full effect, but the expression on her face had given him an idea. He wondered if she'd allow him to play with her.

As they strolled passed the gate, Taja mentally called to the cats. She heard only from one and called again to the white tiger. Nothing. She glanced at Adrastai. "Adrastai, the tiger's not responding. This isn't good. You don't think anyone would hurt her, would they?"

Adrastai shrugged. "Let me go look for her near the pens. Sometimes she'll go there to see if there has been anyone else added to the cat cages."

"Okay. I'll check on Kai."

Taja headed toward the darker area of the park, where she heard the panther's cries. She fingered her dagger in her boot uneasily. Something wasn't quite right. Taja couldn't decipher what was off, but she knew the panther was in trouble.

Adras knew where she was going, so she didn't have to worry about not having back up. She unsheathed her dagger and held it securely at her side. The stillness of the woods made her hesitate in her step. Suddenly, she was thrown to the ground. The dagger clattered out of her hand as Taja felt a body trap hers.

"Thought I'd never get to you, did you, Miss Kitty?"

Frelin leaned over her, his icy-white hair forming a curtain around their upper torsos. He nipped her shoulder with a sharp bite. Trying to shift her weight to toss him off of her, Taja realized she was pinned down.

"I believe we have unfinished business," Frelin growled as he pulled out restraints connected to iron chains. He locked her wrists together and bound them to the ground with his magick. As he levered himself up a little she glimpsed what was attached to his shirt -- a Lovers' Blossom. His plan became crystal clear to her. Frelin was going to use it on her until she was crazed with unspent lust. What he'd do after, she didn't know, but she doubted she'd be unmarked by the time he was done. Taja tugged at the restraints to see if they'd give.

Frelin's eyes were unfocused with lust, and something more that Taja hadn't seen before. Even at his worst, he was never known to be this bad. Everyone who'd spoken to her regarding his actions and the others who were opposed to the treaty agreed upon that point. Something was going on. Not sure what had gotten to him, she knew she had to break the enchantment that consumed him. She pleaded with him. "Frelin, please, you don't want to do this. Please."

The fey grinned ferally as he touched the flower against her bare skin. The contact of the flower's oil engaged Taja's arousal against her will. She experienced the stirrings of magick-induced passion. Frelin's grin grew broader as Taja arched to have the dangling blossom touch more of her. With a sharp tug, he broke cross-straps of her outfit, baring her rounded breasts to his hungry gaze. As her nipples pebbled in the breeze, Frelin bent down to capture one dusky tip with his open mouth.

"Frelin, don't! Think of your brother -- my lover. Adras wouldn't like you touching me like this. You need to stop," Taja begged, while striving to control the raging need and desire that was escalating. Her body was showing the effects of exposure to the oils of the blossom; she was already soaked between her thighs and trying to keep them closed, causing her nether lips to rub together, wreaking havoc with her control.

"He might be your lover, but my brother would never love a were. The most you could ever be is his sex toy," Frelin said, his body trembling with desire. His eyes had a maniacal gleam that told her he wasn't completely himself. "And all used toys are thrown away."

Frelin undid the laces of his pants as a sudden breeze brushed past them. Something grabbed him, slamming his head against a nearby tree. Adras grunted at his unconscious brother, then turned his attention to Taja. "Hajibi, are you okay? Tell me he didn't touch you," he ground out between clenched teeth. He stood between them, closer to where his brother had fallen than to her.

"No," she whispered, biting back a howl at the sensations wracking her body head to toe. The heady aroma of the blossom that lay upon her chest was sending her into a sensation overload. Her control was threadbare. If she didn't get relief soon, she thought her body would combust with the heat it emitted. "He didn't touch me. But that was his intention."



Adrastai stormed over to Frelin's side, jacking him up against the tree trunk. "How dare you attack my habijiti? She is mine, and therefore cannot be touched by anyone but me! What gives you the right to take away my ras'zhari, my Other Soul, Frelin?"

Frelin's eyes focused on Adrastai's furious expression. Part of him didn't seem to understand what his brother was ranting. His brain seemed to try to put together the fact that Adras had used the formal term for soulmate. He rubbed at his neck as if part of the bark had abraded his skin.

Adrastai noticed Frelin scratching at the one area. Moving his brother's hand out of the way, he saw a small mark that looked like a snake biting itself. The insignia was one that hadn't been seen in the courts for as long as he could remember. No royal of the Seelie court should bear a blemish, as was their status among the Seelie. A sense of foreboding filled Adrastai as he finally recognized the symbol. "Frelin, have you and the others brought back the hatred of Aerwydon to our land?"

Frelin tried to look away from his brother. A mixture of guilt and spite appeared on his face. If Aerwydon was back, or one of her kind, not only was the Seelie court in jeopardy, but also the weres, Adrastai deliberated. What in Hades was going on that the opposition to the treaty would invoke an ancient evil as their symbol? The ancient witch had once been of his race, yet because of her greediness for power and her fanaticism to keep the Seelie racially pure, she had consorted with a demon, thus shedding the last of her Seelie tendencies. But she had been a legend for over a thousand years, and people would resurrect her to scare children. However, there was a sect that had been devoted to the witch at one point. Could his brother be part of that cult?

Taking advantage of his brother's turned face, Adras placed his palm over the mark. Calling upon the magick of the fey, he wove a spell that would remove Aerwydon's insignia. Muttering under his breath as it resisted being erased, Adrastai opened himself to the source of his abilities and drew deeply from the earth. Refocusing his attention on the profane blot, Adras sent waves of power through it and into his brother. When he was done, he lifted his hand to see that the seditious mark had vanished. His brother slumped to the ground.

Holding his head in his hands, Frelin glanced up and caught his brother's attention. "Adras?" he asked with a slightly disbelieving tone. "Who attacked me?"

"Me. You tried to kill Taja, the were envoy. She's my ras'zhari. Why did you have the mark of the evil witch, Aerwydon?"

Frelin glanced away, then back to his brother. "One of the leaders of our movement thought it would show how we feel about such a treaty between our realm and the others. Just as Aerwydon wanted power to protect her people and their way of life, so do we. People don't like the treaty. They fear an open door policy will result in more mixed births, thus diluting the Seelie court realm and power base."

"We'll speak more of this later. What did you do to Taja?" His eyes strayed to the chained woman who fought against the unrelenting pressure of desire and lust. As she

writhed, the Lovers' Blossom that had been half hidden in a fold of the suit was dislodged and fell limply to the ground.

"Damn you, Frelin! You know how sensitive we fey, particularly sidhe, are to Lovers' Blossoms. Taja is just as susceptible."

"She's not full sidhe."

"We don't know what it does to the were part of her, Frelin," he ground out, as he realized that there was something that his brother wasn't admitting. "What more is there that you're hiding, frertiere?"

Dark eyes met their opposite. Their wills fought a battle upon the elemental plane, and the wind whipped around them as each tried to budge the other. Finally, Frelin slumped back in defeat. There was no way to beat the head warrior-mage of the Seelie court. At least not fairly. "I used concentrated Lovers' Blossom oil on the petals, intensifying the reactions. I wanted her broken."

Rage surged through Adras. He flung out his hand as a spell left his lips. Instantaneously Frelin was pinned against the tree. He struggled, but couldn't move any part of his body except his eyelids and his mouth. "Let me go, frertiere. Hurting me won't help the were any, and you know it."

Adras watched helplessly as Taja mumbled almost incoherently for release. He cared for her; perhaps he could even admit to falling for this raven-haired beauty. There was a way to help her, but it would require a bonding that he wasn't sure she would accept, much less understand, regardless of growing up part-time in the Unseelie court. It would also bind him to her, making them officially handfasted in the eyes of the Seelie.

Why does this not make me upset or worried? Is it possible that I am in love with her? His eyes lingered over her body as his mind answered. She challenges me, makes me attempt more than I would with anyone else. Taja teaches me beyond what is known in the Seelie courts. I can't imagine being without her.

Adras decided that using sidhe sex magick was the only way to break the pressure of the Lovers' Blossom oil that was wreaking havoc on her body. Quickly, he shrugged out of his clothes, while glaring at his brother. "You will bear witness, Frelin. She is mine and you tried to take her from me. She is my ras'zhari and I claim her according to the ancient ways, mij thy'llan."

Frelin's eyes widened at his brother's words. "You'll claim her as your magick bondmate? Do you know what havoc you'll cause throughout the Seelie realm, taking an Unseelie?"

Adras knelt between the thighs of his beloved, his glance straying to his brother. "Yes. I know what I do. You will be the witness to the claiming."

Frelin found his head locked in place, his eyes unable to avert their gaze as Adras leaned over Taja, kissing her passionately. His hands went to the rest of the outfit and ripped it off her body. Frelin groaned as Taja arched, exposing herself completely.

Taja looked at Adrastai's naked body and moaned. Adrastai leaned over her and kissed her softly. "Rasa, darling, I'm sorry it's going to have to be this way. Frelin didn't know of your heritage. I'm going to have to take you like a sidhe. This might hurt, this might please. But know I'm here with you, no matter what."

Taja looked up at him and smiled. "I know sidhe style. Please, Adras, I'm dying without someone's touch on me. Please!"

