



To
Catch a Wolf

Colette Denece

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Colette Denee

Dedication

For Raymond. May your Sorcha find you when you least expect it.

Chapter One

“Sorcha?”

Her name. It came out more as a whisper than a question. Hell, Braith was surprised even that one word managed to emerge through the shock that shoved his heart up into his throat. The red illuminated numbers on his alarm clock showed the hour as well after midnight.

The sheer curtains, left by his home’s previous owner, billowed around her form. Unsure if this was a dream or reality, he sat up with slow, careful movements. Time suspended as he stared at the woman poised by his bedroom window. With the moonlight behind her, he couldn’t see her face. Not that he needed to. He knew her body better than he knew his own. She looked like an angel. Or a ghost.

“Sorcha, is that you?”

There. He spoke with strength this time. She bobbed her head in a nod. What was she doing here? He pushed aside the sheet that covered his lower torso, set his feet on the floor, and tugged on a pair of satin boxers that lay over the nightstand. All without taking his gaze from her. He clicked on the bedside lamp and rubbed the remnants of sleep from his eyes. “It’s not even dawn yet. How did you find me?”

“I need something from you.”

Braith blinked. “From me? What do you mean?” She didn’t answer, so he moved closer. His arms crossed over his chest in automatic self-preservation. As if a physical barrier would keep the scent of her skin, and the proximity of her soul, from squeezing his heart dry.

She tucked a lock of hair behind her ear. Turned her face away from him. “I need your help.”

“Why won’t you look at me?” He frowned when she shook her head, loosening the hair she’d just tucked back. What the hell was going on? His chest tightened in apprehension.

“Sorcha? Are you hurt?”

“Define hurt.”

His heart skipped a beat. Braith's hand shook a little as he reached for her chin. She flinched, but didn't resist when he turned her face toward the light. "Damn it, Sorcha!" His fingertips brushed the cuts and bruises that crossed her cheeks as rage swelled within him, rolling his stomach.

"I'm fine."

"Bullshit. You look like you lost a boxing match."

The length of her lashes fluttered at his words before lifting to grace him with her gaze. Broken, blue eyes. Eyes that had haunted his every dream for five long years.

This was not the woman he'd walked away from in the States. This? This was just a shadow. The realization stole his anger and gentled his tone. "Baby? What happened?"

"I'm your baby no longer," she snapped and jerked her chin from his touch. "The rest, can I explain tomorrow? Right now, I just want to sleep."

Braith expelled a heavy breath and ran a hand through his hair. Damn, but that endearment slipped from his lips with ease. He took a moment to remember why he had left her in the first place, and tried not to feel her soul pulling at his. Tried not to wrap her in his arms, hold on tight, and then shake the answers from her. "Look, I can't help you if you won't talk to me. Who—"

The question broke off as she swayed on her feet. He caught her in his arms and carried her to the bed. She hissed past her teeth as he set her on the mattress and perched beside her. Her shirt lifted as she lay back. She tried to tug it down, but Braith caught her hand before she could hide the cuts across her abdomen.

"Gods, woman, you look like you've been tortured! Who did this? The pack?"

Her eyes closed as she curled into herself. He tried to touch her cheek, but she swiped the hand away. "They did enough. Don't make it worse."

"Worse?" Braith said. "You came to me, darlin', not the other way around. I'd never hurt you. Only those worthless animals you call family consider pain fun."

The subtle shake of her head twisted his heart. Physical harm wasn't the only kind of hurt. Truth be told, he'd cut her once, and cut her deep. It was a scar they both carried. With a wordless sigh, he lay down and tucked her against his chest. She sank into his embrace as if his body alone could shield her from the world.

“I’m sorry,” Sorchá whispered. “I just—” Her fingers curled into small fists against his heart as she trembled with a quiet sob.

“Easy, baby. Just let it go. I’m here.”

He held her until the tears subsided, and the tension eased from her muscles. Her breath fell even, and he knew she slept. Braith rested his cheek against the top of her head. The sweet, coconut scent of her shampoo filled his nose and triggered one traitorous memory after another.

Sun-baked skin and tangy, salt air. The hushed lullaby of the sea. Her naked flesh oiled and sliding against his. Over his. Under his. He’d lost count of the number of times they’d snuck away to her family’s house at the Delaware shore that summer. Their last summer. When he couldn’t get enough of her. Morning. Noon. Night. Under the boardwalk. Deep in the ocean. Skinny-dipping on the bay...

“Damn it.”

With a small grunt of discomfort, he shifted his position. His gaze fell upon the curve of her shoulder, bared by a tear in her shirt. There upon her skin lay the ultimate truth of his life. A tattoo. A pair of dragon wings holding a broken heart.

A lump formed in his throat that wouldn’t ease no matter how many times he tried to swallow. Guilt swamped him, regardless of the fact that her injuries were the fault of another. She was his. Not his soul mate, not his wife, not even his friend. Just his. In a very deep, very primal, inexplicable kind of way, it was his job to protect her. To love her. To keep her safe. And he’d failed.

Angry at himself, and with her, Braith reached over and clicked off the bedside lamp. Tomorrow, he’d get some answers.



Braith woke through a slow peel of peaceful layers. He didn’t want to leave the haze of a succulent dream. By his ear, the warm breath of his nocturnal lover fell with easy cadence. Her soft, feminine breast pressed against his side, one silken thigh drawn up over his waist. He could feel the flat of her warm palm over his heart. Touch. Her every touch, however small, made his soul sing. Power surged beneath her fingertips. Urged his heart to keep time with hers.

Eyes closed, he struggled against the call to consciousness. It was such a pleasant dream. Peaceful. Comforting. Hell, the only damn comfort he had without her in his life.

“Brai,” whispered a voice.

A frown furrowed his brow. Sorcha sounded so real. So real that he didn’t want to look and find the bed empty. The voice, though soft, was rough. A voice that hadn’t been used in a long time. Like her throat was injured and—

“Oh gods, not a dream.” He groaned. His fingers flexed into the supple ass cheek held so tight within his hand.

She moved against him with another rasp of his name. Braith opened one eye and then the other. Sorcha lay curled up against his side, her face buried in the crook of his neck, one leg draped over his abdomen. Those luscious lips of hers parted, and her hot, wet tongue licked a spot over his carotid. Once. Twice.

“I love your taste,” she muttered.

He went still, every part of his body alive and tingling, as he stared at the ceiling and fought the urge to kiss her awake. Damn, but he wanted her. Wanting her was never the problem. Little shock waves of desire rippled along his spine, making his cock jump to attention. Sorcha muttered his name again as she rolled away from him.

Seizing the opportunity of freedom, he scrambled from the bed like it was on fire. He gave himself a full minute to lament his inability to bury himself deep within her body. His or no, her answer would still be “not a chance in hell”. Maybe it was better that way. His cock promptly disagreed by thickening to a painful degree.

A grumble from his abdomen reminded him of the body’s need for sustenance of another kind. Want warred with prudence. He had no idea why she was here, or what she wanted from him. She was hurt. She was asleep. She was definitely not his anymore. He had no right.

He swallowed a curse, turned on his heel and marched into the kitchen. At least he could satisfy one hunger. While he made himself some eggs and bacon, his thoughts lingered on the woman in the other room. He’d never thought to see her again. Distance was the main reason he’d moved to Mexico in the first place. He knew her deepest, darkest secrets and that

knowledge was not comforting. In fact, knowing who and what she was only served to endanger them both.

The bacon sizzled away in the pan as his mind shifted back to the night he'd left her. The feelings all rushed to the surface in a blinding flash of sorrow, regret and pain. Her voice echoed through his head.

"Let me get this straight. You don't want me. Because of who I am."

"I didn't say that."

"But you meant it," Sorchia accused, hands on her hips.

"Look, we're just too different. Your people—"

"My family!"

"Fine. Family. Whatever. They'll never accept me, babes."

Her eyes softened then. "How will you know unless you try?"

"I don't want to try." Braith clenched his fists at his sides and looked away from her gaze. "It's not worth my time. I am who I am."

She paled and inched over on the mattress a bit. "What you really just said was that I wasn't worth your time. Right?"

How he found the strength to look her in the face, he still didn't know. The visit from her pack earlier that day only confirmed what he already knew. Sorchia was Shandai. A wolf shifter. He was not, and never would be. A fact her pack made sure he understood. Every cell in his body screamed in protest, but the word tumbled from his mouth all the same.

"Yes."

"You son of a bitch."

He saw her palm fly at his face and made no move to stop it. Hell, he welcomed the slap. And her hatred. Because the lie was for her own good. She needed a mate within her own species, the pack insisted. Her family would protect her, keep her safe. She was far better off with them than with him. Yet their logic couldn't dissuade the regret that ripped at his heart.

"Baby, I—"

"Don't," Sorchia snapped. She rolled off the bed and jerked on her clothes. Quick. Angry. "I don't believe this."

“It isn’t that I don’t care about you—”

“Whatever.”

“I’m doing this for your—”

Sorcha whirled around, boot in hand. “If you dare tell me this is for my own good, I swear to Odin I shall beat you to death!”

Braith clamped his teeth together and watched the love of his life storm *out* of his life. He paced the bedroom floor and fought with himself to go after her. Within an hour, he knew he could no longer stay in the city. City, state, country, world. He needed to leave. Taking only what his bike could carry, he threw his belongings into a bag. His arm swept the surface of the dresser, pushing the contents into his backpack. His stuff, her stuff. Everything. Then he jumped on his motorcycle and fled. Fled from her. Fled from himself.

The screech of the smoke alarm slammed the door on that memory. Cursing fluently, he jerked the pan from the stove and threw it in the sink. It toppled a dirty bowl, the water hit the grease, and a flurry of hot fat spat up in the air.

“Ow, shit!”

He cradled one hand against his chest and used the spatula to smack the cover off of the blaring smoke alarm. Pieces of plastic flew everywhere as he jerked both the battery and the wires out of the unit, but at least the noise stopped. In a moment of pure self-disgust, Braith stomped on the cover piece and called himself a few choice names. When at last he looked up, it was to see a very amused pair of eyes. Eyes that watched his every move.

