

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

THORN'S
Kiss

MYLA JACKSON

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Thorn's Kiss

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Edited by Briana St. James.

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THORN'S KISS

Myla Jackson

Chapter One

"You want me to babysit a socialite?" Miko Bastian stared at his older brother, Kyros, as if he'd sprouted horns.

"No, I want you to be a bodyguard, take this assignment and do a good job for Parker Thorn." Kyros unbuttoned his suit jacket and pulled it from his broad shoulders. "Thorn is perhaps the most influential human in Memphis. If we do a good job for him, think of the doors it'll open for our bodyguard business." He pulled off his tie and flung it over the back of a chair.

"Let Zarek take this one. It's more his speed. I can be of much more assistance on the night watch." His years on the Memphis police force had helped him hone his skills and instincts for finding and dealing with miscreants.

Zarek strode into the living room from the adjoining kitchen, a glass of whiskey in his hand, his feet bare and the top button of his jeans undone. "Yeah, let me take this one. I hear Talia Thorn is hot."

Kyros shot a narrow-eyed look at his youngest brother. "No way. This job needs finesse. And finesse is something you've yet to learn."

Zarek frowned. "I have more finesse in my pinky finger than Miko has all over."

Miko laughed out loud. "What Kyros is really saying is that you can't keep your dick in your pants."

"Hey! I can't help it I have stronger needs than the two of you." He strutted across the room like a rooster in a chicken yard, his bare feet silent against the hardwood flooring. "I also can't help it that women love to get me naked."

Miko had to admit, his little brother had females falling all over themselves to be with him, human and werewolf alike. With his face, build and bad-boy attitude, he could have any woman he wanted. Not that Miko and Kyros were shabby in the looks

department. They were just a little more subtle and discerning about the women they fucked.

Kyros unbuckled his belt and slid it from the loops. "Zarek, you'll come with me tonight."

Zarek sighed and removed his black leather jacket, one arm at a time, without spilling a drop of whiskey from his glass. "Same ol', same ol'?"

"Last night's watch found a couple of rogue weres in Draco and Diablo territory."

"Sure they weren't from the Lobos del Diablos?" Zarek jerked the buttons loose on his shirt, one at a time.

"No, Rafael assured me they weren't Diablos."

Miko took the glass from Zarek. "I never liked the idea of Lyka living among the Diablos."

"It's for the best." Kyros unzipped his trousers and let them fall to his ankles. He stepped free, standing completely naked. "Besides, you don't see her complaining."

To keep the peace between the Dracos and the Lobos del Diablos werewolf packs, Lyka had agreed to marry the Alpha male of the Lobos del Diablos, Rafael Deccar. And no, she wasn't complaining. The two had a stormy and passionate engagement that promised to be a long and seldom boring marriage. If they could get to the wedding date before one of them killed the other. Or someone else beat them to it. Someone had tried recently at the club Rafael owned called the Three Dog Night Club in the heart of Memphis on Beale Street.

"And another thing," Kyros said. "Police found dead men in alleys not far from Beale Street last night and the night before."

Miko's brows rose. "Get an ID on either?"

Kyros shook his head. "Not sure. They think one of them is Julio Valdez, the other couldn't be identified. He was too messed up, but he was definitely a werewolf."

"Julio was Diablo, right?" Miko didn't like the sound of this. If someone was killing off Diablo weres, the Diablos would turn to the Dracos for retribution. The uneasy truce they'd had would end. Which would leave their sister, Lyka, stuck in the middle of a bloody war.

"Right." Kyros' lips firmed in a tight line. He also understood the ramifications.

"Cause of death?" Miko asked.

"Can't tell you that either. But they were both a mess, as if they died halfway through transformation."

"How can that be?" Zarek set his glass on an end table. "All werewolves transform to their human form in death."

"Has Deccar set up stronger security around the club?" Miko asked.

"Yeah. He screens everyone entering for weapons and attitude." Kyros unclipped his watch and set it on the counter next to his wallet before he turned to Zarek. "You gonna take all night? I'm ready to go."

Zarek shrugged out of his shirt, dropped his pants and smiled. "I'm ready."

"For what, a night of fucking?" Miko nodded at his brother's erection.

"Can I help it that the thought of kicking ass gives me a hard-on?" Zarek laughed. "What's the matter, brother, jealous?"

"Of that twig?" Miko snorted.