Adras felt the call of the flowers. As their scent and hers mingled, he moaned. Adras dipped his head and bit her nipple hard, making her arch up and cry out in passion. He opened her legs roughly. Swearing quietly to the sidhe deities, Adrastai bit her breast as he plunged himself deep inside her without giving her time to adjust to him. He thrust himself deeper and harder, not letting Taja have time to catch her breath. She screamed as she arched toward him, her hands pinned above her. Adras bit her again on the nipples then pushed her hips down.

He knew this pace could hurt her. She wasn't a full sidhe who could let her passion flow out of her, or let the oil out of her system with this type of lovemaking, but it was the only way to help her to move through quickly enough to keep her from going crazy.

Adras kissed Taja on her lips and whispered against her, "Rasa, please move with me. Stay with me. Don't give up yet. You're going to be fine. Then we can get you washed off. C'mon, my love, stay with me."

He tilted her hips so that he could place his knees under her ass. He kept thrusting his stiff cock in her while whispering how much he needed her to get through this. He knew that his brother was watching and probably needing his own release, but Adrastai didn't care. What mattered was getting his beloved, his habijiti, true beloved, through this.

Taja's eyes opened up more and looked at him. She began to speak in the ancient tongue of the sidhe. "O'hejjok. Elmessni. Anta kul'ee wae robhiy."

Adras could hear her words. "I love you. Touch me. You're my heart and soul." His heart leapt at her words, but reality made him realize that perhaps she was saying it in the throes of the sidhe passion. Her body had melted against his and she was taking his deep thrusting and crying out in passion, as she orgasmed over and over again.

Adras knew that he had to do what came next. He wanted to only do this when they were handfasted, but now there was no choice. Because she was part sidhe, she had a part of her that had to be dealt with to end the torment of Lovers' Blossom. He withdrew out of her and turned her onto her stomach. He helped to open her legs and he guided his hard cock to her entrance again.

Adras slid himself almost out of her. Taja cried out, wanting him, needing him. Her inarticulate cries almost made him lose himself in the magick of her body. He waited as he

kept playing with her clit. When he felt her sidhe magick absorb the Lovers' Blossom effects and smash into his, meshing them completely as one, Adrastai plunged himself into her so hard they both orgasmed and fell into a primal pumping rhythm that had started and continued life through many eons. Quietly, he whispered the words that made the magickal binding official for them both.

Finally, he collapsed onto her and felt her sigh as the rest of the Lovers' Blossom dissipated into the earth below her. Adrastai couldn't move easily. His body roared with the combined power of them both. In that moment, he saw with clarity how she called upon the were magick within her. Adrastai curled Taja against him, holding her while she began her recovery from the blossom's intoxication.

Adrastai heard a noise, and he realized that his brother was still bound to the tree behind them. Frelin lifted his gaze and met Adrastai's coolly with a nod of acknowledgement. Adras lifted an eyebrow at him, but said nothing as he took in the damp spot on his brother's pants. He'd seen the ritual in person before and knew the watcher was just as badly affected, even if they didn't stay or watch beyond the initial penetration, as the magick began to intertwine. If pushed, he might even admit to the fact that his body had reacted the same way.

With a quick word, Adras released his brother from the tree. *"Go and report this back to our father. This needs to be spread among the Council"*. Frelin nodded and walked away to give the two of them some privacy. Adras moved so he could release Taja's bonds, and pulled her on top of him. She moved reluctantly, her body tired and spent from the release of a lifetime.

"Taja, we need to talk. Look at me. We need to talk about what's occurred."

Taja looked at Adrastai. Her mind was clearing from the fog that had taken over earlier. She remembered everything, including the most stunning orgasm she'd ever had. Blushing, she realized how wild she had become in those moments. "Do we have to talk?" she responded, her embarrassment plain in her voice.

"Taja, it was the flower. It was coated with concentrated oil from more Lovers' Blossoms. It was created specifically to overwhelm you. You're okay now, and safe. I think I have an idea of who's behind the assassination attempts."

"Your brother."

"No, he was a pawn in the game. They're part of a group who's taken the name of Aerwydon. From his remarks, I guess one of the leaders goes by the ancient name. Aerwydon is trying to close the Seelie court by killing you," Adras explained patiently.

"She was an ancient sidhe witch, wasn't she? I thought she was banished from the fey realm, away from both courts, along with her descendants?"

Adras explained what little he knew from his brother. Taja closed her eyes and sighed. Then she opened them to Adras. "So, what do we do?"

"We make it so any harm done to you will make her and any of her supporters the enemy of both courts. You handfasted with me."

Taja gasped and stared at Adrastai in shock. He smiled at her, then drew her down for a kiss. When he pulled away, he whispered, "In order to stop the effect of the flower, I used an ancient ritual among the sidhe. It bonded us magickally together. We call it mij thy'llan."

"We had no witnesses," Taja protested.

"Frelin, who's now telling the king," Adrastai replied as he stroked her hair, lovingly.

"But this isn't necessary!" Taja cried.

"It is. This way, you're here and you're safe. We'll deal with it later. Kiss me, habijiti."

## Chapter Nine

Taja looked at Adrastai in shock. Granted, she loved him, but this was too much. He didn't love her, and there was no way she could be bonded to a man who didn't love her. It was too soon, and Reina would kill her if she didn't accomplish her mission.

"Adras, I've got to teach my people how to do this magick. I can't be here and not be with my people. I just can't."

"A group of Seelie court purity fanatics wants you dead, and you can only think of going home? Taja, habijiti, you can't just up and go. They'll follow you, and then what? You need my protection and help," Adrastai said as Taja pulled away from him.

She tried to piece together her clothing, but knew it'd be impossible. Taja took Adrastai's shirt and slipped it over her body. She looked at him as she bent to retrieve her dagger. "I can defend myself. This was an aberration. I was distracted because of the time I'd spent with you. It will not happen again."

Inside, Taja shook with what had happened. She knew what he said was true. She knew that the Aerwydon group would hunt and kill her for her new knowledge and powers, and to end the treaty. The kicker was the fact that she knew she couldn't risk Prince Adrastai's life. She loved him too much to let him be part of this game. It was time to be the solitary hunter all were-cats were known to be. The fact that he denied her skills hurt her even more. After all of this time, it was the one thing she thought he had accepted about her.

Taja handed Adrastai his pants, then sauntered off, her pert bottom peeking from under his shirt. As she walked away, she called to her cats as both came out of the woods. She communicated with them and learned about the spells and how drugged they'd been until Adrastai had snapped the spells. Taja and her feline companions left.

Adrastai sat up and dressed himself as he watched Taja storm off. He cursed out loud. How could she react like this considering what happened between them? Adrastai stalked after Taja. He had to stop her from leaving him. Aerwydon had to be stopped, so Taja could train other weres in fey basic magick. She didn't realize how much danger the others would also be in if they weren't stopped. She wouldn't be the lone target for long.

As he left the park, there was no sign of Taja. He cursed again as he saw some of his father's guards come toward him. The lead guard looked at Adrastai's attire then shook his head. "Yes, Beruth?" Adras snapped at him.

"Your father is requiring your presence. This instant. You're to bring the were with you."

"She's gone. I'm not sure where she is. Why does my father choose now to see me?" Adrastai demanded.

The guards looked at Adrastai uneasily, as if not wanting to be there. Beruth stood straight and glared. "Your father and Frelin have spoken. Someone has been allowing the one called Aerwydon admittance to Seelie court news. Your father will see you now."

Adras followed them back to the court proper. As he walked in, he could see the looks on peoples' faces. Fear, anger, and dim hope. Adrastai shook his head to clear the emotions from his thoughts. As he stepped into the throne room, he saw his father sitting next to Frelin.

Alterran looked at his half-dressed son, then looked for Taja. "Where is the woman? Where is the were-cat queen?"

"She's missing, your Majesty. She was not with the prince when we found him," Beruth answered.

Alterran narrowed his gaze at his son. "Where is she?"

Adrastai shrugged. "I don't know. Things happened, and afterward, we argued. As far as I know, she went to her cottage." He paused for a moment. "What's going on, Father?"

"Reina, queen of all weres, will be here in a couple of days to see how Taja of the cats is faring. Frelin has told me what Aerwydon has done. There's got to be a way to stop Aerwydon once and for all," Alterran said, his eyes filled with determination. "From what Frelin tells me, the leader is a woman who calls herself by the name of the ancient witch."

"How are you going to tell the reina that Taja is now handfasted to you and is under Seelie law, as well?" Frelin asked quietly.

Adrastai could see the fear and sorrow in his brother's eyes for what had almost happened. Perhaps their father was able to conquer residual magick that he hadn't been able to undo. The slight incline of Frelin's head told Adras that his brother had heard the mental query and his assessment was correct.

"I don't know. I'm not sure Taja even realizes exactly what has happened," Adrastai admitted reluctantly. "Being Unseelie, she wouldn't have been taught about mij thy'llan."