Sorcha leaned against the doorframe, one brow arched. Okay, beating the alarm to death was funny. He could admit that. Almost. He smothered his own smirk, turned and opened the kitchen door to let some of the smoke out of his house.

“You think it’s dead now?” he asked, turning around.

“I’d say so.” She smiled. The sun that filtered through the window bathed her in a halo of light, drawing out the colorful bruises on her body. He’d noticed the ones on her face the night before, but not her arms and legs. Steeling himself against her scent, he walked up to her and ignored the fact that his ex-lover stood before him in nothing but a tank top and G-string.

“So. Who did this? Cadon? Meg?”

She shook her head in the negative with a scowl. “Tempest. Well, her minions, anyway.”

“Vampyr? Why would your pack be dealing with them? I thought that wasn’t done.”

Sorcha shrugged. “They assumed I had something they wanted.”

Braith tipped her chin to tilt her face toward more light and whistled. “By the look of your body, I’d say it was something pretty valuable. You never involved yourself in pack politics before. Why now?”

Her clear blue eyes held his a moment before she lifted a hand and touched his chest. “That’s my business.”

He tried not to react to the innocent touch of her hand on his body. To the surreal feel of her power, her soul, spreading warmth to his from a single index finger pressed to his skin. He lived within the land of eternal sun, but he never felt warm. Never truly warm. Unless he was with her.

“You came to me. Doesn’t that make it my business now too?”

She ignored the question and went back into the bedroom. Braith hated when she did that. He followed her, arms crossed over his chest in case she tried to touch him again.

“Hey, here’s a question. Just where was your pack when all this happened, huh?”

Her slight shrug did nothing to calm his rising temper. Braith shook his head and uncrossed his arms. Her pack had taken measured pleasure in letting him know where he stood that day so long ago, and exactly what Sorcha would face if she tried to bring him into their little circle. He left her to keep her safe, and she got hurt anyway.

“Why did you even come here?” he asked. A knot of anger wrapped around his heart. “What do you expect me to do? I’m the last person you should be with.”

She didn’t answer, just continued to stare out the window at the sea. Maybe it was better if he didn’t know the reason. Whatever it was, she had left her family for it. That alone told him volumes.

“Look, I own a small bar down the beach. I have some business to take care of today, but I should be home around lunchtime. There’s food in the fridge if you get hungry before then.”

Sorcha nodded without turning her gaze from the window. He went into the bathroom to change. When he emerged, she was still in the same place. Braith passed behind her and cast a quick glance over her shoulder to see what held her interest.

The yard behind his home was barren save for a few cacti, two tall palm trees and a wild patch of Chaya. A single straight path of terra cotta stepping stones led from the back door to the beach. At one time, the previous owners had attempted a garden, and the lifeless sections of empty earth pockmarked the sand.

There was nothing there. Just as there was nothing left between them.

“See you in a bit.” Frowning, Braith kissed the top of her head, then turned and left.

Chapter Two

From the hollow of a pale oak tree, a child's figure emerged in the night. It ran across the sweet grass and fell upon its knees beside a fallen man. Tears trailed down the cherub cheeks of the young girl as her small hand reached to splay over the bloodied shirt of Cyric Lynnae. Sorch's father, and all she had left in this world. The bad people had taken her mother away not a day before.

"Papa?"

Sorch watched the raven curls of her younger self bounce as the child shook her head from side to side, struggling against the sobs that pushed out of her chest. Back then, she had eyes only for the shredded body of her father, and the circle of wolves that had bayed for his death not an hour before. Now, looking back, safe in a vision instead of reality, she could watch herself. Her reactions. See the things she didn't care to see then.

Her child-sized body bowed as she hugged the broken parent and willed it back to life once more. But the heart beneath her ear drummed a happy beat no longer. Cyric was dead.

Anger soon replaced the despair. Trembling with all the righteousness of a scorned woman thrice her age, the child rose and slowly drew the gilded dagger from the leather loop at her father's hip.

The silver blade cut through her palm, cut well and deep and true. Without a sound, the girl curled her fist over the wound. She swallowed hard and let the blood drip upon her father's heart.

"I shall avenge you, Papa. The Shandai will die. Each and every one of them. And when the last one stands before me, he shall beg my mercy. On this, I swear."

Sorch closed her eyes against the memory. Face pressed into the smooth wood of the window frame, she panted and tried to calm the race of her heart. The folly of youth. She spent years chasing the Shandai before Alec found her. Foolishly, she fell for a man who wasn't a man at all, but one of the creatures she had sworn to destroy. He bit her. Changed her. And left her for dead.

She survived. Day to day. Then one night she ran, quite literally, into another shifter. Meghi. Meghi guarded her, took her in, as did the rest of the pack. She had a home. A family. She also had the unique position of being an enigma. To the pack's knowledge, no human had ever been changed by a single bite. Shandai were born, not made. Yet still, the pack accepted her as one of their own.

Years passed, and the pain of her father's death eased. Meghi told her the truth of Cyric's demise, and so an old vow died. Replaced by the call of a new vengeance. A different blood oath against a different enemy. It was the woman in white who would beg penance for Sorcha's murdered father. Tempest. And only Sorcha knew what the Queen Vampyr wanted of a man long dead.

Her fingers shook as she went to the phone on Braith's bedside table and punched in the numbers for home. She had to let her pack know she was still alive.

"Hello?"

"Meghi. Get me Meghi."

A minute passed in silence before the familiar voice of the pack enforcer, Meghi Dristare, came across the line again. "Sorcha? Blessed Odin, girl, I thought we'd lost you. Tell me where you are. I'll send Torin to fetch you."

"I'm in Mexico. On business. Don't bother Torin, I won't be here that long."

Meghi drew in a sharp breath. "Sorcha—"

"Look, I don't have a choice. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Meghi's nails drummed against the handle of the receiver, sending a dull rhythmic tap into Sorcha's ear, before she spoke again. "Tempest sent us a message this morning. She said you are on a blood-oathed mission for her and have two weeks." She expelled a curse, then continued. "Two weeks before the Hunt is called upon your head. Now, I have no idea what you are doing in Mexico, but I have a damn good idea who you are with, and I'm quite sure this shit has something to do with him."

"It doesn't, Meghi. I swear."

"Right. And I'm that stupid? We're the only family you've got. Where else would you go?"

Sorcha sighed, then said, “Okay. I admit it. I am with Braith. But it’s not what you think. He has what Tempest wants. I’m here to get it. That’s all.”

“Look, you are under my charge, Sorcha. I can’t protect you if you aren’t here, damn it, and that *human* sure as hell isn’t up to taking on a Hunt. That’s twenty Vampyr hunting you down, Sorcha. To the ends of the Earth and beyond if they must. They won’t stop hunting you. Ever. Do you understand that?”

“I remember the definition of a Hunt, Meghi.”

“He left you, Sorcha, and he doesn’t care if you live or die. Remember that.”

The line went dead.

Sorcha replaced the receiver. Her teeth chewed at her bottom lip as she glanced at the alarm clock beside the phone and noted the time. Two hours had slipped away while she’d stared out the window, lost in her own thoughts. Precious hours worth of borrowed time, wasted for her own memories.

Time to get busy. She stripped, went into the adjoining bathroom and turned on the shower. Letting the water heat the tile floor of the stall, she pulled a towel down from the cabinet in the corner. The movement brought her before a mirror and Sorcha froze in horror. Her reflection was the face of a stranger. Cuts and bruises crossed both of her cheeks and trickled down the sides of her jaw. A ring of fingerprints wreathed her neck, and she shuddered at the thought of the one who had put them there.

Tempest was a Queen Vampyr like none other. Her very aura vibrated with hate and greed. After two seconds in her presence, Sorcha had wanted to turn and run, but the hypnotic eyes of the woman held her still. And that was the bitch of it all. Unable to move, unable to defend herself. Of course, Tempest didn’t lay a hand upon her, her minions did. The queen merely stood and watched while her underlings beat and tortured, never stopping the abuse for more than the few seconds it took to wake Sorcha when she passed out.

She swallowed the sudden bile that rose in her throat. Her fingers curled under the edges of the sink. One hit by the queen’s bastard priests, and Sorcha sang like a songbird, spilling more secrets than she cared to ever recall. Including the fact that she knew the location of the Masti.

“You made a pact with the devil herself, my girl,” Sorcha told her reflection. With a snort of self-pity, she stepped into the shower and let the hot water wash away her sins. The heat felt good on her battered body. If she could just shift into her brethren form, the bruises and aches would disappear. But Tempest’s priests made sure the pain would last. Whatever the bastards had injected in her arm inhibited her ability to shift and heal herself. Sorcha prayed to Odin the effect wasn’t permanent.



Braith left the bar and headed for home once again. Twice now he’d started to go, yet each time his feet found their own way back to the bar. His mind wasn’t on work. Indecision kept turning him around.

Sorcha permeated his every thought, his every breath. Part of him was afraid to go home and find her gone once again, like a ghost. The other, larger part, feared she would still be there. Hell if he knew what to do with the woman, or what to say. Did Hallmark make a greeting card that read, “I’m sorry I abandoned you. Sorry I left you to them. Sorry I never told you the truth before I said goodbye. Now go home again before I do something stupid, like start kissing you and never stop”?

Several minutes later, he pulled open the screen door to his house. He could hear the shower running, so he occupied himself with household chores until the water shut off. When he figured he’d stalled long enough, Braith walked into his bedroom.

“Sorcha? I’m home,” he called by way of warning.

She emerged from the bathroom wrapped in nothing but his small, blue bath towel. The swell of her breast rose above her fist, skin flushed a soft pink from the heat of the shower. The long lines of her tanned legs came together as she tried to keep her body hidden in the terry cloth. A blush stained her cheeks, deep enough to be seen even through the bruises. Sorcha cast an accusing glance his direction.

“What?” He smiled and held up his hands in innocence. “I warned you I was here.”

“I didn’t hear you.”

“Not my fault.”

“Yeah, well.” Her mouth quirked up on one side, and she crooked a finger, gesturing for him to turn around. He coughed and lowered his gaze to the floor instead.

“My shirts are in the dresser over there. Second drawer. I might have an old pair of shorts in the bottom drawer too. If you’re interested.”

“It’s either that or walk around naked, right?”