"If you two are done comparing dicks, we have work to do." Kyros turned toward Miko. "You're supposed to show up at Thorn's mansion at eight." His eldest brother moved toward the door. "Remember, this gig is important to our business. Be a nice escort, will ya?"

"Escort? What do I look like, a gigolo?" Miko held out his hands.

As Kyros and Zarek exited the house through French doors leading into the garden, Zarek's laughter rang out in the night.

Miko followed them to the door and stared out into the night. What? Wouldn't he make a good gigolo? Had it been that long since he'd been with a female?

He thought back. Yeah.

Kyros took off running toward the wooded copse behind the house. As his bare feet pounded against the path, they transformed into paws. Hair sprang out on every inch of skin until his entire body was covered in thick black fur. His nose elongated, and wickedly sharp canine teeth flashed in the moonlight. He dropped to all fours and raced into the darkness. Zarek completed his transformation within seconds of Kyros and quickly caught up.

Miko closed and locked the French doors behind them. There was a key hidden in the garden under a landscape stone for when they returned from their night's adventures. He wished he was going with them, unencumbered by clothing, running with the wind blowing in his ears.

All he knew was, this daddy's girl better not give him any troubles. He just wasn't in the mood for tantrums and hysterics. Why couldn't Kyros have handled this one?

* * * * *

"Daddy, I don't need a bodyguard. I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself."

"You do, and you're not." Parker Thorn gripped his daughter's arms and forced her to look at him instead of the designer clothing in her closet. The intensity of his gaze burned into her soul. "I love you more than life itself, sweetheart. There are dangerous creatures out on the streets, for the love of Pete. Remember the werewolves who killed your mother? I can't let you go out unprotected. Hell, if I could keep you locked up inside, I would."

"Daddy, you can't keep me inside for the rest of my life. I'm fully grown. If not for you, I'd have moved out a long time ago. Don't make me change my mind." She cupped both his cheeks with her palms and smiled at him. "Besides, not all creatures of the night are bad."

"Maybe not, but a lot are." His fingers closed around her wrists and he brought her hands away from his face. The dark circles beneath his eyes had deepened. He hadn't been sleeping well for the past month.

Did he know? Had he guessed her secret?

Talia's lips tightened. So much had changed in that short amount of time. The free and open communication she'd enjoyed with her father had disappeared. Before, she'd shared everything about her life. Now...now she couldn't tell him anything. Especially the most important part. "I thought you liked animals, Daddy. You've donated enough money to the zoos and sanctuaries."

"Animals belong in cages. They're incapable of human feelings and thoughts."

His words stung, but she swallowed her hurt and shrugged her father's hands loose. "Animals have feelings. And the werewolves that got Mamma all those years ago killed her in her own bed. If they want me bad enough, they'll get me here just as well as out on the streets." She lifted a hand to her father's cheek. "I promise I'll be careful."

"Promise me you'll take the bodyguard with you. Please, do it for me. I have an important function to attend or I'd go out with you tonight."

Talia's eyebrows rose. "You'd go out dancing at a bar, Daddy? I don't think so."

"All the more reason to take a younger bodyguard with you." He buttoned the jacket of his tuxedo. "Now, is my tie straight?"

"Is this how you bully your employees into doing things the way you want?"

"No. My employees don't argue nearly as much as you do." He kissed her forehead. "You have the advantage, I can't fire you."

With a quick tug on one side of the bowtie, she set it straight. "There. You look handsome, as usual."

"I'll be later than usual. I have a meeting following the banquet. Don't wait up for me, assuming you get back to the house before I do."

"I won't. You be careful, Daddy." She kissed his cheek. "I love you."

"I know, baby. I know." He glanced at his watch. "Miko Bastian will be here in...he should be here now." As if on cue, her father's cell phone rang. He flipped it open and pressed it to his ear. "Yeah, okay. Let him in."

"I really don't need a babysitter, Dad." Talia's lips twisted in a half-smile. "But if it makes you happy, I'll tolerate him." She didn't say she'd stick with him. That would be a lie.

"Good girl." He tipped her chin. "And don't break any hearts on the dance floor tonight."

"Don't worry, Daddy." She had plans other than dancing, but her father didn't have to know that. And her plans didn't include a shadow of a bodyguard. "You better hurry. You don't want to be late to receive your key to the city."