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Taja commanded her cats to stand guard as she quickly shrugged into another outfit. How dare he do an ancient ritual with me without my permission? Granted, I wasn't completely coherent, but that was unforgivable. He took advantage of me and then had the nerve to say I needed protection. Am I not the queen of the cats? I thought, perhaps ...he cared; I guess I'm wrong on that.

Snarling, Taja slid her daggers into their sheaths and mentally prepared herself with her newly learned magickal spells. Leaving the panther and the white tiger to guard the place, she made her way toward the palace. As she neared the gardens, one of the councilors slipped past her. As she listened, she heard him mutter, "I must tell Caerwydon what I've learned. She'll be unhappy to note that Frelin is no longer hers to command."

Eyebrow raised, Taja switched plans and tracked the councilor as he wound his way around the town. She kept out of sight and tried not to draw any attention to herself. The various fey had grown used to her meandering around looking at the houses and the gardens in the capital city. Their gazes seemed to acknowledge her presence and then move on, showing her that slowly most of the Seelie court was getting used to those not like them. Inwardly, she smiled. At that point, it was probably the only thing that made this entire experience worthwhile.

When the councilor arrived at a pale gray home, Taja snuck behind some of the berry bushes and she tried to see who answered the door. A sidhe-looking woman appeared and cocked her head to the side as the man quickly began speaking. Blinking, Taja tried to work past the scintillating amalgam of pictures the woman actually used to cover her looks. The form she had seemed to rotate before Taja's eyes from beauty to crone in a matter of seconds. Something about this nagged at Taja, but she wasn't sure why.

As the councilor left, she followed. Again he took back roads through the city of Loreth as he made his way back to the palace. Good, I need to speak to the king and face Adras. There's no way we can be bonded if he can't let me be part of a battle that's also mine. After watching the councilor sneak into the main hall through a secret passage, Taja decided to enter the room when she heard her name being mentioned, as well as that of her ruler, Reina.

Taking a deep breath and lifting her head to show her strength, Taja stepped into the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'm right here," Taja said as she strolled in from a side entranceway. Adras noticed she was wearing her patent black leather outfit with silver threads running through it. Neither of her cats was with her, which was unusual. "So Reina is coming to see what I've learned.



Which means this Aerwydon would love to get rid of her and me. So, what are we going to do about this? Adrastai, I know how to fight, and I don't back down from anything."

"Handfasted females don't fight," King Alterran announced in his regal voice.

"Excuse me? I'm not handfasted to anyone," Taja replied. "And I'm not an official member of the Seelie court, especially as I'm only part sidhe."

Frelin looked to his brother and then to his father. Adrastai glared at his brother's smile as he stepped in front of Taja. "Taja, what we did in the park..."

"Was plain old-fashioned fucking. Nothing more or less. You were trying to break the spell of the coated Lovers' Blossom."

King Alterran walked to Taja and looked in her eyes. "You do not understand. Aerwydon will kill you and Reina if she can. She wants to keep the courts of the fey realm away from mortals."

"Why not have her come, then, when she tries something, take her prisoner?" Taja asked.

"There's a plan in place, Taja. But you and Reina can't be put at risk," Adras retorted.

Taja looked from the father to the sons. She felt exasperated because they didn't understand her abilities or power. Unsure on how to handle this, she knew she'd not miss this for anything, because if Reina were here, she'd have to show up to give her report. Not to mention the fact that she was Reina's main protector outside of the were-hold.

Adrastai watched the emotions play across her face. He knew that she wanted to be part of this. His gaze watched as she left the main court hall. Her body was loose and moved with a grace that he loved feeling beneath him. She was his, even if she didn't want to admit it for now.

He walked after her, sparing a hard glance at his father. He knew his father meant well, but he hadn't spent time with Taja like Adras had. He knew she didn't want to be coddled. With the weres, Taja had to fight in order to prove herself worthy of being queen of the cats. Adrastai just knew that whoever this Aerwydon was, she would use anything at her disposal to do what she wanted in order to break the treaty and institute a new rule in both courts of the fey realm.

"She's not happy, father."

Alterran's eyes bored into his son's. "Does that matter? You wanted her safe and took her without her knowledge. It's done. Do you think she can handle herself?"

Adrastai said nothing as the words rang in his head, and he tried to catch up with Taja in the gardens.

"Taja, wait for me," Adrastai called as he ran to her.

She didn't slow down or miss a step. He was sure that she was mad about what she'd heard. "Taja, talk to me. Please tell me what you're thinking."

"I'm a trained warrior and I don't need to be coddled. I can help you with this. Then, to lie and say you've handfasted with me when you helped me deal with the Lovers' Blossom oil -- I don't like that."

"Taja, the way it happened was as the ritual claiming in ancient sidhe times. It's how our ancestors made sure that the bondmates wouldn't stray. Plus, with Frelin as a witness, we are handfasted. Is it that bad to be handfasted to me?" Adrastai asked, pulling her chin up so she stopped and had to look at him.

"Adras, you never meant to claim me like that. It means nothing to you. I know and accept that. However, what's real is Aerwydon's threat. I really don't want to die; however, I will do as I need to. Neither Reina nor myself are so helpless that we cannot protect our loved ones or ourselves. She's the were queen, by the gods. Do you think she'd be helpless?" Taja demanded, her eyes flashing in anger and more.

"Taja, I know she's not helpless. I know you're not, either. But know this, if Aerwydon were to hurt you, I'd personally be devastated. You mean more to me than you realize," Adras stated softly.

Taja looked deeply into his eyes, looking for signs of lying. There were none. Shaken, Taja pulled back. "We're friends, Adrastai. Lovers, too, but nothing more than that. Neither of us said anything about emotions in this. Don't try to pull this on me to stop me. It won't work."

Taja stomped off into her cottage. The slam of the door, to his ears, rang of pain and anger. She was right. Not once had he told her how much he liked and cared for her. He never told her how she called to his koh'by, his heart. She was his ras'zhari. Adrastai smacked his fists on his thighs in anger. He should've told her, and now...now it might be too late. Damn it all.

He walked back toward the palace to discuss the details with his father and brother. His only hope was to find a compromise that would allow Taja and Reina to feel part of this and maintain their truce. Adrastai wasn't sure what else would happen, otherwise. They only had a couple of days before Reina arrived. If they knew it, then so did this Aerwydon and her cohorts. Dammit all to Hades, this wasn't going to be easy.

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Taja leaned against the door of her cottage. She allowed the tears to finally fall down her cheeks. Her pain knew no bounds. Taja was in love with Adrastai, but he felt nothing, just the sexual magick they created together. Though he claimed to care, he didn't even respect her as a warrior. For her people, that was the ultimate insult. They were warriors who had learned to live with other races, particularly humans, and to have someone deny

her skills -- it was denying part of what made her were. The pain in her heart throbbed in time with her pulse. Part of her wanted to run and leave here, never to return to the Seelie court.

She pushed her pain down and out of her, while trying to think of how she could make sure she attended the ceremony. There had to be a way. As she sat on a nearby couch, her two cat companions sat down beside her. Their presence reassured her as she began to think about how to be there for her queen. Reina had no clue about how bad some of their enemies could be in the fey courts, but Taja did. It was one reason why Reina had sent her. Reina knew her heritage and history. She was counting on Taja to do what would be needed to protect the weres.

Taja sat there as the sun dipped over the horizon, calling an end to the day. Her thoughts were troubled and nothing she lined up would work as effectively without Adrastai being by her side. Without his agreement, it'd make it harder for her to be there to protect her queen. As slumber claimed her, she knew what to do. She knew it'd annoy the sidhe fey, but if, in the end, it helped stop the threats to them, so be it. The need to protect those she loved came first, and this plan might actually allow her to leave with some kind of dignity.

## Chapter Ten

A knocking on the door woke Taja from her restless sleep. She stretched her arms over her head, forcing her two companions to move, as well. Her dreams were some of the most erotic and dangerous she'd had in ages. Taja felt Adras making love to her in her dreams. She knew that couldn't be possible, but she could've sworn he had. The knocking continued as Taja went to the door.

"Who is it?" Taja asked, her voice low and husky from just waking up.

"It's Adras. Please let me in, Taja. I want to talk to you."

Taja debated allowing him entrance for a minute. Her plan required her to use him, though, so she admitted him to the cottage. Adras walked over to the felines, patting them both without looking at Taja. Both felines responded with affection to her sidhe lover. She knew they cared for him, and they were disappointed that he didn't believe in her as they did. Taja blinked back the hurt in her heart and pushed it aside for what she had to do. The treaty was all-important, as Reina had told her before she left. Nothing else mattered beyond the treaty and the freedom it brought. Not even her heart counted. My heart... How little did I realize that in the end, I'd lose my heart?

"What do you want, Adrastai? Reina won't be here for a bit longer, I believe," Taja said, her eyes taking in his casual clothes as the curl of desire nestled deep in her body. She needed to resist him, even as he allowed his natural fey sex magick to swirl around her. "When she arrives and the protocols are fulfilled, I will be away from here, so you won't have to deal with my presence anymore."

"I didn't say I wanted you gone. I want you, Taja, but that's not what you want to know about. King Alterran, the councilors, and I have spoken on the merits of having you there with us. I don't know how to have you there and keep you safe from Aerwydon,

though. Please, Taja, I know you need to meet with Reina, but at the same time, if anything were to happen to you..."