Braith stared hard at the wood beneath his toes. His vote was the latter of the two choices. Not that his vote mattered. Her towel hit him in the head. With a smile, he laid it open over the door to dry and turned to find her tying up a pair of cut off sweat shorts. The dark blue T-shirt she chose dwarfed her lithe form. He watched her teeth nibble on her bottom lip as she worked the drawstring into some semblance of a knot. Damn, he wanted to go over and touch her more and more with each passing second.

Sorcha smiled in his direction. “I don’t suppose you have a brush?”

Braith nodded and pulled a brush from the top of his trunk. He had a few things of hers from when he swiped that dresser top five years ago. He just wasn’t willing to give them all back. Yet. “This one might look familiar.”

He tossed the brush over and made the bed while she tended to her hair. His fingers itched to run through the silken locks, but she braided it back with a speed and ease that thwarted any such ideas. Straightening the pillows, he turned to go into the kitchen and almost ran right into her.

“Damn, I forgot how quiet you move.” He laughed.

She rose on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. “Sorry. Thanks for taking me in.”

The feel of her lips, her breath against his skin, sent a streak of need through Braith’s neglected soul. His fingers tightened of their own accord. Awareness flared in her eyes a second before he whispered her name and captured her mouth in a searing kiss.

Drowning, he was drowning. And damn if he cared. A whimper slipped from her throat as her arms wound around his neck, bringing her body flush with his. Gods, how he missed the soft sounds she made when they kissed, touched, loved. Braith pulled her closer with a hand splayed at the small of her back. He kissed her like he never wanted it to end—a kiss to make up for the five years of his absence. Five long, grueling, wasted years. Over and over his lips moved against hers, seeking an entrance to taste what was hers alone.

Her heart drummed against his chest, pounding out a rhythm that his own pulse picked up and joined. Warmth stole through every pore in his body. He didn't know what he'd expected, but it certainly wasn't this overwhelming sense of peace. Of relief. Of his soul rejoicing in the only place he could ever call home—Sorcha.

"Gods, woman, I've missed you," he said as she broke the kiss to nip along his jaw.

Her teeth caught at the sensitive lobe of his ear and tugged until he bent his tall frame lower to grant her easier access. Sorcha traced the shell of his ear with the tip of her tongue. "Mmm...Braith."

His name on her lips pulled up memories he thought long buried. His eyes closed as the air rushed from his lungs, and he squeezed her tighter, silently willing the memories not to fade again.

"I've missed you too, Brai."

The soft whisper wrung a growl from the depths of his throat. Lifting her up by her ass, he caught her lips again and sent his tongue in deep to lick at the roof of her mouth. Her legs wound around his waist, arms locked over his shoulders to hang on tight.

He didn't care why she had come to him. She was here. Belonged here. With him. Against him. Beneath him. With a smirk of possession, he lowered her body to the bed and followed her down. The scent of his own soap reached his nose, mixed with the fragrance that was undeniably Sorcha.

Her hands ran lightly up his spine, body arching, showing him without words exactly what she wanted. The tumble to the bed bared her stomach, and his fingertips brushed the marks there before traveling higher. She was without a bra, and that suited him just fine. Her breasts were large enough to fill the palm of his hand, in perfect accord with her body. Braith kissed her neck as his fingers found one pert nipple and teased it, pinching and rolling, mimicking the actions of her mouth against his carotid.

Sorcha gasped and pressed him again with a delicious whimper of his name. He nipped at the juncture of her neck and shoulder in response, his tongue lapping at the bite. She moaned and lifted her hips to press her sweet, hot pussy against his cock. She was wet enough to soak the shorts, and it made him grin with anticipation.

“Braith, I want you,” she said. “Now. Right now.”

He ignored the obvious request. With a smile, he kissed her mouth. Slow this time. Teasing. Taunting. Her hands caught at his shoulders, fisting in the cotton of his shirt, tugging.

With a grunt, Braith jerked the shirt off over his head and tossed it aside. Sorcha leaned up and open-mouth-kissed along the base of his throat. Nibbled. Licked. Bit. He closed his eyes and held still, letting her taste to her heart’s content. Her nails raked little tracks through the hair on his chest, and then dropped lower to slip into the waist of his jeans.

His forehead pressed against hers with a shaky breath as she undid the zipper. Sorcha’s fingers curled around his rock hard cock, stroking him in a sure, steady grip. He groaned, the sound lost deep into her neck as he nuzzled at her shoulder, biting at her clavicle again.

“Damn, woman,” he breathed, “I want to fuck you so hard.”

She grinned in answer and released his erection to cup both of his cheeks in her hands. He studied her features, breath drawing in and out as time stood still, waiting and watching the agreement fill her eyes.

“Then take me, Braith. Just once,” she whispered. “That’s all I want. Just one more time. Nothing more.”

His heart beat in instant denial. “Once will never be enough, Sorcha, you know that as well as I do.”

A flicker of anger rippled beneath the facade of her smile. She nodded, and the ice in her eyes served the same purpose as a bucket of water. “Then I guess we’re done here, aren’t we?”

Braith stayed on all fours and lifted his body off hers by the smallest of fractions. She was going to run. Fine. But he’d be damned if he’d make it easy for her.

Sorcha moved beneath him, ducked under his arm and slipped off the bed. Back straight, she headed for the bedroom door.

“You know where I am when you change your mind!” Braith called.

“Don’t hold your breath.”

Damn.

Chapter Three

Sorcha paced the terra cotta tiles in the backyard. The red clay, hot from the sun, warmed the soles of her feet. A thousand times a fool she was to kiss Braith like that. Of course he wouldn't follow through with his lust. He never followed through on anything.

Her anger swelled to an unbearable pitch. She felt the wolf within her body strain to break free, rising like an agonized scream for release. The magic had to go somewhere. Anywhere, so long as it was out. She stumbled to one of the bare garden beds and dropped to her knees. Her hands plunged into the dark, rich soil beneath the sun-baked dirt, and she channeled her energies into the ground.

"Blessed Mother, take my rage. Take my greed, my lust and my dark thoughts. Take this wolf's energy into your heart, and from your womb may good spring forth."

Head bowed, eyes closed, Sorcha felt the soil shift in her hands. She focused on an image, a smattering of life native to this barren place. For a good twenty minutes, she sat frozen in that position. Let the rays of the summer sun warm her back. Let the sound of the waves in the distance ease her pounding pulse. As the surging anger seeped from her spirit, she concentrated on finding her balance, her center, one slow degree at a time.

At last, she opened her eyes and smiled. The once naked garden now housed a plethora of Datura, Desert Marigold, Sand Verbena and Spanish Needles—all exploding in a five-foot arch around her hands.

Anger spent, she trod down the broken path to the beach. A sense of homecoming swamped her the moment her toes sank into the warm sand. No matter where she lived, nothing but a beach called to her soul. She walked all the way to the water line, mindful to go around the rocks and sharp shells. The surf surged forth, over the tops of her feet, providing a cool contrast to the heat of the day. Eyes closed, she tilted her face back and savored the tangy scent of the air. The warmth of the sun's rays. The lonesome call of a single gull passing overhead.

Here is where you should be, girl. You belong here, with him.

The words drifted away as she opened her eyes once again. She shook her head and crossed her arms over her belly, wondering why such a thought would go through her head. Determined not to let his stupidity anger her further, she meandered along the beach, pausing every now and then to pick up a shell.

By the time Sorchas feet found their way back to Braiths door, her mind and body were once again in silent accord. She was here for one reason and one reason only. To retrieve the Masti. Nothing else mattered. Not anymore.



Braith noticed the change in Sorchas the moment she stepped through his door. Gone was the sexy smile and bouncing energy. Her eyes flickered to his and held. Flat. Emotionless. Empty. He swallowed the question he didnt dare voice and lifted the frying pan from the burner.

“Thought you might be hungry.”

She paused a second before nodding. “I am. Thanks.”

“Well, have a seat then,” he continued, giving her his back. “Should be done in just a minute.”

She looked like she didnt have a care in the world. Like she didnt give a damn that he was still hard and aching to be soaked in her pussy. If he had a choice, hed be eating her instead of lunch. Stirring the fish and peppers with more force than was necessary, he cut off that line of thought. Kissing her got him nowhere. Dwelling on the aborted lovemaking—well, that was just suicide.

He snatched a plate from the drain board and slid the contents of the frying pan onto a flour tortilla. When he turned, the defeated look to her posture gave him pause. Perhaps she wasnt as immune as she first appeared.

“Its a house specialty,” he said, striving to lighten the atmosphere, and sank into the chair across from her. “Fish tacos.”

One corner of her mouth quirked, but at least she picked up her fork and started to eat. He tried not to laugh at the American using utensils for tacos. The locals had teased him unmercifully for doing the same when he first moved to Baja. Braith watched her for a moment,

hating the way she winced as she tried to swallow. What he wouldn't give to have the bastards who hurt her at his mercy. Anger threatened to leap to the surface once again, but he kicked it down. Balance. Balance was his motto now. Keep it even. Keep it calm. Survive.

"Well... Eat up! I need to go to the garage and work on Elsa for a bit."

Now that got her attention. And a full smile. "You still have that old thing?"

"Yeah, I have my bike." He smiled back. "Couldn't get rid of her. She's old, but she's my gorgeous. Too many memories. Too many good rides to just trade her in. Not my Elsa. She'll die with me, and that's the end of it."

Sorcha's smile faded. "At least then you won't die alone."

He didn't know what to say to that. "Right." He cleared his throat and stood. "The garage's out back, turn left. If you get bored, the TV works. Computer is in the bedroom, but Internet is kinda hit or miss."

She nodded. "Thanks, but I think I'll just eat this and go lay out on the beach. Maybe take a swim. Will you be long?"

He shrugged. "Couple hours. Maybe when I get back we can talk about why you're really here, huh?" When she didn't say anything else, he added, "You know. Whenever you're ready."

"Sure."

With one last silent admonishment for his libido to give it a rest, Braith turned and walked out of the house. *See, you can do this*, he told himself as he trod down the path covered with crushed shells to the garage. *Friends. You can be friends with her. You don't have to want her every second of the day. You are an adult. She's an adult. This can work.*



Sorcha walked the busy main street of San Lupe. The waning moon hung overhead, casting odd shadows in places best left alone. For a human, anyway. The carnival drew to an end too soon. Vendors packed up their wares for the night, their lights blinking out like fireflies before the dawn.