"No, I don't." Parker Thorn squared his shoulders, his expression the same one he used when he marched into the Board of Directors meeting of Thorn Enterprises. Without a kiss goodbye, he hurried down the stairs.

Deep voices rumbled in the granite-tiled entryway below. Talia didn't bother to listen. If she wanted to get out before her Neanderthal snoop caught wind of her plans, she had to do it now. Not to mention she had to make good her escape while the security system was disarmed.

She slipped into her room and closed the door. So much for leaving the house like a civilized human being. Not that being human was an option at all. But then sometimes the stealth of a nocturnal creature had the advantage. She slipped out of her shoes and opened her window.

For the past five years, her father had been meaning to have the giant magnolia tree beside her window trimmed back, claiming the branches were rubbing the eaves. Talia had always managed to change the subject and he'd forgotten. The tree had been her way of fleeing her gilded cage whenever the need demanded.

If her father knew why she'd been disappearing so much lately, he'd likely have a coronary. As the man who hated werewolves and had spent more than his share of

money to come up with ways to rid the city of the creatures, he'd be appalled at the people—no, creatures—she'd been hanging out with. He'd probably try to stop her, but Talia had gotten wind of a possible cure for the malady. Come hell or the high water of the Mississippi, she'd get it.

* * * * *

Miko stared around at the beautifully restored paneling in the library. The Mallory-Neely House, once been owned by the city, was located on Adams Avenue in downtown Memphis. He wondered who had convinced the city Historical Commission to sell the three-story Italianate mansion to the owner and chief executive officer of Thorn Enterprises. He thought the commission would hold onto it and let it fall to ruin before they'd sell it to a private individual. But Miko couldn't fault the man's work or taste in restoring the 1852 landmark to its original glory. He remembered when the city ran out of money to maintain this old house and how dilapidated it had become.

He studied the leather-bound books on the shelves without really seeing the titles, all the while resenting being left to his own devices. How long did he have to wait for a spoiled little rich girl to get ready to go out partying? Meanwhile his brothers were busting their asses to round up the rogue werewolves stirring up trouble in Memphis.

They thought they'd had enough to contend with feuds between the two reigning packs. A third pack only made matters worse—leading to confusion and more hostility between the Dracos and the Lobos del Diablos. It had all begun over six months ago when the first of the rogues entered the city and killed or started turning humans into weres. When would it end? When they killed the alpha male of the rogue pack? As the leaders of the indigenous packs, Kyros and Rafael had gone all out to discover the identity and location of the rogue leader. So far, the rogues weren't speaking. When they caught one, he hadn't lived long enough to tell.

Miko glanced at his watch. Was there a time limit he had to endure? Could he walk out after waiting fifteen minutes? His shoulders slumped. Not if he wanted to make a

good impression on the boss, and he owed his brother and their business the necessary patience to make this job a success.

Footsteps sounded on the staircase, and a moment later, Parker Thorn stepped into the library. "Don't let her out of your sight for a moment. Do you understand?" No introduction, no handshake.

Okay, so intros and handshakes might be old-fashioned, but the man's condescending tone rankled with Miko. "I got it."

"Look, I don't even like werewolves and wouldn't normally let one in my house, but you're about as close to a bloodhound as I can get to watch over my daughter."

"Thanks." *I'm feeling the love.* So the guy knew about the were population in the city. Not many humans did and the Bastian brothers, along with most of the civilized weres in Memphis, liked to keep it that way. If the humans knew the exact percentage of the population who were were-creatures, they'd flee the city or send in an exterminator. Memphis would become a veritable war zone or ghost town, either way.

Parker's eyes narrowed, but he didn't comment on Miko's sarcasm. "Talía managed to slip past the last two human bodyguards. I'm counting on you to stay with her and keep her safe." He stepped closer until he was practically nose to nose with Miko. "And I mean safe from everyone and everything, including you and your kind."

Miko bit down hard on his tongue. If Kyros hadn't told him to play nice, he'd have decked this son of a bitch by now. However, decking him wasn't the way to win him over. Doing a good job was. Damn, he hated his logical side when the animal in him wanted nothing more than to rip this man's throat out. "Yes, sir."

"She should be down in five minutes." Parker gave him one last hard look and left.

After three minutes more of standing in the library, Miko strode to the window shrouded in heavy drapes. Pulling the fabric aside, he stared out at the night, the basic instinct flowing through his blood at that moment screamed at him to shed his clothing and race out into the darkness. But he had a job to do.