Taja's green eyes narrowed. "Nothing is going to happen to me. How many times do I have to prove that I'm just as capable as you are in fighting?"

"Taja, hajibi, your ability to fight isn't an issue with me. I've seen you take out some of our best men. But Aerwydon uses magick, not just physical violence. I don't know how well you can handle pure sidhe magick, even with your heritage," Adras stated as Taja took a step back from him. Pain flared in her eyes as his words came out like stinging gnats.

Taja knew that he was right, because he didn't understand her ways as a were, nor her magickal skills. Part of it was her own fault for not explaining more about her personal talents, but that hadn't been the issue, even after her mixed heritage was revealed. When he tried to touch her, Taja flinched. She walked away from him and bent low next to the white tiger. Stroking Maj's soft fur, she spoke quietly.

"Look, Adras, I'm not going to fight you on this. You go to the court and put this plan of yours into motion. The cats need to be fed. I'm taking them to the park. I know I'm not allowed to go, so I'll wait until after everything's done." She transferred her affections to Kai. "After the Reina arrives, you and the others can arrange for us to talk under your protection. Okay?" Taja stated, her voice deceptively mild. There was no way in Hades she was going to let them take away her responsibility to her queen.

Adrastai searched Taja's face for signs that she was lying to him. Something in what she said just didn't sit right with him. He knew, though, that if he did confront her, she'd deny it or rail against him more. Finally, he inclined his head, his hair slightly obscuring part of his face from her. "That's fine. Alterran and Reina will discuss the whole situation. I can bring her to you afterward, if you wish?"

The panther pulled out from under Taja's hand and strolled to Adras's side, rubbing against his white leather pants. Adras absently petted the cat while staring at Taja. He watched as Taja stroked the fur of the tiger again, remembering how she stroked his body, heated with desire and need. The memories of their lovemaking had his body tightening in response. "Taja?"

Taja glanced up at Adras. She could no doubt see the desire in his eyes and his body's obvious need. She lifted a dark eyebrow. "Yes, that's fine. Why don't you go now, before you're late? I'm going to take them out while I have a chance. You can stop on your way to the court and immerse yourself in some sidhe female to slake your obvious sexual thirst."

Taja whistled to the cats and stood up to walk past Adrastai. Adras grabbed her arm and pulled her against his hard body. He tilted her chin back and lowered his lips hard against hers. His erection brushed against her soft mound. She gasped against his mouth in shock at his quick, decisive action. Adras smiled deep inside. Taja wasn't as unaffected as she was

pretending to be. He released her from his embrace and watched her stagger a step before recovering.

“The only person I’ll be fucking anymore is you, my beloved Taja. I don’t break my vows. I handfasted you and made you mine through our bonding of magick. Your body will be the only one I taste, touch, and fuck, until I explode.” A stray thought entered Adras’s mind, causing him to growl, “Just remember, Taja, I’m also a true sidhe. I get jealous. You let any other man touch you and they’ll die. Now, I’ll go. Reina sent word she’ll be here tomorrow sometime. There are things to be arranged. I will see you tonight and we’ll talk. I’m not going to let you run away so easily from my touch, Taja Drevin.”

Taja shivered as Adras walked out of the cottage. She rubbed her arms and then placed her warm hands on her breasts trying to ease the tight nipples that craved that man’s touch. His last kiss had scorched her emotionally and physically. If she had to, she’d admit that she hadn’t wanted Adras to stop, but to take the kiss to its full conclusion.

Shaking off the desire that he had intentionally stoked within her, Taja made her way to the bedroom to grab a few necessary items for her little stakeout. Giving the cats some instructions, she then left the cottage to do what had to be done.

\* \* \* \* \*

An hour later, Taja stood before the gray cottage where the councilor had gone. It seemed almost eerily quiet, as if it were abandoned. Making herself comfortable in a nearby tree that prevented her from being spotted by any observers, Taja began the wait to see who all visited this Aerwydon, or Caerwydon, that both the councilor and Frelin had spoken of.

Through the day, various fey entered the house and then left, their eyes seemingly aglow with refreshed dedication to the cause of purity and Seelie isolation. She made copious notes about what they looked like and of any snatches of conversation she heard, especially as a couple of fey royals met together in front of the house.

“You realize that the reina arrives on the morrow,” the full Sprite said to a sidhe female.

The lavender-haired woman nodded, her face wrinkled with disgust. “Yes, Aerwydon says that once both weres are killed, the treaty will be null and void. I can’t wait. It appalls me that Adrastai would dare cavort with someone not of the Seelie court.”

The sprite male chuckled, “Lihde, you’re just jealous because Adras never gave you the time of day. The fact that the sexual were attracted him pushes your buttons because you want him still.”

Lihde growled and slapped the sprite. “I will have him once that mixed breed is dead. We’ve always been friends and once she’s gone, he’ll seek solace in my arms.”

The two followers of Aerwydon went their separate ways as night fell. Taja shook her head at the hatred this Lihde woman showed her. It was hard to distinguish between the personal jealousy and the hatred she had for all mixed breeds. Perhaps that was one thing that this leader played upon -- jealousy, as well as revulsion. Thing was, Taja knew the history of the Seelie court better than those who claimed to be pure. The Seelie court races were actually just mixed races themselves that had been considered pure over the millennia as they kept breeding true.

When no one else seemed to be arriving in the middle of the night, Taja made up her mind once and for all to approach the leader and stop this problem at the source. With a sigh, she fell only into a light sleep, in case anyone approached her hiding spot.

\* \* \* \* \*

Morning found Taja rapping on the pale gray door. She waited for someone to answer the code that she knew signaled that she was a member. Resolved, Taja made a mental check that she was indeed ready to face this. Reina would be arriving at any moment to Loreth, so the risk to them both would grow exponentially. She also knew if Adras had any clue, he'd have tied her to the bed and fucked her until she was unconscious. Too bad he hadn't done that -- then she could've let this go easier. Taja smiled wryly at that thought. As it was, he had to be wondering where she was when he returned to her cottage to find her missing.

The door opened slowly, creaking as if it didn't want to let in the light of day. An older woman stood before her. The hair had once been blonde, but with time and hard work, it was streaked with gray. The eyes that met hers were beady and dark, with a haunting of power in them. Taja knew instinctively who it was that had answered. As the visage wavered, Taja at last recognized what magick was being used and tried to contain her reaction. Glamour magick!

Taja knelt down before the woman, her mind working furiously as the pieces were slowly coming together. She bowed her head while holding out her ceremonial dagger. The pommel with the panther head faced the old woman. Taja couldn't see the woman's face, but knew that she was deeply curious. The dagger slid out of her hand. Taja waited until she felt the dagger at her throat.

"Why have you come, were-cat? Don't you know I want you dead? You're a threat to my race. You, the whore of Adrastai, the whore of all weres," the woman sputtered.

Taja didn't move an inch. The woman would slit her throat if she edged one way or another. Taja whispered, "I've come to tell you the truth, Aerwydon. I'm not a whore of any man, sidhe or were. If anyone is a whore, it's the one who let magick seduce her until she couldn't live without it."

Taja remembered the tales of the ancient sidhe witch, Aerwydon. To the others, she was called Caerwydon, the name she possessed before she broke Seelie and Unseelie laws. How could this woman still be alive after so long? Why would she risk coming to Loreth?

What was in it for her to break the treaty between the weres and the Seelie fey? She had to know that there was peace between the Unseelie and the weres for many years now.

The blade nicked Taja slightly, but then was removed from her neck. She tilted her head to look into the dark, beady eyes of Aerwydon. She could feel the blood trickle down her neck and the scent of it called to her animal nature. Resisting the urge to put her fingers to her mouth and then lick the wound took a great deal of Taja's patience. Not stopping the light blood flow was abnormal to any were who could use their saliva to help speed the healing process. Her gaze never left the woman before her.

"Come inside, were-whore. Come in and tell Aerwydon all about the whore you speak of. Perhaps you'll be of use to me, after all. Maybe I will spare your life then."

Taja rose slowly to her full height. With a pointed gesture, she wiped the blood off her neck. As she licked the blood, Taja commented, "Spare my life? You'll need me to bring her down. Or for me to protect you from her, you old magick-sucking hag."

Taja darted to the side as the dagger embedded itself in the doorframe. With a tug on the hilt, it fell into her hand. Taja slid the dagger back into its sheath. As she shut the cottage door, she let out a cheery little whistle. Aerwydon's glare caused the whistle to die on her lips. A breeze blew past her. It reeked of magick and hate. She couldn't push her luck yet. First things first.

Taja boosted up her personal shield that helped protect her from casual magick, just as Adras had shown her those many weeks ago. She stood with her feet apart, bracing herself. Aerwydon grinned evilly. "Come to me, were-whore. Play magick with me. Tell me of this other."

Taja didn't move. "Drop the spell, witch, and I will. Until then, I'm not saying a word."