Dinner with Braith had been an odd affair. While he worked in the garage, she had searched for the Masti, and came out empty handed. Part of her wondered if he hadn't thrown it away.

Maybe even pawned it for money. What at first appeared to be a beautiful gold necklace with a heavy charm was actually an amulet of ancient magic. It gave whoever wore it the power to call the Shandai into service. For Sorch, it was a beautiful reminder of her father's artistic gift. For Tempest, it was a means to ensure her own survival—she could call any Shandai to provide protection, and Sorch's people would be helpless to refuse.

She tried not to think of the implications of that. Tried not to think about why she was even here, wandering the darkened streets of Braith's hometown. What mattered right now was getting the Masti to Tempest before the Hunt came to kill Sorch. Meghi would figure out what to do to protect the Shandai from there.

Lamenting her poor grasp of the Spanish language, Sorch shook off her thoughts and tried to decipher the directions the liquor-store owner gave her. Braith had told her how to get to the carnival. He'd gone back to the bar after dinner with some excuse, but Sorch knew better. He didn't trust himself around her, and she understood the feeling. Guess he didn't count on her getting lost in the crowd.

"Right? Is that right?" She muttered to herself, staring at the slip of paper in her hand. "I think that word means right. Okay, so...make a right on—"

A hand slapped over her mouth from behind. Her body was jerked sideways into a dark walkway between two booths. Instinct lowered her teeth in an instant. She didn't even pause to thank Odin that the Vampyr injection was wearing off. She just growled and wrapped her fingers around the forearm in front of her neck.

"Easy, easy," a male voice whispered in her ear. "It's just me, Sorch."

Shoving free from his hold, Sorch spun around and swatted Braith in the shoulder. "Damn it, Braith. I could have killed you."

He smirked, one corner of his mouth tilting up. With an arm around her waist, he pulled her close. "You couldn't kill me. No matter how mad you get."

She tried not to smile. "Oh, I don't know about that."

His eyes turned serious as the smirk fell, his gaze dropping to her lips. "I've been thinking about what you said. About just once. It's not what I want, but..."

Her heart skipped a beat. He deserved to know the truth. She swallowed. “Look, Braith, it’s not what I want either. But I-I can’t give you more than that. Not right now.”

“Why not?” he replied, the pad of his thumb dragging across her bottom lip. “The Vampyr hurt you. Your pack didn’t protect you. Stay, Sorcha. Stay, and let me help you.”

“You can’t help me.” Her chin went up a notch in defense against the guilt that called her chicken. “Not with this.” Her stomach tightened in denial, but what else could she do? Agree to stay, just so she could watch the Vampyr destroy him? Ask him about a necklace he sold or lost years ago?

“Then I accept your terms,” he said after a pause. “One kiss. One night. Just one more time to call you mine.”

“Just one,” she echoed.

Bending down an inch, Braith brushed his lips over hers. Soft and light, like a leaf drifting in the warm spring breeze. Sorcha’s eyes slipped shut as bees danced in her belly. She rose on tiptoe, deepening the kiss by the barest of fractions. Her tongue flicked out to trace his lips. The action earned her a rumbled sound from his throat.

“Sorcha—”

Whatever else he wanted to say disappeared in the grunt that tumbled from her as he walked her backwards into the wood of the carnival stand. He pressed the length of his body against hers, flooding her mouth with his kiss. His taste. Swamped her nose with that crisp earthen scent that was his alone. His hands cupped her ass cheeks and lifted her feet from the ground. She looped her arms around his neck and held on tight as her world tilted.

This kiss was not like the Braith she remembered. This was the kiss of a man who knew what he wanted. And wanted it now. Hot. Deep. Demanding. Relentless. Regardless of consequence, future or past. His heartbeat thundered in her ears, calling to her soul like a lighthouse from a distant shore. Home, this way. This way, home.

Pure, primitive lust broke over Sorcha in a wave. She whimpered and felt a gush of her own hot juices flood her panties. She needed this. Craved this. Craved him. Braith tore his mouth from hers, rasping his teeth along her jaw. “I want you.”

“I want you too,” she panted back.

“Now.”

Sorcha blinked, amazed at the way desire shaded his face. It was deep and dark, beyond human comprehension. If she didn't know better, she'd think he was Shandai, for his eyes shimmered with a dangerous heat sure to leave her burned. Before she could respond, Braith set her down on her feet, jerked open the fly of her jeans and shoved them to her knees.

“Step out,” he whispered, voice roughened by desire.

“Here? Are you nuts?”

“Step out,” he demanded, nibbling on her earlobe, “or I'll rip them off you, I swear to the gods.”

She arched a brow, but did as she was told. His groan mixed with hers as their mouths met once again, and his fingers plunged deep inside her waiting pussy.

“Tell me you want this,” he croaked against her lips. “Say it, Sorcha, say it.”

“I want you to fuck me,” she responded immediately, undoing the buttons on his cut-off shorts. “Right here. Right now.”

Her nails skimmed the tip of his cock, already hard and risen above the waistband of his boxers. She curled her hand around the base, stroking him just as fast and sure as his fingers stroked her. Sorcha moaned as his thumb snagged on her clit and rubbed.

“That's it, baby,” he muttered. “Gods, you're soaking me.”

“Braith,” she rasped. “Braith, now. Fast. Hurry, damn it.” She begged. She couldn't help it. Her body was coiled tighter than a cobra waiting to strike.

He answered by lifting her up against the wood once again. Sorcha's fingers curled in the shoulders of his T-shirt as he drew her thighs up along his waist and squeezed.

“Mine,” he breathed, the tip of his erection teasing her folds, nudging at her opening. “You are mine. Always were. Always will be.”

Sorcha responded with an inarticulate cry of assent as he plunged deep inside her. Her soul crashed into his. Scenes from other times, other lives, other places flashed behind her closed lids, each one coming faster than the last. She dropped her forehead against his and held on for the ride.

Braith pounded into her body, fast and furious, his breath coming in harsh bursts against her carotid. She let the passion take her from the night into a place far beyond the street. His name spilled from her in a rambling chant, broken only by her moans, his kiss, her tears. The climax built inside her with frightening speed, one matched only by the frenzy of his pace. Her chin tipped up, exposing her neck, as she shuddered.

“Come for me, Sorcha,” he prodded as his nails bit into the soft flesh of her thighs. “I want to hear you.”

The cord within her snapped, exploding in a searing flash of fire and light. She screamed his name. The word ended in a howl as the flames consumed her in their fevered embrace. Wave after wave of pleasure reverberated through her soul, marking her as claimed.

“I love you,” Braith whispered. “Forever.” He buried his face in the crook of her neck, every muscle in his body tense. “You know what I want,” he hissed. “Do it now. Sorcha. Now.”

“I can’t.”

“You can. We’ve discussed this before. Make me yours.”

It was a demand she couldn’t refuse. Didn’t want to refuse. The Masti was gone, and she only had a few days left to live. Might as well spend her remaining time with the only person she ever truly loved. Holding his gaze steady with hers, she surrendered. “I claim you as mate, Braith Merlow. Blood to my blood. Kin to my soul. Odin-blessed to blessed-born. Now until eternity.”

“Yes!”

Without a second thought, Sorcha sank her teeth deep into his shoulder. He shouted and bucked against her, each thrust slamming her back into the wood. And then he achieved his own finish, the hoarse cry of victory smothered against her skin.

Sorcha lapped at the blood she drew, trembling in his arms. The link between them weaved itself into an unbreakable bond that stole her breath. She couldn’t tell where her soul ended and his began. They were one, as they were always meant to be. Braith eased her legs gently away from his sides, setting her down with far more care than when he lifted her up. She whimpered as he slipped out of her.

“Oh, baby, I’m not through with you yet.” He laughed. “Grab your jeans. We’re going home.”

Chapter Four

“I remember this,” Sorchu whispered.

Braith's arms tightened by a fraction. He stayed still and listened to her voice in the dark. Her tone was thoughtful, and that never boded well for him. Beyond that, he could feel her soul withdraw, and he hated it.

“I remember the way it felt to be held by you,” she continued. “Lying in the dark, in that little bed that spooned us closer. Your chest against my back. Your arm over me. The feel of your face against the back of my neck. The sound of your quiet, even breath in my ear. Just like this.”

He placed a gentle kiss over her tattoo. “I remember it too.”

“Warm. You were always so warm. Even in winter. I liked being smaller than you. Made you my own personal cocoon. You smelled, always, like the sun and sea. Your heat is a gift from your patron, you know. The one you have yet to acknowledge? The pagan god who waits patiently for you to notice his hand in your life?”

“I don't have a pagan god, love. I'm not like you,” Braith said quietly. “You know that.”

She turned slightly in his arms. He could feel her frown at him through the dark. “Ignoring the truth won't make it go away. You are just as wolf at heart as I am. Perhaps more so. Especially now. When you settle with that, you'll find some peace.”

“I don't need peace.”

“Everyone needs peace. If you don't know who you are, or where you belong, how can you be sure you should be with me? I accept Odin as my pagan father. What does it say when you can't do the same? No, refuse to do the same?”

Now he was truly lost. “Baby, what are you saying? I'm your mate.”

“A mate who promised his love before and left. A mate who felt kinship with wolves his entire life. Who whispered to the wolves, and had them answer back. You won't even pay homage to the god who gave you such a gift.”

It was his turn to frown, and he leaned up a bit to do so. “We’ve been through this Odin thing before. And if you want to know why I left, why not just ask me?”

“I am asking.”

He shifted a bit, unsure of where to start. Granted, he’d rehearsed what he would say many times. Not that anything he planned came to mind at the moment.

“Brai, if you don’t want to talk about it—”

“No, no.” He sucked in a breath and blew it out. “Do you remember the night of the festival?” Her head nodded against his shoulder, so he continued. “I left you at your house, and started home. About halfway there, I was surrounded by ten or so of your family. They roughed me up a bit, told me to leave you, and gave me a glimpse of what would happen to both of us if I stayed. Which is a nice way of saying they threatened to kill me and cast you out of the pack.”

Sorcha sat up. “My family wouldn’t do that.”

“Well, they did. They didn’t like me, for whatever reason, and they made damn sure I knew it.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t believe you.”

He cursed to himself and sat up as well. “Why else would I leave you? You knew how much I loved you. I did what I thought was best for you.”

“Best for me?” She laughed, and it was not a pleasant sound. “How honorable of you.” She slipped from the bed.

“Sorcha—”

“I’m sorry, I need some time alone.”

He sat there, in the dark, and listened to her get dressed. “I’ll be right here when you’re done.”

“Will you, Braith? Or is this all just a dream? You left me once, so what’s to stop you from doing so again?”

“My word.”

“And what is that worth? Your soul drifts. Mine knows its place. Mine knows its path. And mine knows the feel of being left behind.”

The bedroom door clicked shut in her wake. Braith scrubbed his face with his hands. “Damn, that went well.”



Sorcha walked along the shoreline, arms wrapped around her chest to fight off the slight chill in the wind. The waves broke upon the sand in a soothing rhythm. She walked for over an hour before the anger and mistrust inside her heart lay to rest. Braith’s reason for leaving her hurt. Her family’s betrayal hurt. And she was so damn tired of hurt.

She bent to retrieve a shell half-buried in the sand. Strong, warm hands slid along her hips as she stood. A soft smile parted her lips.

“I’m sorry for walking out,” she said quietly, and leaned by reflex into Braith’s body. “I just needed a bit of time to accept that my family threatened to turn me out for dating you.”

Braith’s arms came around to hold her close, his voice a hot, husky whisper in her ear.

“You know, I love watching you bend over like that. Makes me think of other things.”

She shivered from the vision his words put in her head. “You’re trying to make me laugh. It won’t work.”

“Come to the blanket with me,” he whispered, even as his hand slid up to cup one of her breasts in his palm.

A small gasp slipped past her teeth as his fingers found her taut nipple through the thin cotton shirt. “I hardly know you anymore. And there are things—things I haven’t told you yet.”

“I haven’t pushed to know why you are here.” He kissed what skin the neckline of her shirt would allow. “I did notice you went through my house looking for something.”

She bit her bottom lip with a nod. “I did. And I apologize for that. I couldn’t find it anyway. But, it doesn’t matter now. I guess it’s gone and—”

Her voice cut off as Braith brought a hand in front of her face. In his grasp dangled the very object they spoke of.

“Is this it?”

“I—blessed Odin, Braith.” Her fingers trembled as she took the Masti. Tears welled in her eyes, blurring her vision.

“Here, let me.”

Sorcha passed it back, blinking hard to abort her tears, as he hooked the necklace around her neck. “Thank you.” She turned and smiled up at him. “You have no idea how much this means to me.”

He shrugged. “You used to wear it all the time. When I found it in the stuff I took from my apartment, I just couldn’t get rid of it.” He tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “It reminded me too much of you.”

She didn’t know what to say to that. The lump in her throat pretty much left her speechless anyway. She had the Masti. She was going to live. Just as soon as she and Braith went back to her home, and handed over the necklace.

Sorcha felt the color leak from her face as her heart fell. If she went home, her pack would never accept Braith, mate or no. They’d threatened to kill him before. Would his new status as her mate make a difference to them?

No, she couldn’t take him along. How was she supposed to tell Braith she was leaving without him? He wouldn’t let her go. Not after he’d seen what the Vampyr did to her.

“You look so beautiful out here under the moonlight. Now, you have your pretty bauble back, and I have you, and so all is right with the world. Come over to the blanket with me.” He tugged at her hands, lips curved into a sexy smile. “I won’t take no for an answer. Not tonight.”

Not tonight, she repeated in her mind. He didn’t need to know anything tonight. In effect, he had just given her back her life. Or, at least, the possibility of living. He deserved a night to remember.

He leaned forward and gave her a slow, light kiss. Desire flashed through her in a single, vibrating wave. She slid her palm down across his abdomen, and then rubbed the fly of his jeans in a teasing caress. His fingers flexed over her nipple at the touch.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Braith muttered and lifted her up into his arms.

Soft, warm lips slid along her carotid, alternately nipping and kissing the smooth flesh there. She wrapped her legs around his waist and let him carry her across the sand. Even tilted her head back to allow him better access.

“Do you know,” he purred against her skin, “how many times I have wanted to take you since I first saw you in my bed?”

“As many times as I have wanted to be taken?” she replied.

His chuckle rumbled over the pulse in her neck and sent shivers along her spine. Braith set her on her feet. Sorcha lost her balance for a moment, but quickly recovered when her hands fisted the front of his shirt. It wasn’t just the kisses to her throat that made her knees as weak as proverbial heroines. It was his soul. The raw power of his soul moving through her skin to wrap around her own.

“There’s nothing like you and I, baby. No one can ever make me feel like you do. Ever.”

Guilt dimmed the wattage of her ardor. He was right. No one could ever replace this feeling. And once she left him in the morning, she wouldn’t return. Tempest was so unpredictable. A loose cannon just waiting to explode. She would probably take the Masti, and kill Sorcha anyway. If the pack didn’t get to her first.

“Sorcha, look at me,” he entreated, and tilted up her chin with a thumb when she didn’t move. “Baby, what’s wrong?”

“I love you. I always have. I just want you to know that.”

The stark hunger and need in her shimmering blue eyes caught at Braith’s breath. He framed one cheek and then the other. Looked deep into her eyes and placed a kiss to her forehead. Her nose. Her right cheek. Her left cheek. She rose on tiptoe, aiming to catch his mouth with hers, but his hands held her face away. He studied that face, noted the flare of anger in her eyes. He bit his lip to keep his grin hidden.

“Say something,” she demanded. “Kiss me.”

He kept her still, his mouth hovering over hers, close enough that the air between them warmed from their breath. The pulse in her throat jumped up in tempo. He purposely drew out the moment, savoring it all. The way her breath accelerated in anticipation. The growing scent of her arousal. The feel of her wolf spirit being swallowed in his. This was magic. Better than any dream.

“Do you know how precious you are to me?” Braith whispered.

Her eyes flashed with a smile. Her tongue shot out to lick along his lower lip, but still he held her at bay.

“Damn it, Braith. Kiss me. Now.”

He closed the distance with a chuckle that turned into a groan. Her arms wrapped around his neck. He jerked her body flush against his. She ate at his kiss, and he devoured her in return. His tongue slipped into her mouth, reaching, exploring, and tasting the flavor of passion within her. One arm around her waist, he cupped a supple ass cheek and squeezed. The fingers of his left hand drew small circles into her spine while she kissed him until they both couldn’t breathe.

“Take me,” she pleaded on a whimper, “fast and hard.”

“Not long and slow?” He smiled as she bit along the edges of his jaw.

“Yeah, that too.”

“Hell, yes.”

Chapter Five

Braith smirked and toppled her off her feet.

Sorcha laughed as they fell, holding onto his shoulders. She reveled in the feel of his weight pressing her into the sand under the blanket. He smelled like sunshine and felt like heaven.

“My turn,” she insisted and made him roll over onto his back. Not that he issued much protest. Straddling his thighs, she leaned in and attacked his neck with open-mouth kisses. His hands stayed folded behind his head, relaxed, while she leisurely explored his nipples and belly button and lower.

“Watch your teeth, love. Don’t forget what—shi—” His curse sucked in on a wordless mumble as she unzipped his jeans and flicked her tongue over his glistening tip.

“Don’t worry, love. I know exactly what you are.”

She made the first long sweep of her lips over his throbbing cock a tease. Light and fast. She wanted him to barely register the touch, only feel the dampness left behind by her breath.

“Don’t tease me,” he said.

“I’m not teasing,” Sorcha answered, her eyes holding his as she licked along the swollen vein that pulsed up his shaft. “I’m practicing my patience.”

“Patience? Patience was never one of your virtues, baby.”

“Oh. Right,” she muttered and swallowed him whole in a rush.

He hissed out her name. His eyes fell shut. Sorcha grinned at his obvious pleasure. She used her mouth like a weapon—one designed for the basest of pleasures. Her teeth dragged along his shaft and head. Her tongue danced back and forth, as she alternately sucked and licked and teased. And all the while, her hand stroked his base.

Braith latched his fingers in her hair, fisted them in fact, and didn’t remember a single moment in his life better than this. His one true love, his mate, was his again and nothing would rip them apart.

Her hands tugged at his jeans and pulled them farther down his legs until she could ease her knees between his. He kept his eyes focused on the top of her head, watching as she took his thrusts in stride. The longer she pleased him, the more his control slipped, until at last, a groan echoed from within him. She answered it with one of her own, cupping his balls and kneading them.

“That’s it, baby,” he urged. “Suck my cock, Sorcha. Just like that.” She did, and pretty soon, his control was hanging by a thread. “Damn, I love your mouth. Tell me where you want it cause—”

His words cut off because her answer was a fast, hard suck that dragged the full length of his cock with her mouth. Braith felt the vibrations of her whimper radiate out across his body like a spider web. He leaned up a bit. Watched the way she suckled him, over and over again. His fists tensed in her hair, urging her wordlessly to go deeper, faster, harder. Sorcha complied, and the night sky above began to spin.

He panted her name, lost in the moment as his climax licked along his spine. His back bowed as every cell in his body exploded as one. A wordless cry rolled along the beach with the waves as he came deep in her throat. Sorcha continued to lap at the fluid, swallowing his seed with a wicked smirk.

“Is it your turn now?” she asked, blinking at him with all the innocence she could conjure.

Braith laughed, a deep chuckle that bounced her chin against his hip. “Damn, woman. Give me a minute to catch my breath.”

Sorcha tilted her head to the side, her face the perfect picture of an angel. “A full minute? Or a figurative minute? I mean, if you can’t handle the tempo, babe, you need to let me know. I can always look elsewhere.”

Sitting up with a growl, he switched their positions and pinned her to the blanket. “You are mine, Sorcha. Mine. And I’m going to prove it to you.”