She waited while Aerwydon kept pressing magick against Taja, trying to make her bow down to her personal power. Taja resisted the urge to bow and concentrated. Summoning her own personal magick, she pushed back against Aerwydon. The blinking of the beady eyes told her that she'd scored a point with the witch. Slowly the breeze died down until it was gone.

"You're stronger than I thought, were-cat. Sit and speak with me. I want to know of the magick-whore," Aerwydon drawled as she turned to the wood stove behind her.

Taja glanced to the left and saw the table and chairs against a wall. Turning a chair around, she carefully sat down, making sure there were no hidden spells that would be triggered. As her eyes adjusted to the darkened room, she looked around the dim cottage. Anything of use had to be memorized, in case they ended up battling here on Aerwydon's ground.

Books were strewn everywhere, as well as spell components. The chairs were old, but comfortable. The walls were covered with various tapestries dealing with ancient magick within this world and the mortal realm. Aerwydon took her magick seriously. Taja grinned slightly as she recognized one of the spellbooks of Charna, a were magic-user. The fact that



Aerwydon felt the need to learn were magick gave her a pause, then a glimmer of hope. Some of that magick was dependent upon having were talents. Being a full sidhe, Aerwydon wouldn't be able to access some of the spells.

Taja saw a small black book that was near her feet. Power flared as she stealthily scooped it up while her enemy continued standing over the stove. Taja opened the book quietly as Aerwydon poured two cups of the steaming tea.

When Aerwydon turned, she let out a shriek. "Drop that, were-whore! How dare you touch a sacred book of the sidhe?"

Taja held out the book. "This? This is a sacred magick book of the sidhe? This is an Unseelie court magick spellbook. Something that you, as one of the Seelies, shouldn't have in your possession. What are you doing with this, Aerwydon?"

Aerwydon's eyes narrowed as she hissed. "How do you know this?"

What harm could follow to show her exactly what she faces? The woman has to realize sooner or later that I'm not an easy mark. Perhaps then she'll see the futility of her actions.

Taja opened her leather shirt and showed Aerwydon the tattoo above her right breast. The symbol only showed when Taja willed it to appear, as was the case with anyone who had the magickal tattoo embedded in their skin. It was the Unseelie court royal symbol. The stylized knot was reminiscent of a Celtic wedding knot. In the middle of it was the letter "Dasha," which meant magick child. The gasp from Aerwydon made Taja smirk. Gotcha, you witch. You knew I was mixed heritage, but not which one specifically.

Aerwydon placed the cups on the table and grabbed Taja's shoulders with a force that caused her to bite back a wince of pain. One gnarled finger traced the tattoo continuously. The woman muttered under her breath. "Only those of the court royal families are tattooed. Unseelie children are the only ones who bear that mark, no one else is allowed. This creature is marked. This isn't possible. I was told she was sidhe and were. How can she be both Unseelie and were?"

Taja said nothing as the sour breath hit her nostrils. The woman's body heat was almost too much for her to handle. The magick that resided within Aerwydon was enough to burn Taja to smithereens. She waited without moving or speaking. It was a battle of patience, and she was determined to win this round. Finally, Aerwydon looked into Taja's face. "Well, child? How does a were bear the mark of an Unseelie sidhe?"

Taja wanted to shrug and make this woman work for the answer, but the wild look in Aerwydon's eyes made her reconsider. There had to be a way of turning this to an advantage. As power crackled around her, she realized just how dangerous this old crone was. By the books amassed and the way the woman was able to casually discharge magick without seeming to need to recover meant she was indeed ancient. The realization that she was indeed facing Aerwydon, the banished witch of the fey realm made her throat close. Though part of her had known it was possible, Taja's impetuous act of not telling anyone where she was could imperil her life, as well as those she loved.

Aerwydon growled at the lack of answer. She placed her palm on the tattoo. A burning sensation began to emanate from Aerwydon's palm into Taja's body. Taja tried to not move as pain began pulsating throughout her being. She wanted to pull away, or backhand the witch into the wall to make it stop. Clearing her throat, she grunted, "Stop, Aerwydon, or I won't explain. Plus, you'll have to face Queen Reina and Queen Iolana if you mark me in any way."

Aerwydon growled in loosely controlled anger, but removed her hand. "Speak, were-child. Tell me how the likes of you bear the mark of the royal Unseelie court."

Taja motioned for Aerwydon to sit in the other chair. Might as well be comfortable, as I might just die at her hand, one way or another. When the woman sat opposite her, Taja picked up the cup of tea and inhaled the fragrant aroma. The bouquet was inviting, but she could smell a hint of the poison known as delga. It was popular among those of the Unseelie court. Part of her was amused at the attempt to kill her with a poison common to her second home. If her father were here, he'd laugh in the witch's face. Taja knew that wasn't an option she had. At least, not right yet.

She placed the cup back on the table. "My father is one of the queen's courtiers. My mother was a were who visited the Unseelie court during the time of the were-vampyr conflicts. My mother and father were well suited to each other, and I was the result of their union. I've grown up in both worlds."

Aerwydon's eyes were like saucers as she realized what Taja didn't say. She placed her hand over the cup in front of Taja. "Don't drink this. It has delga in it. I didn't know, Unseelie were."

"There was no need for anyone to know. Had you known, then your life would be forfeit, as the queens dictated since my birth. Very few people know the truth of whose child I am. I was to live life as a were, but given my full heritage and training in both realms." Changing strategies, Taja asked, "Aerwydon, you search for the magick-whore because she threatens to mix sidhe with others?"

Taja knew that by referring to the treaty and those who supported the treaty as magick-whores, the ancient witch would be more likely to answer her questions. Something about the crone still seemed out of place, but she knew she wasn't skilled enough to discern what it was. The more she could find out, the more likely she could figure out some way to take out the witch and prevent the treaty from being dissolved. At least, she prayed she'd be able to stop the powerful crone.

Aerwydon's gaze never left Taja's face. Taja could smell the fear and the power within the elder sidhe. It was a dangerous combination that could get her killed. The fact that she wouldn't poison her by Unseelie means only meant that she feared Iolana, Unseelie queen. Why fear Unseelie magick or punishment, if she's all that powerful? Unless there's weakness in her magick armor I can exploit by my Unseelie magick.

Aerwydon pushed herself out of the chair and moved toward the woodstove. "Taja, you don't understand. She's trying to mingle the magicks and take away what makes the sidhe

unique. I'm protecting the last bastion of magick. I'm here to protect each race's power from dissolving if interbreeding continues. We will lose Seelie identity and our magick, if it's allowed."

Taja waited, her body trembling as the power in the room seemed to climb toward an unseen apex. She knew that soon, she'd be facing the magick-whore, as Aerwydon put it. Her only hope was that she could do enough damage and stop the problem.

Aerwydon continued, unmindful of Taja's preparations to attack. "That female would do anything with a cock. If it were male, semi-male, or vaguely shaped like a male, she'd screw it so she could possess their magick. She'd whore herself out for her next fix. Mixing magick and taking it away from the purity of the races is an abomination. She needed --"

The air swirled past Taja as suddenly Aerwydon began to change, to straighten up from her hunched-over state. Her hair went from long and gray to a silver-white sheen. Aerwydon turned around and came toward Taja as the Lady of Cats quickly scrambled out of her chair and tried to find the door. Aerwydon's dark, beady eyes were now silver and cold. No emotion was there except the craving of power. Absolute power. Absolute magick.

Taja drew out her dagger and made the sign to bring forth her shield of protection. No longer was Aerwydon her crone self, but a younger version. The eyes gave Taja the clue she needed to put the final piece of the puzzle together. Caerwydon was a succubus. Had anyone ever realized?

"Caerwydon, I should've known. When did you become sidhe?"

The woman stepped closer toward her. Taja avoided the dagger tip as her opponent tried to find a way to touch Taja's bare skin. "I've always been sidhe. I was sidhe-born when Caer, the demon, changed me into this...this creature that I am. He said it would give me what I desire the most. Little did I realize it'd made me a protector of all things pure -- me, the witch accused of being impure by working with a demon!" The succubus lunged forward to scratch her long nails against Taja's skin, but she ducked out of the way. "I need your magicks, Taja. I've got to stop Reina and Alterran from letting the realms mix. I can't let our powers be diluted. I will not allow it!"

Taja slashed at Caerwydon's clawed hands. The dagger blocked the fingernails from touching or digging into her skin. She knew the magickal touch of Caerwydon would slow her down, make her sluggish and prevent her from accessing her talent. Succubae loved to tease men and steal their magick and souls, yet when dealing with women, it could only slow them down and make them unable to use any power. Taja eased her way toward the door while the other woman went into a berserker-like frenzy.

The screams became higher when Taja slashed and cut Caerwydon's arm. As Taja pushed open the door, one clawed hand connected with her bare shoulder, the nails digging deep. Blood welled up in the holes created by Caerwydon's attack. The succubus's magick began clouding Taja's and caused her to stumble as things began to fog in her brain and body.