Cupping her cheek in his palm, he studied her face. The full moon shone down upon them and cast her features into shades and shadows. The bruises were still there. Faded a bit, but there. “No one is ever going to hurt you again. I swear.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep.”

“You’re mine. I *keep* what’s mine.”

“Am I?” Her voice hinted at doubt. Yet her eyes he could see as clear as in day, as clear as in dreams. Her eyes said she knew exactly where she belonged. He kissed her, just a soft brush of his lips against hers. Just enough to make her lean into his body with a hushed sound.

“Tell me. Are you mine, Sorchia?”

She moaned as he slid two fingers into her warm, wet folds. Moving them with an easy speed, he shifted to suck at the spot on her neck that he knew drove her wild.

“Do you remember the first time we did this?” he breathed against her ear.

“Hm?”

“You were so nervous,” he continued, ignoring the way her back arched to press her pelvis into his palm. “Trembling in my arms. Your pussy so damn hot and wet for me.”

“Yes,” Sorchia hissed back as his teeth tugged at her earlobe. “I remember, damn it. Just—”

“Just what, baby? Do this?” His thumb found her clit and began to rub it, dragging little sounds of pleasure from deep in her throat.

“Braith.”

“Yes.”

“Shut up and eat my pussy.”

He smiled and withdrew his hand. “And the magic word is?”

“Pretty. Please. Sugar. Something.”

He laughed when she cursed and resorted to pushing his shoulders down her body. Her hips lifted against him, shifting this way and that, trying in vain to get him where she wanted him.

“Not yet,” he laughed. “Not yet. I have one more question.”

Sorchia growled in frustration but stopped pushing at him. “What? What, what, what?”

“Whose are you, baby?”

“Yours. I said it, okay? Yours.”

He winked at her. “Always. Forever. As I am yours.”

Sorcha kept silent as his lips moved along her body, trailing fire in his wake. She was always his. Completely his. He was the one who had left in the first place. Tomorrow it was her turn to flee, but her heart would remain here with him. Forever. As silently promised.

Every nerve in her body sang with desire from his touch. His cheeks rubbed along her groin as he slid farther and farther down her skin. She bit back another moan when his hands splayed over her knees and pushed her legs wider apart.

The first touch of his tongue tore a curse from her mouth. He teased at her clit, taunting her with his teeth while his hands drew small, slow circles on the inside of her thighs. Braith took his time, and she both hated and loved every second of it. He bit and licked, sucked and probed. She quivered around him, fingers digging into the sand above her head, trying in vain to stay grounded on earth when she really wanted to fly.

His palm slid up to hold her down a split second before the fingers of his free hand slipped into her core once again. Sorcha bucked and shouted his name. Her spine arched, head tipping back.

“Down here, sweetie.” Braith paused. “Look at me, baby. I want to see your eyes.” He lapped at her clit in painfully slow circles that made her ache.

She curled her fingers by her ears, and looked down at the erotic vision of his head between her thighs. His beloved face buried in her heat drew at her arousal like a whip. She whimpered. His gaze lifted and met hers at the sound.

“Make me come, Braith.”

He nipped at her clit while crooking his fingers deep inside her. The line of ecstasy wound tight within her very soul broke. She had a moment to see his catlike grin and then her body and mind shattered beyond vision.

As her heart and scattered senses returned, Sorcha opened her eyes to find Braith leaning over her, a smile on his face. She smiled back and framed his cheeks with her hands.

“What?”

“Nothing.” He kissed her nose. “Just waiting for you to come back down so I can take you up again.”

She laughed. “I might need a nap first.”

“No nap.” He kissed her neck, hitting all the sweet spots he knew would make her shiver. How do you defend against someone who knows your every weakness?

Her fingers traced along his back in a soft caress that drew a shaky breath from them both. Palms sliding along her thighs, he caught her knees and tugged them up along his sides. The head of his cock rubbed at her clit, waiting for her to make the first move.

There was nothing like this moment. No matter how many times, or places, or nights together. This one moment was the reason for it all. This one thing that they had with each other alone. Completion.

“Sorcha, I love you,” he whispered. “Don’t ever leave me, baby.”

Her throat tightened around the words of agreement and kept her response silent. She couldn’t get the lie out. To say it aloud was almost more than she could bear. Tomorrow, she left.

“Sorcha?”

“I love you too,” she said, and pressed her pussy against him.

He entered her in one slow, deep thrust. Sorcha bit her bottom lip and swallowed hard. He filled her, stretched her, in a way too sweet for words. Braith held very still until she whimpered and moved beneath him. He released a moan, and he gave her what she’d silently asked for.

Together they moved in a rhythm all their own. Each knowing what the other wanted, each knowing what the other liked. Sorcha’s magic flared to envelope them both, taking them far from the beach and into a world where only they existed.

“You feel so good.” He bent to bite at her clavicle. “So damn good wrapped around me.”

“Not good,” she answered. “Perfect. We fit together. In every way possible.”

His arms tightened as he moved within her. Harder. Faster. His thumb slipped into her folds to flick at her clit. Sorcha arched into him and cried out his name. Their souls blended until she no longer knew what was hers alone. The emotions inside him crashed over her like the waves upon the shore—a single unrelenting tide. She couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Braith.”

He picked up their pace, urged on by her hands, her whimpers and cries. His name rippled from her in a ragged chant, each time punctuated by a breathless gasp. When the climax rushed

upon her, she clung to his body. Skin to skin. Heart to heart. Soul to soul. One place. One heartbeat.

“Sorcha...”

His cock pulsed inside her as he exploded. She barely felt his fingers dig into her hips as he thrust through his climax. While she filtered back to the ground, Sorcha felt the threads of power that united them, knit and bind back into their two separate selves. She allowed herself to hold him close for one last moment before gently pushing him over onto his side.

She laid her ear against his chest and listened to the strong, steady rhythm of his heart. He laced his fingers through hers before his breath evened out into slumber. Where the dream world replaced a reality far too painful to bear.

“Sleep well, my love,” Sorcha whispered, near tears. How could she leave him on a lie? Tomorrow she would tell him everything. Why she was here and what she faced by going back. Tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow.

Chapter Six

Never in a million lifetimes did Sorchia think Tempest would stay true to her word. Yet as the black material slipped off her head, Sorchia felt surprised to be on her knees facing three heavily armed Vampyr. So much for her two-week time limit.

“Where am I?” she demanded.

Her answer was a swift blow to the cheek that sent her sprawling across the dirt floor. Stars danced in front of her eyes for a few moments while the vamps shackled her ankles to the wall.

Understanding caused a chill deep in her bones. “Tempest sent you? But I have a few more days left. I don’t—”

“We’ll do the talking here, wolf,” the one Vampyr snapped.

They turned to go, and Sorchia realized she was in a cell of some sort. One with a window that faced the east. Through the bars there she could see the gray sky hint at morning. How did she get here? The last thing she remembered was falling asleep beside Braith on the beach. Braith!

“My friend,” she called after them. “Is he— Did you—”

“Tempest will speak with you after sunset,” the same Vampyr responded. “Until then, why don’t you think of all the possible things we’ve done to your male, hm?”

The trio laughed as the cell door shut with a heavy clang. Sorchia bit her bottom lip and fought to deny them the pleasure of her tears. Their footsteps seemed to echo for miles before silence left her alone. Cold, alone and very scared.

She scooted back against the rough rock wall and curled into the smallest ball she could manage. A tear fell as she thought of Braith. Then another. And another. Arms around her knees, she rocked and let the river come, pouring out her grief. He had to be dead. The Vampyr never left witnesses. Dead. He was dead because of her. She led the executioner right to his doorstep. All for what? Her own safety?

She wiped the wetness from her cheeks on the hem of her shirt. Shirt? Blinking, she looked at herself. Well, at least the Vamps clothed her before they dragged her here. But why didn't she remember? With a jerk, she ripped up her right sleeve and searched the crook of her arm. Sure enough, a bright red welt proved her theory. They'd drugged her.

Surely Braith woke up. Found her being kidnapped. Fought them. Died. A fresh wave of agony rolled over her heart. All for a stupid necklace. If she'd only been strong enough to keep quiet when they first interrogated her, he'd still be alive.

The Masti hung heavy between her breasts. She withdrew the medallion and held it in one shaking palm. Once Tempest had the piece, they would kill Sorcha. Right now, the idea wasn't such a bad one. At least she'd be with Braith again.

Her thumb rubbed the intricate designs of the medallion, over and over, as she stared at it. Her father had spent hours on the knots, the runes, the details of the wolf heads. Only to turn the piece over the flames and begin again. She'd sat on her little bench in the corner and watched him pour every ounce of sweat and magic in his body into the metal until it achieved perfection.

Papa never said why he made the piece for Tempest. He didn't have to. Sorcha remembered the night the Vampyr came to their home and took her mother hostage. Cyric crafted salvation for the woman he loved. To save her life. And then lost his. Three days later, the Vampy broke their word and killed her mother as well.

She closed her eyes. Her hand fisted over the Masti. How ironic that the piece brought his daughter to the same end. An idea sparked in her mind. It grew into a plan. Tempest could have the Masti. Just not the power.

Sorcha wasn't going to go down without a fight. Anger surged forth, and with it came the grounding she needed to focus. The energy needed somewhere to go, and with her fingers wrapped around the Masti, Sorcha knew just what to do. She plunged her fists into the dirt floor and began.

"Blessed Mother, hear me. I've never needed you more than I do now."



Braith curled his fingers over the steering wheel of the rental car. His knuckles turned white as he squeezed. The mansion on the hill filled his field of view. A house he'd never wanted to set eyes on again.

It was hard to believe that just nine hours ago he'd fallen asleep on his little beach in Mexico with Sorchia wrapped in his arms. Now, a motorcycle ride, a plane ticket and one rental car later, he was right back where he swore to never be. Staring at the gates of the Shandai compound.

He drew in a deep breath and pushed open the car door. Somehow, when he woke up, he'd known Sorchia was in trouble. His head hurt, his heart pounded, and his pride refused to believe she'd run from him of her own volition. Someone took her. And he was willing to believe that someone lived right up there. Why else would there be no signs of a struggle?

Shoulders squared with determination, he marched to the gate and pressed the button on the call box. It took a moment, but a voice soon responded. "May I help you?"

"I want to see Sorchia. Right now."

A pause. "I'm sorry, sir. There's no one here by that name."

"Bullshit. Open the damn gate." When they didn't respond, he bent down and added, "She is my mate. Do you hear me? My mate." Stepping back with a muttered curse, he faced the gate and shouted, "You people can't keep her from me again. Even if I have to break down this fucking gate myself!"

"You have some pretty big balls for a human."

Braith spun around at the new voice. A woman stood behind him. Tall. Short hair. Black leather vest, pants and boots. She had enough piercings to make a mother wince. And her eyes were just as cold as the metal through her skin. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Meghi," the woman said. "We've met before."

He caught the scent of her perfume and felt the answering clench of his gut. This was the leader of his un-welcoming party so long ago. "You didn't exactly stop and give me your name back then."

"You have about five seconds to get your ass back in that cheap car and go. Unless you'd like a repeat performance."

"I'm not leaving without Sorchia."

Meghi rolled her shoulders, like a boxer before a fight. “She isn’t here. Five seconds is up.”

“Wait. Someone took her. If it wasn’t you, then it had to be the Vampyr. The sun will be down in less than five hours. We’ve got to save her.”

She stopped, eyes narrowed. “What do you mean someone took her?”

Braith’s jaw tightened in agitation. “We were asleep on the beach. Next thing I know, I wake up alone. She’s gone.”

Meghi shrugged. “So, she finally came to her senses and ditched you. Smart girl.”

“No. She’s in danger, damn it.”

“Fine. Then I will take care of her. You may go.”

“Go? You can’t just—”

He grabbed her arm. His mother always said not to touch a woman in anger. She was right, Braith thought as he lay on his back on the cement, looking up into Meghi’s furious gaze. Perhaps he should try a different tactic. He licked his lips. “Sorry. I wasn’t trying to hurt you.”

With a snort, Meghi released her hold on his chest. “As if.”

“I love her. She’s my mate now, Meghi. Whether you and your family like it or not. And I am going after her with or without your help. Somehow, I’m pretty sure Sorcha stands a better chance if we work together.”

Meghi stood there a moment. She was thinking, and Braith fervently hoped her internal debate would result in his favor. A full minute passed before she spun on a heel and went to the gate. It swung open with the smallest flick of her fingertips. He sucked in a breath, prepared to argue some more, then nearly choked on it as Meghi glanced over her shoulder and snapped, “Are you coming, or not?”

Chapter Seven

They came for her mere moments after the sun slipped below the horizon. Sorchá struggled to stand. The iron weighed down her feet, and the energy she had expended on her plan left her weak as a kitten.

“Come on, girlie, rise and shine.” The Vampyr from hours earlier unlocked the shackles and pinched her elbow in a tight grip. “Tempest wants to see you.”

Sorchá let him lead her through a maze of hallways that seemed to go on forever. “How do you know your way around here?” she asked after the tenth turn.

“Shut up and keep walking,” the Vampyr spat and jerked her around yet another corner. At last, they reached a set of immense double doors. Two guards stood on either side of the entrance. One nodded to her tour guide and parted the wood just enough to let Sorchá and the Vampyr through.

She stumbled when she saw the room. This was the same place they had tortured her the first time. Self-preservation kicked in, and she started to pull back. The Vampyr wrenched her forward and issued a small sound of satisfaction when she fell to her knees.

“Oh, wonderful! She’s here.”

The voice of the Vampyr Queen sent an instant rush of trepidation along Sorchá’s spine. Still, she straightened her backbone and looked toward the front of the room.

Tempest sat with a priest on either side. Silent muscle behind blank faces. “So, little wolf. Have you found my prize?”

“Why did your henchmen kidnap me,” Sorchá answered, “when two weeks was our bargain?”

Tempest shrugged. “I grew tired of waiting for you to return. Now, where is my prize?”

Sorchá wanted to ask if they’d killed Braith, but she swallowed the question. Why give them something else to gloat over? *Dear Odin, please let me die with honor.* She fought back the panic

and tried to appear calm as she pulled the Masti out from under her shirt. Tempest's eyes widened, as did her fanged smile.

"Excellent! Bring it forward, girl."

Sorcha unclasped the necklace. She forced her feet to carry her closer to the enemy. Her heart pounded. She could smell her own fear, and the wolf spirit inside her balked at her submission.

"One Masti. As promised." Arm carefully extended, she let the bauble drop into Tempest's waiting hands.

Tempest cupped the medallion in both palms. Her smile stretched nearly ear to ear, a perfect frame for her four-inch eyeteeth. A shiver of apprehension brushed the back of Sorcha's neck as the Vampyr Queen pocketed the Masti with an infantile giggle of pleasure.

"What will you do with it?" Sorcha asked, but then flinched back from the flicker of anger in Tempest's obsidian eyes.

"That's really none of your business, is it, girl?"

Sorcha crossed her arms over her stomach as she shook her head. "It's my family you will harm. You're going to kill me anyway. Can't hurt to ask what you plan to do."

"Since you already have the answers, I have little to say, don't I?"

"I suppose not."

The agreement appeared to appease Tempest. "I never thought I'd say this to a wolf, but well done." She stood and waved her hand in dismissal. "You can go now."

"Go?" Sorcha blinked.

"Yes, go. You might want to make it quick before I change my mind."

"And the Hunt?"

"You paid your debt. You may live, as agreed. After all, you've proven yourself quite useful. I may require your services again."

Not wanting that statement elaborated, Sorcha inclined her head, rose to her feet and tried not to show fear as she left the building. The tingle at the nape of her neck began to sting. She rubbed the spot with more force and jerked open the front door.

The night soothed the heat of her skin. She felt at home in the dark, and the wide open grounds of the Vampyr estate gave her room to run. The nagging sensation on her neck ceased. She felt the drug that inhibited her ability to shift disappear completely. With a howl, she let her wolf burst to the surface. Fur replaced clothing, paws replaced hands. On all four limbs, Sorcha raced across the dew-kissed grass. The powerful muscles of her brethren form corded and flexed as she ran.

She loped under the stone entrance to the property. The scent of her pack hung heavy in the air, and Sorcha sped up as she bolted down the street. They were coming for her? How did they even know she was there?

Her paws slid in a patch of thick lawn as she followed the scent around the bend in the road. She scrambled to a stop at the scene before her. The entire pack was racing down the street. And they weren't alone. Braith walked beside Meghi. Braith!

Sorcha let out a howl of joy and rushed down the road. Braith ran as well. They crashed together and toppled over.

“Oomph!”

Sorcha shifted on impact. The magic of the Shandai replaced her original clothing, which was good since the whole pack gathered around them, staring. She grinned down at Braith. “You’re alive.”

“Of course I am alive,” he grumbled and stood to brush off the backside of his jeans. He pulled her to her feet, one arm clamped around her waist to pin her body against his. “It’s you I was worried about. What the hell happened?”

She threw her arms around his neck and smattered his face with kisses. “I love you. I love you so much. When the Vampyr kidnapped me, I thought for sure they hurt you.”

Every muscle in his body went rigid. Anger slapped from his soul against hers. “Damn it, where are they? I want to kill them with my bare hands.” He tried to step around her.

“Braith, don’t. You don’t have to do this. It’s okay.”

“The hell it is,” he snapped. “Nobody grabs my woman and drags her away from our bed. I don’t care what damn species they are. I’ll kill every last one of them.”

Sorcha blinked. She'd never seen him this angry on her behalf. Ready to take on an entire Vampyr stronghold. "Braith, it's over. I'm fine. They have what they wanted."

"And what exactly did they want?" Meghi asked.

"The Masti."

Everyone went unnaturally still. "You gave them the Masti?" Meghi said with a growl. "It will destroy us, damn it. How could you do such a thing?"

"You don't have to worry. Nothing is going to happen."

Meghi took a step toward her. Sorcha winced as Braith tugged her behind his body in response. "Back off, Meghi," he warned. "The important thing is that she's safe."

"No," Sorcha corrected, "the important thing is that Tempest has the Masti, but it won't work. At least, not the way she hopes it will."

"Explain that," Meghi demanded, arms crossed over her chest.

Sorcha smiled. "They left me alone for almost nine hours. In a cell with a dirt floor. I used the time to undo my father's spells and drain the medallion of its magic. The cell has a serious moss problem now, but at least the Masti can't hurt us anymore. All Tempest got was a pretty piece of jewelry."

Meghi laughed. "Priceless. I love it." She signaled to the rest of the pack that it was time to go home. "I knew you were an enigma when I found you, Sorcha. You'll have to teach me this magic-transfer thing you do." Meghi started to walk away.

"Meghi, wait. About Braith—"

"See you at home," Meghi walked backwards to keep up with the pack. "Oh. And bring your mate. We've much to discuss with him. After all, being part of this family isn't all surf boards and beer, Baja Boy."

Sorcha grinned. Braith turned and looked at her. Her elation at Meghi's words slipped a few notches. She knew he was still upset by the way his gaze slid over her body again and again.

"I guess that means you aren't shunned any more? That's a good thing, Braith. It may take them a bit to accept you, but it's a start. They called you part of the family, babe. How did they know you were my mate?"

Some of the tension leaked from his body. “It scared the hell out of me to wake up and find you gone. And I didn’t have a damn clue where to start looking for you. So, I went to your house.”

“You went to my house?” She knew she must look shocked because Braith chuckled and gave her a reassuring squeeze.

“Well, yeah. I wasn’t about to let you go without a fight. And damn if Meghi was going to keep you from me twice. It would have helped though, had you told me the truth from the beginning.”

“I know, I know. I’m so sorry.” She stepped back and took both of his hands in hers. “I was going to tell you everything this morning, but they grabbed me last night, and I didn’t have a chance to explain. I needed the Masti, that necklace, to keep Tempest from killing me. I should have told you everything the night I showed up in your room, but—”

He stopped her speech with a toe-crunching kiss. Sorcha surrendered, knowing that the frantic roam of his hands was an attempt to verify she was really unharmed. She let her warmth wrap around him, offering comfort and reassurance. When he finally stopped the kiss, he dropped his forehead against hers. “No more secrets. No more leaving. Swear it to me.”