Damn, damn, damn, Taja thought. She tried to shift into her cat form. Caerwydon's magick blocked her from her natural talent. The others had to be informed of the true nature of Aerwydon/Caerwydon. If they didn't comprehend the succubus's power, they would all fall under her touch. Caerwydon's laughter rang in Taja's ears. "You can't escape me now, Taja. I'll have your powers to stop Reina and Alterran. After, I'll be able to fuck Adrastai and take his powerful magick, as well. I will rule the Seelie and keep them safe. Then I'll be able to prove myself as pure to those who thought otherwise."

The world spun and darkened slightly. Taja knew that Caerwydon was trying to exert her magick and control her. Taja tried to run, but couldn't. Her sight darkened as her body began to go numb. She was out of time, and no one knew where she'd gone.

Taja crumpled to the ground in a heap. She looked up and saw Caerwydon standing over her. As darkness began to consume her sight and consciousness, Taja saw the flash of fangs as Caerwydon closed the distance.

## Chapter Eleven

The roaring in her ears brought Taja to consciousness. The room spun as her eyes opened. She could see faces all around. In an instant, Taja realized she wasn't in the cottage anymore. Where am I? These are Seelie people. I think. Taking in a couple slow, deep breaths, she tried to pull herself onto her knees. A foot came down on her back, pushing her flat to the floor.

"She will die if you two leaders do not agree to my demands," the old woman said with power resonating throughout the hall.

King Alterran spoke first. "Aerwydon, the weres are no threat to the fey. You know that. Release Taja back to her ruler. If you let her go, then we can talk."

Taja knew that her queen was tall at six feet, with tawny hair and deep brown eyes that shimmered in the sunlight. Reina was not only the queen of the weres, but also queen of the birds. She didn't give in easily to any person. Not even the fact that one of the lower queens was being held would make her give up her position of power.

Reina spoke next. "Aerwydon, what problem do you have with the weres? What have we done to you? Speak and be heard, woman. As for Taja, know that if you harm her again, you will pay with your life." Reina and Taja's eyes met and the wordless communication they were known for by other weres seemed to occur in that split second as Aerwydon pushed the were-cat down on the floor again.

Aerwydon's evil smile took in Adrastai. Taja's eyes lifted and saw the man she loved as he stared at the evil witch. His muscles were bunched tightly, showing how upset he was, even though his face showed no emotion. "Prince Adrastai, you won't mind if I get rid of this little were-whore will you? We all know you need a woman whose magick is as strong as yours."

Adrastai struggled to keep from launching himself at the old, decrepit woman. If she thought he'd take her instead of Taja, his heartmate, she had another thing coming. He clenched and unclenched his fists. When his gaze fell upon Taja's near-naked body, his eyes catalogued every scratch, every cut, and every bruise. Adrastai promised himself that Aerwydon would be dead before she could leave the court. Unlike his predecessors, his mercy was gone with his ras'zhari used as bait.

"Witch, I want no other than Taja Drevin. She's my heartmate and we're handfasted. Nothing will make me give her up," Adrastai countered, taking a couple of steps toward Aerwydon.

"Stop, or she dies!" Aerwydon shouted as she placed the blade of the sword against Taja's neck. Taja's eyes locked onto Adrastai's. He paused when he saw the look on her face. There was something there she was trying to tell him, but he couldn't quite pick up her thoughts like he could with other full-blooded sidhe fey.

Taja moved her head a bit to keep her gaze locked on Adras. He could see she was desperate to tell him something about the witch -- something he needed to know. Taja braced her hands and feet on the floor. Suddenly, she jerked her body up, forcing Aerwydon off of her. Taja's face went pale, but still she kept moving forward toward Adrastai. "She's not Aerwydon, she's Caerwydon, the eternal succubus, servant of Caer, the demon!" Taja called out as Aerwydon swung the sword at her exposed back.

Adrastai dove in that instant, knocking Aerwydon over. Suddenly magick and wind buffeted through the court. As it centered on the fallen witch, Adras grabbed at Taja's hand. But the change once again came over Aerwydon, transforming her into Caerwydon, and her hand grasped onto Taja's. The silver eyes looked down at Adrastai as a wild, evil laugh bubbled forth.

"Foolish fey! Did you really think that I'd let you take this lovely Unseelie were? I plan to rip her apart and make her magick mine. Piece by lovely, succulent piece. You, Prince, will be the one to help me. Strip for me, Adrastai." Gone was the old woman cackle, and in its place was a low, sultry chuckle. "Let me see your perfect sidhe fey body so I can begin to take the powers necessary to keep the sidhe safe from halflings like Taja."

When Adrastai hesitated, Caerwydon pulled Taja's hair, lifted the top half of her body off the floor, and ripped the leather binding holding Taja's shirt, exposing her breasts to everyone in attendance. One of her long nails raked across a nipple, drawing blood as Taja bit back a cry of agony. Adrastai saw Taja stiffen her back so she could handle succubae poison. His course was set. Taja was the woman he loved, and he would not let her die at the succubus's hands.

Adras marched before Caerwydon. He unhooked his sword belt to let the sheath and blade fall to the floor. Then he began removing his soft, white shirt that emphasized his fey musculature. His darkest blue eyes never left Taja's green ones as he tossed the shirt aside.

When he began to unfasten the strings on his navy blue leather jerkins, a female hand closed over his.

“Let me help you, Prince Adras,” the husky, sensual voice said as Reina knelt to one side of Adrastai’s thigh. “Since you are doing this for one of my were queens, it’s the least I can do to make sure this will be a pleasure for you.”

Taja’s eyes glared in anger and hurt at her queen’s actions. As Reina helped to unlace Adrastai’s pants, the queen placed a ring upon his one hand while her other hand began to push down on the material. As Adrastai’s semi-erect cock emerged from beneath the fabric, Reina’s hand briefly caressed it as she helped him to remove the clothes from around his ankles.

Taja tried to control her jealousy, but the fact that her friend, her queen, had touched the man she loved was almost too much for her to take. If she got out of this, Taja knew she and Reina would fight over this disrespect.

Connected by the strange succubae magick, Taja sensed Caerwydon trembling in desire. Taja’s heart dropped to the floor and shattered as she watched her queen caress Adrastai’s naked body as she removed the last of his clothes. Reina then knelt before Adrastai. After she bowed to the prince, she slowly stood up, her hands sliding over every inch of his skin. Not once did Adras react or look at Reina, his eyes locked on Taja.

Taja only knew that, at that moment, she was sure that not only did she love Adrastai and had failed to tell him, but now she had lost him completely to whatever was about to happen.

Reina moved back to Alterran’s side as Caerwydon stepped toward Adrastai. One of Caerwydon’s nails cut the straps holding up her dress. As it settled around her ankles, her innate magick kicked in causing other males in the room to unwillingly groan with lust. Before the prince was one of the most alluring succubae known to man, naked in all her glory. Caerwydon held Taja by the arm, while beckoning the proud, naked, male fey.

“Come to me, my Prince. I want you to show this were-whore how two sidhe really bring forth sidhe fey magick. Come and take me, Adrastai. Let’s make the Seelie protected always from those who seek to corrupt and weaken it.”

Adrastai resisted the magickal pull of her words. He knew she was using her sexual appeal and voice magick to draw him to her. His eyes shot back to Taja. Her breasts were full, lush; her nipples tight and beaded. Though one had a slash on it, Adrastai wanted her more than anyone he’d ever known. A slight shift in his gaze and he took in Caerwydon’s nude body. It was lush and dark. Her curves were perfectly proportioned, while the silver hair contrasted with the cocoa color of her skin.

He imagined his mouth exploring the dark nipples of Caerwydon's breasts or burying his face in the glistening wet curls between her thighs. Adrastai knew, though, it'd be a temporary pleasure, for there was always a price for dallying with a succubus. She would never own his heart, as it was already taken. His thumb played with the ring Reina had slid onto his finger. By the design alone, he knew it was a ring of power that each of the rulers of the realms wore. Had she not believed in him and his skills, she'd never have entrusted him with her were ring in order to save Taja.

Caerwydon licked her lips as Adrastai moved closer. Her hand snaked out and captured his cock. With long, hard strokes, he grew and throbbed in her grasp. The smile Caerwydon gave Adras was pure sex. Taja moaned in pain and in resignation, as Caerwydon's other hand tightened around her arm, forcing her to watch at what was happening. She bit her lip to stop herself from crying as she watched his body react to the succubus's magickal touch.

"Fuck me, Adrastai. Let the power between two ancient sidhe lines mingle. Come drive yourself deep within my heated core. Drive home all the magick of our kind," Caerwydon urged. Her voice was silken and enveloped every male there. If there hadn't been female Seelie feys there, the males might've fought to be the first to taste the witch. As it was, each female Seelie royal placed their hands protectively over a nearby male, thus exerting patience and control.

Adrastai looked into the cold, silver eyes then down into the hurt, green eyes. Those green eyes sung to his soul and his heart. Within their depths he could see the love that Taja had hidden from him, as well as the devastation she felt, because she thought she was going to lose him forever.

With a small, tight smile, Adrastai spoke, his hand stroking Caerwydon's arm. "Let me take the were-whore. I can show her how she can't handle full sidhe power. This entire time I've held back my magick, as I've known that she lacked the necessary energy to match my own." He leaned against Caerwydon, his fingers playing with each tight nipple, while her hand kept milking his erection. "Then after I break her, you can take all her magick, as she won't be able to wield it once beaten down by our superior Seelie abilities. After that, I shall claim you before all of these people and show them how the Taer'tha, the ancient witch-mage match, brings forth the ancient magick of our people. We won't need the were magick then."

Caerwydon's lips curved into a wicked smile. Taja's eyes lit with fear, her body shuddering as a slight, desperate sounding whimper escaped her throat. That sound and Taja's look of utter desolation gave Adrastai faith that this impromptu plan could work. He stepped back from the succubus, lifting a brow to show his royal irritation at her lack of response.

Caerwydon threw Taja against Adrastai's legs. "Fuck her, kill her, do as you will, but open her up to my power. I need her magick so I can meld with you completely, Prince Adrastai, son of Alterran, heir to the Seelie throne." Looking down at the beaten Taja, she



announced, "I want to watch you destroy the woman who once posed such a danger to me and our kind. Now she's nothing more than a plaything -- soon to be a dead, drained one at that. Poor baby were-whore."

Adrastai nodded as his hand wrapped itself in Taja's black hair. He yanked, pulling her up against him. Taja winced in pain, tears slowly leaking from her eyes and down her cheeks. She clearly hadn't recovered from the poison magick Caerwydon used to control her, or the beating that had followed. There was no way for her to shift, much less fight. Her body slammed flush against Adras's hard, hot body. Taja let out a gasp as his cock nestled itself between her thighs as his mouth claimed her.

He tilted Taja's head further back and started to ravage her exposed throat. He bit it, licked it, and suckled on the soft skin he found there. Adras's other hand curved down and cupped her bottom. He tilted his hips, making sure Taja felt how hard he was. He groaned as she whimpered beneath the sensual assault and power that was Adrastai, the Seelie mage-warrior.

His fingers slid into her slit and sought the warm wetness that signified she was ready to be taken. Taja stiffened, unwilling to encourage or make it easy for him. One finger felt her moisture as the others followed into her tight entrance. Slowly, he withdrew his fingers, letting them glide up and down her cleft, taunting and teasing as his mouth traced a path down the front of her chest.

Once his mouth found her nipple, a cry burst forth from Taja. Adras smiled against her soft, weighty flesh. Her responsiveness to his touch increased his desire for her. Everything he did now was to show her the honor and love he had for her. He brought his hand out of her hair and traced the other nipple. He pulled, tweaked, and gently massaged it.

He could feel the burning desire grow in Taja, striving to match his. Adras needed that burning desire in her. Unless she matched him, this ritual he was about to enact would be worth nothing. Absolutely nothing. He bit down on her nipple harder than normal, causing Taja let out a yell filled with passion and pain. Her eyes fluttered open and, in that instant, Adras knew that no matter what, she was his. The only thing Taja didn't realize was that he was hers alone.

He eased Taja down onto the floor. Once she was beneath him, he looked upon her lush body. His awareness told him that Caerwydon watched, and that any wrong moves would cause them all to die. Adras turned his head, his eyes widened to see Caerwydon's hands were caressing her own breasts and playing with her clitoris. Her breath was fast and panting. This was sheer torture for the succubus. They couldn't stand to watch when they needed the release just as much, if not more, than most races. Adrastai gave her a wicked grin and licked his lips, causing the succubus to moan with want.

Adrastai's goal was to make sure Caerwydon never touched the were and Unseelie magick that was Taja. There were ancient rituals that could end in death, though they looked like a lover's tryst. In some of the most ancient lore, there were a few that would allow

another Seelie to take their lover's magick for a short time into their own flesh and wield it. Taja didn't know that he had finally mastered the one thing he had asked her help on.

When he had met the ruler of the were realm, Reina had spoken to him about the ring that each ruler in Hylia was given to help enhance their rule and allow them to tap into the power of their people at times of great need. Reina's ring would make it easier for him to accomplish. But the ritual needed to be completed. Their magick was powerful enough to reverberate through the Seelie court that one night; it could be enough to stop Caerwydon. Adrastai refused to doubt that what he was going to do would fail. There was no room for failure. With a mental "I love you, Taja," Adras began to release his magick around them both.

He kissed Taja's stomach while he motioned for two guards to each hold onto one of her hands. She tried to fight them off, but the guards were too strong for her in this weakened condition. Each guard pulled her arms back until they were flat on the marble floor.

"Do not let her touch me. I'm going to teach her once and for all how much more superior the fey are to the weres. I'm going to make her pay for her insolence -- right, my little horteenas?"

Taja didn't react to the were term for betrothed. Her mind was still clouded with the residual poison and with the passion Adrastai invoked in her body. His mouth claimed her clitoris, sucking on it long and hard. Taja screamed at the intense pleasure that exploded through her body.

Her hips bucked while Adrastai slid his hands under her ass. He squeezed her hard as he buried his face deep, his tongue licking her wetness. His teeth scraped her clit while Taja began begging for release. With each deliberate movement, Adrastai mentally spoke the ancient words and wondered at the woman beneath him.

She's so responsive to my touch. This woman is made for me and me alone, Adras thought in triumph. He slid three fingers into her molten core. As he thrust them in hard and deep, Taja tumbled over the edge. Her orgasm rolled through her body, while Adras felt it drive him higher to a new sensual awareness. In that moment, their magicks began to collide. This was what he needed. The magick of them both, already bonded once, could join easily this time, filling them both. Passion reached a crescendo as another climax hit Taja.

Taja arched back, her body thrashing as she tried to control the pleasure flooding her. The guards held onto her arms, not letting her out of their grasp. Adrastai slid up her body until his hard cock teased her wet entrance. He had to have her consent in order to complete this ritual. If she refused him, then the power that was generated would die with them, as would all hope to conquer Caerwydon.

"Taja, do you want this? Do you want me to fuck you in every way, and open you to everything?" Adrastai whispered in her ear. "Including all the magick between us?"

He stroked the ring against her breasts, the coldness of it forcing her nipples to pucker even tighter. She arched, trying to force him in her, as he kept only the head of his cock stroking her wet nether lips. Adras smiled as she moaned at his teasing. The full power of sidhe sex magick and the natural Seelie ability soared within him as his heart poured out his love, making his magick all the more powerful.

"Tell me, Taja, my ras'zhari. Tell me you want this. Let me show you what you don't understand." With an ultra-low whisper he knew only she would hear, he added, "Trust me, my heartmate, my Other Soul."

"Fuck her -- take her now, Prince Adrastai! If you don't, I will. If I fuck her I'll make sure she screams, not in ecstasy, but in pain. I will create a cock with razor edges to take her to the brink of orgasm, then to death, while I suck her magick from her body. Fuck her and show her the fullness of Seelie power," Caerwydon urged as she forced one of her guards between her spread legs. Growling at him to shove his fingers deep within her, Caerwydon moaned as the guard did exactly that. The guard then proceeded to slide his fingers in and out of the succubus, his rhythm becoming hot, hard, and fast in tempo with Caerwydon's pants of pleasure. The succubus leaned her head back as her hips rocked to the guard's motions.

That moment of distraction was what Adrastai had needed. With a nod, he entered deep into Taja with one hard thrust. Taja's hips met his, their rhythm showing that they were mated by more than just magick alone. As he stroked her body with his, Taja whimpered his name.

"Adras! Please. I love you. O'heyyle, my heartmate," she cried, letting out her emotions as their magicks collided within her.

Hearing her words of love, Adrastai let loose the last bonds around his magick, the magick that could only be given to one who loved him as much as he loved her. As he slammed harder and harder into her, the sidhe magick began to pulsate around them both. Taja's eyes opened as she felt Adrastai's body caress not only her womb, but also her soul. His eyes were filled with the love he had never told her of, and he knew she finally could see the truth.

"Mine," Adrastai growled as he brought up one of her legs onto his shoulder. The ritual was almost completed and soon the power between them both would upsurge, giving them the chance to stop the succubus.

Taja couldn't hold back anymore. Her love, as well as Adras's magick, broke down the walls surrounding her were and her sidhe magick, allowing them to be mingled to where she'd never be able to block one off from the other. As he claimed her, his words low and powerful, her body shuddered, signaling that she was about to climax. Their intertwined magick touched them both, the ancient ritual causing enormous power to be invoked.

As the magick enveloped them, Adrastai chanted against Taja's lips the last part of the spell that soul-bonded them together. She began keening as the ultimate climax rocked her.

It was caused by their love, their combined magick, and their souls weaving together. Adrastai growled Taja's name, and his life-bearing seed flooded her womb as he went over the edge, his body thrumming with Seelie, Unseelie, and were magicks.

He felt her key the were talent of shifting as she started climbing again in the emotions he was flooding her with as their bodies melded together in an unending rhythm. This beautiful woman seemed to know exactly what he needed her to do and what was the best for them both. There could be no one else for him, ever. Taja was his forever, from this moment on, and nothing would ever dissolve their bonds.

Taja triggered her shift into her panther form, and as her magick raged throughout her body, it activated the ring, allowing Adrastai to begin his own shift at the same time. She didn't care anymore about hiding this aspect of were lovemaking from Adrastai or anyone else who watched. She needed to feel the magick in her animal form, as well. She could feel him urging her within the magick to change for him.