“I swear,” she replied. “Never again.”

“Good. Then let’s go home. I want to lock you in our bedroom for the rest of my life. Maybe then I won’t have gray hair before the age of forty.”

Sorcha grinned and hooked her arm around his elbow. “Sounds good to me, but my family may have something to say about that.”

He sighed. “We only have to stay for a little while, right?”

About the Author

Colette Denée lives in Texas with her ultimate hero and their blended family of seven children. Yes, seven. A glass of wine, a little sunshine, and a good book go a long way! For more information about Colette, visit her website www.colettedenee.150m.com. MySpace junkies can friend her page: <http://www.myspace.com/111135744>. Come join her where Myths become Legends, time stands still, the girl always gets her man, and fairy tales become fantasies.

Look for these titles

Coming Soon

To Tempt a Wolf

When a man who isn't human is accidentally enslaved by a woman who has no idea what he is, the result is magical.

Sealed with a Kiss

© 2007 Lila Dubois

Signing up for a one-week adventure vacation, Helena expects to be kayaking in the Pacific, not having every sexual fantasy fulfilled in her guide's bed.

Ocean is more than he seems, his kayaking business a cover for his deepest secret.

When Helena accidentally enacts old magic, enslaving Ocean, he doesn't know if she is the luckiest girl on earth, or an enemy of his kind, bent on imprisoning him forever. Ocean's strange behavior worries Helena but she's distracted by the mind-blowing sex.

After the truth is revealed, will their budding love be Sealed with a Kiss?

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit sex, graphic language, voyeurism, and fantasy fulfillment.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Sealed with a Kiss*:

On deck, Ocean spread out a beach towel for her. The strange sexual confidence of a few hours ago returned and Helena shot Ocean a seductive smile as she made her way to the blanket. There she stretched out on her back, arms above her head, one knee bent, coyly hiding her sex.

Ocean lay face down beside her, and for several moments they simply basked in the sun like the sated beasts they were.

"Oh no, I forgot sunscreen." Helena sat up, peering at Ocean through the dark glasses he provided. "Do you have any?"

He opened one eye and gave her a slow once-over. "I'll get some."

Helena lay back and waited. When Ocean returned, there was a thickness to the air around him, and the tense set to his shoulders told her their play was about to begin again.

Ocean straddled her hips, forcing her bent knee flat. "Give me your right arm."

Helena lifted and extended her arm as Ocean poured sunscreen into his palm. Helena shivered as he placed hands coated in cool sunscreen on her wrist. From wrist to shoulder, he worked the lotion into her skin, the scent of coconut strong in the heated air.

When he finished, Ocean carefully replaced her arm in its position above her head and started in on the other, giving it the same treatment.

He left no part of her body unattended, swiping fingers over her cheeks, nose and forehead, kneading her upper chest, causing her to squirm as he massaged her ticklish belly.

When every inch of skin above her waist was covered, save her breasts, Ocean leaned down and blew on her nipples. His breath, like the air around them, was hot and so had no effect. With a disapproving noise, Ocean grabbed the bottle of sunscreen. Holding it upside down, he squeezed and a large dollop of the still-cold cream landed right on her nipple.

Helena yelped. The sound cut off as he gave the other peak the same treatment.

One large palm covered each breast, pressing the cold into her skin. Her nipples beaded up hard and Ocean rumbled with pleasure. His fingers slid through the creamy pools melting down her breasts and plucked on the hard buds.

“Oh yes, yes, yes. Do that again.”

Ocean obeyed, pinching the flesh between his fingers and lifting. Coated as they were, the pebbled tips slid through his fingers, forced between the viselike pressure of his fingertips. When first the right and then the left peak finally slid from his grip with a pinch, Helena moaned in pleasure, her fingers wrapped around his forearms, nails digging into him.

Slowly he worked the sunscreen into her breasts, kneading the soft mounds, molding and shaping them with hands rough from his work. When the lotion was gone, he repeated the nipple pinch, the hold now lasting longer as her body had absorbed much of the sunscreen. As he squeezed hard and lifted her breasts away from her body by their tender peaks, Helena’s hips moved helplessly beneath Ocean.

“Ah, ah, ah, gorgeous, stay still, I’ll be down there soon.”

Beyond words, Helena nodded, her hips stilling as her nipples slipped free of his pinching grip.

Ocean flipped around, still straddling her belly, presenting her with a view of his wide golden back. Hands once more filled with sunscreen lifted each leg, working the lotion into her skin, not missing one inch, from the soles of her feet to the outside of her hips. As he lowered her legs he bent them at the knee, so when he was done they fell open, mercilessly exposing her sex.

Please, touch me, she thought, touch me and please me and make me whole. Make it dirty and sweet and lovely.

Ocean finished smoothing lotion up the inside of her thighs. His hands inched closer and closer to her sex.

Finally he placed four fingertips along each lip of her sex and carefully separated them, exposing her soft pink core.

Once the hunter catches her scent, there's no turning back.

Desert Heat

© 2007 Leigh Wyndfield

While trying to deliver life-saving medicine to her village, Tannar runs afoul of a party of slavers. The women of her race, the Morjan, are mercilessly hunted for their highly prized sexual prowess. Never mind that once enslaved, Morjans soon die. Wealthy men from far and wide will stop at nothing to possess one.

Complicating matters, as Tannar runs for her life she unexpectedly comes into heat. She takes refuge in a cave, desperate to escape yet frantic to mate.

Nicolas Rentard is forced by Prince Dante to use his uncanny hunting skills to capture a Morjan woman. He follows Tannar's enticing scent and runs her to ground.

But once he enters the cave, she's not the only one ensnared.

Warning: This title contains hot wicked scenes, explicit sex, graphic language and a yummy hero!

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Desert Heat*:

He could smell her vague scent on the air. Twice he'd corrected himself using that alone, since she hadn't left much of a physical trail to follow. Her spicy, womanly fragrance had gotten stronger through the day, especially once he'd scented, then seen, her blood on the rocks. The deep metallic tang pulled him along as if by a string.

As the hours rolled by, her choices of terrain became so familiar, he found himself anticipating her.

An evil wind whipped up from the west as the sun set, lowering his vision and whisking her trail away. He watched helplessly as the tracks he'd been following were erased forever, blowing her scent from his nostrils.

A growl rose in his throat. The Trilec piece of him drove him on.

Marking the place where he stood with two rocks, he began a slow sweep of the surrounding area. Exhaustion tugged at him, but he shoved it away. He'd find her or die

trying. Going back to the prince without her in tow would mean the end of everything he'd ever wanted. Failure wasn't an option.

That being said, there were other reasons, personal reasons, he wanted to find this woman. He knew a lot about her, even though he'd never seen her. Her intelligence showed in every choice she'd made on the path. She had strength and stamina that rivaled his own, although over the last few kilometers, he'd sensed something wrong. She wasn't limping exactly, it was just a subtle change in her stride, as if she was injured in some way. Perhaps she'd been hurt more than he'd thought when he'd found her blood. But even injured, she still whispered over terrain without leaving a scratch, ghosting along with nerve and cunning.

With every passing hour, his respect for her had grown and he wondered again how he could turn her over to the prince only to die. It nagged at him with every step, but the thought of losing everything he'd spent his life working to gain, for a woman he'd never met, spurred him forward.

He had to admit that if he hadn't been able to track her with his Trilec powers, she would have escaped him completely.

He stumbled back onto her scent as he approached a jumble of rocks. She'd been here. He could almost feel the shadow of her. He'd been tracking her quickly since he began hunting alone and as she'd slowed down, he sped up.

He stopped when he saw the cave entrance. Silently, he worked his way to the opening. The ground trembled, just a small shift, making him pause. Had he really felt it move or was he imagining things? Desert birds chirped in the distance, signaling everything was okay. He held still, scenting the air and waiting for it to happen again. After a few minutes, he shook his head and turned back to the cavern.

It could be a trap, but the cave lured him, a siren's song he couldn't resist. Trap or not, he crawled through the low entrance. Pausing, he inhaled the scent of her, which now surrounded him completely. The more her essence filled his lungs, the harder his cock became. This woman called to the beast in him on a visceral level and as dangerous as that thought was, he wanted her. Now.

He paused, lying still while his eyes adjusted to the dim light. A sound echoed in the small space. The low moan ran along his skin like a caress. He knew it wasn't from pain.

"Oh." The sound bumped off the walls and his body.

Working his way forward once more, he saw her.

A single candle splashed weak light against the craggy rock walls, catching the sweat on her naked body as she arched her hips from the floor. She was tall, but thin, covered in lean muscle which corded as she bowed upward. Her hips rocked against the hand between her legs. Faster, harder, until she rolled to her stomach to get more leverage, moaning the word, "*please*" with agony and desperation.

The growing desire inside him exploded, forcing a groan from his lips.

She turned so slowly to look at him he suspected she'd already known he'd arrived, but she didn't stop the buck of her hips against her hand.

Her haunted gaze tracked him as he crawled across the room. The cave danced in shadows, the low ceilings making the small space appear even smaller. He didn't bother to stand, knowing the ceiling wouldn't allow his height.

The scent of her was overwhelming, filling his lungs and hazing his mind. The musk of pure woman swirled with a spicy aroma that enticed him to taste. He had to put his mouth on her as soon as possible.

Instead, he ran one finger down her sweat-soaked back, watching the track he left along her skin.

She cried out, her hips never ceasing the ride against her hand. Rolling her face into the blanket, she didn't look at him when she said, "Help me. Please."

Without understanding how he could be so sure, he knew she hadn't wanted to ask. Something had been wrong with her for miles as he tracked her, something that was causing her to turn to a stranger to relieve the pressure of her desire. The heat Dante had bragged about was on her and it now impacted him as well.

Sympathy and protectiveness washed through him.

He flattened his hand on her back and smoothed across her buttocks, then down her long legs as far as he could reach. "Widen your legs, Shadowbloom," he murmured, liking the jump of surprise on her face when he named her flower.

She complied and he ran his hand back up the inside of her thigh.

Her face hid again in the thin blanket, partially muffling her moan of need. “Hurts,” he thought she whispered.

It wasn’t time to give her slow loving. She needed relief and she needed it fast.

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