Adras kissed her and she gasped as she realized he wasn't frightened at the fact that she was shifting while his cock was deep within her body. His emotions of desire and want of her, all of her, filled her mind. He wanted to feel the soft fur of her panther body as he pounded his cock into her while he shifted into his own animal form.

Yes, Adrastai, I'm yours in all forms, in all ways, my Jethmer, my husband. Swiftly, she completed the transformation.

As he felt her body shift, Adrastai called upon all the magicks they possessed together and spoke the key to shift. A gasp went up in the Seelie court hall. Seelie and Unseelie magick combined with the magick of the were and were made one within the sidhe known as Adrastai, Prince of the Seelie fey. When the shift was done, he was no longer in man form, but that of a white tiger.

As the transformation completed, the white tiger slammed one last time into the docile panther. Once its life-seed was spent, it roared in joy, then it sprung at Caerwydon. It wasn't until the guards who were trying to make their mistress climax started screaming that her attention reverted back to the prince and the were-whore. One swipe of the tiger's front paw and Caerwydon lay on the floor, bleeding.

Within a minute, he was back in his naked male body. Adrastai placed his hand with the ring upon Caerwydon's breast. The panther came to his side and shifted back. Taja laid her hand upon his. Sharing a look of love, they then focused their magick through the ring.

"Death, destruction, and all things doomed. Begone, Caerwydon. Never again disturb these realms," Adrastai chanted using the ring's power, as well as their combined magick, to send the succubus back to the demon realm, where she'd have to fight for power in order to escape once more.

With a puff of smoke and a keening wail, Caerwydon and her men disappeared. Once she was gone, Taja slid to the floor. Adrastai gathered her in his arms as she began to weep. She shivered against him, while she tried control the emotions flowing through her. His embrace reassured her it was over, as her mind struggled to make sense of all that had happened.

The voice of her queen could be heard over the din of people as they cheered Adrastai and Taja. "Taja Drevin, stand and make your report," Reina called out.

Taja pulled out from Adrastai's embrace as her leader's voice sang through her were blood. She carefully stood up and made her way to where Reina sat. Memories of her queen touching Adrastai flooded her mind, but then she remembered seeing Reina place her token of office upon his finger, giving him the control he needed over the were talents. Her queen hadn't betrayed her, but had given her lover the means to help bring this to an end. Relief filled her heart and soul at that moment.

"Reina, I am here. The weres can learn the Seelie magick without worrying that they can't on the basis of racial and magickal differences. Weres may never be as accomplished with it, but they can do at least the basics." Taja paused, catching her breath. "In turn, the fey can learn our basic were magick and glamour to help them when the gateway opens and once again our worlds are accessible by mortal man."

Her voice shook as she gazed into the dark eyes of her queen. Reina's head nodded. "I am pleased by that knowledge." The reina's voice lowered. "What of you, Taja? What have you found here, Were-cat Queen?"

Without looking at Adrastai, Taja cleared her throat. "I've discovered more of my heritage. Within my soul, I can touch Seelie, Unseelie, and were magick. I've learned not only control, but also when to let the magicks be used together for the betterment of everyone."

"What about the prince?" Reina insisted, her voice regal and sharp. Taja knew why Reina was doing this. She knew that she heard what was said. "What have you learned about him in the time you've spent as his student, teacher, and lover?"

"I love him. He is the bond that I've lacked all this time," Taja whispered, her head lowering in fear and embarrassment. "Without him, I'm not whole. His magick is a complement to mine. He is my hortein, my betrothed, if he'll have me."

"What say you, son of my loins, Adrastai?" King Alterran spoke.

"I love Taja. She is my ras'zhari, the other part of my soul. She is my beloved, my horteinas, as well as the woman I'm bonded to, heart, soul, and magick. What more do you wish?" Adrastai responded as he stood in front of his father.

Taja turned to look at Adrastai. He stood naked before her, his eyes never leaving her face. She whispered, "Do you mean that? You don't care that I'm a were or mixed breed?"

“You being were allowed me to learn more of the magick granted to our races, and without your teaching and were magick, I couldn’t have changed forms. Come here and love me, Taja. Promise me you’ll be at my side, now and forever,” Adrastai said as he opened his arms to her.

She flung herself into his arms. Her body wrapped itself around his. He held her tight against him as he kissed her deeply.

“Yes, please don’t let me go. Ever.”

Adrastai smiled as he strolled toward the end of court hall, proud of the naked woman in his arms. “I’ll never let you go. Let’s go and become one, my love.”

Taja grinned and whispered mischievously, “You mean you wanna fuck again, huh?”

“Hush, woman. I mean I want to eat you and drive myself into you until you become pregnant with our children.”

“Oh. Yes...” Taja’s eyes teared with the pleasure of the thought of having children just like her young nephew. She took Adras’s hand and followed her soulmate toward their future.

With that last comment, they headed through the doorway, leaving the astonished royal Seelies with both the king of the fey and the queen of the weres smiling at the forged link between their realms. A magickal soulmate bond as they’d witnessed didn’t come often enough in their lifetimes. They could only hope that with this treaty, more of their peoples would find love and completion, if not with their own kind, then with others.

As the king and Reina watched their envoys reach the doorway, Adrastai’s voice carried something indistinct to them. Yet, his possessive, deep chuckle made them smile.

In response, Taja exclaimed, “Adrastai! I didn’t know you could -- Oh my!”

Everyone laughed as the couple went to create their own treaty, a treaty of love and desire.

## Appendix

This appendix will help to explain a bit more behind the magickal realms of the Seelie, Unseelie, were, and vampyr. It will provide a bit more information regarding what they all face in three years, as well as what's happened in times past.

The Seelie and Unseelie courts are in the realm of the fey. These people were once part of the mortal world, but as man rejected the magick of the world, they also negated the treaty between man and fey. The fey are often known as faeries, sidhe, bainsidhe, brownies, etc. Those who are full-blooded of their subspecies or who can prove that their mixed ancestry was at least three generations prior are considered Seelie fey. Those who are mixed bloods, like Taja's father who is half sprite, half sidhe, are of the Unseelie court. The only requirement for being of the Unseelie court is that the fey abilities are manifested in early childhood. In the Unseelie court, most members are fey subspecies that have interbred, though there are some exceptions, such as Taja.

The were realm is ruled by the were queen or king. Under the absolute ruler are subordinate rulers of each subspecies of were. At any time, one of the sub-rulers can challenge for the lead were rule, but they must show that they can transform beyond their own form into a different subspecies. Weres are born, as well as made, though that is rarer than people realize. The myths of werewolves and lycanthropy are encouraged by the were, as it helps to keep the truth of their existence from mortals. The only time a were can make a person into one is by biting them and tasting their blood seven times, exchanging the pattern with each bite.

Vampyrs are made as well as born. They can walk about in daylight, not just the night. Born vampyrs differ from made ones in certain ways. They do drink blood, though it's not just for nutrition. They can eat and drink like normal people do. However, born vampyrs can only pierce certain areas with their fangs. Made vampyrs have slightly shorter fangs and find

it easier to feed from the carotid arteries or the wrist. In order to become a vampyr, an exchange of blood and ritual must be done. Vampyrs can mate and have children.

The magickal land they all reside in was created when mankind tried to destroy them out of fear. Together, they joined their magicks and created Hylia, the land beyond the veil. Each realm possesses a gateway to the mortal realm. When mankind wouldn't stop hunting the fey, the Seelie and Unseelie fey came together and gave up their glamour magick in order to close the gate between the mortal and fey realm.

While the weres and vampyrs learned how to blend in somewhat among mortals, the fey kept themselves isolated. After one thousand years, the gateway once again was open between mortals and fey. Slaughter of both sides occurred in that year before the magick once again cloaked Hylia from men's sight. Even among the main races of Hylia, there were often confrontations, raids, and occasionally war, as they fought to control expansion and debated over the other shielded, but open gateways.

As it stands in the time of Alterran, king of the Seelie court, the time of the veil to be lifted is closing in. His people have no glamour with which to blend in with the mortal people, which will make them prime targets for twelve months before Hylia vanishes from mortal sight. In his wisdom, he realized that his people could learn from the other races that had some contact with the human world. That way, the losses would be minimal, if any. Perhaps after two thousand years, man and the races of Hylia would learn to live in peace, thus ending the need for the veil.

However, not all people of Hylia want this treaty, or the teaching of magick between the separate races. As time ticks away, the other races have to face facts -- the mortal world might not accept them or their ways. Through myths and legends, their peoples are seen as frightening and thought of as being evil. Fighting the ingrained beliefs of the mortals will require the fey to look outside themselves and enlist the help of Hylia's other races in order to survive.

 THE END 



## Cynnara Tregarth

Born in Chicago, currently living in the Peninsula state, aka Florida, Cynnara loves to write, has always been writing or telling stories. Unfortunately for her, it means that her sense of direction sucks on occasion, but she can tell you all about ancient history. She always writes hot, but on occasion, delves into various other genres. Yet her first love is paranormal with various other genres tossed in for good measure.

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