Something stirred in the light from the nearly full moon. A figure dropped from a tree at the corner of the house. A woman in a dress, carrying her shoes. Her straight white-blonde hair hung like a silk curtain, glistening in the starlight.

Instead of slipping the shoes onto her feet, she dropped them to the ground and slipped the thin straps of her dress off her shoulders.

What the hell? Miko's breath caught in his throat and his pulse leapt.

Zarek wasn't kidding when he'd said Talia Thorn was gorgeous. He just didn't know how gorgeous — all over.

When she dropped the wispy scrap of material that was her dress to the ground, she was completely naked. No panties, no bra, just alabaster skin glowing a light shade of blue in the night sky. The rounded curve of her shoulders, the gentle dip into her tiny waist only accentuated the lush, fullness of her hips. She raised her face to the sky and lifted her arms heavenward as if reaching for her lover, the moon. Her hair hung down to brush the top of her buttocks.

Miko's hand gripped the curtain as he struggled with the creature inside. The soft curtain of Talia's hair sweeping across her ass made his groin tightened painfully behind the zipper of his trousers. What was she doing? He moaned and closed his eyes for just a moment.

When he opened them again, he had to blink twice, certain his mind played tricks on him.

Instead of the smooth-skinned woman, a sleek wolf stood in the moonlight, her fur a solid, shocking white. The animal lifted the sandals and dress between her teeth and turned.

"Fuck. Kyros didn't say anything about her being a were." Miko dropped the curtain and raced for the French doors, shedding his clothing with each step he took and reaching deep for the wolf within. Ripping his shirt up and over his head, he yanked it off and tossed it beneath a bush, careful not to leave his clothing lying within

view around Thorn's house. Fuck. She was going to get away. He grabbed for the doorhandle and flung open the French door so hard it banged against the wall.

All he saw of Talia was the twitch of her feathery white tail as she leaped the hedge and disappeared into the night.

Outside in the moonlight, Miko stepped from his trousers as the full transformation consumed him. On the run, he ditched his clothing beneath a magnolia tree. His muscles contorted, his face stretched and lengthened and teeth sharpened. He dropped to all fours and leaped over the hedge. As a wolf, he would have no trouble tracking Talia, her scent was unforgettable and even more tantalizing than the image of her standing in her human, naked form.

Not until he'd traveled the few short blocks south to Beale Street did he catch up with her. She was fast on four legs, racing through yards, down alleys and leaping fences.

Miko found her in the alley behind the Three Dog Night Club, owned and operated by his sister's fiancé and leader of the Lobos del Diablos, Rafael Deccar. He stayed back in the shadows, hoping his scent blended with that of the other weres frequenting the establishment. He didn't want her to know he'd followed her. He wanted to see for himself what she was up to.

The sleek white wolf dropped the clothing from her mouth to the pavement. Then her body elongated, stretching and growing.

While the woman transformed, Miko eased in, snatched her clothing and slipped back into the shadows.

When the shiny fur coat became smooth skin, a woman replaced the animal. She paused for a moment on her hands and knees, as if to orient herself. Then she leaped to her feet.

Miko completed his own transformation at the same moment as Talia and stood tall and naked in the shadows, the woman's dress and shoes in his hands.

The blonde spun, her gaze panning the back alleyway, a frown knitting her brow. "What the f..."

Fighting back the urge to laugh, Miko chose that time to step forward, wearing nothing but a smile, her dress draped over his shoulder. "Looking for something?"

Talia crouched in a fighting stance, everything about her body tight and ready, from her firm rounded breasts tipped with pale rose nipples to her flat tummy and well-defined thighs.

Miko's groin tightened and he cursed silently as his cock twitched awake. Hell, it wasn't just awake, it was blowing up like a goddamn balloon.

Without bothering to cover any part of her nakedness from his view, Talia fisted her hands on her hips and raked her gaze across him...much like he'd done to her.

Rather than hide his condition, Miko stood straighter, his brows rising as her glance ultimately reached his face.

One side of her mouth tipped upward. "Are you going to give me my dress, or am I going to have to take it?"

"You can try." And he'd enjoy every second of her attempt. It probably meant her getting that gorgeous body really close to his. That damned dick of his hardened to the strength of a crowbar.

"Is that a challenge?"

"Not much of one." She couldn't take the dress from him until he wanted her to. And oh the fun he could have in the meantime.

"Challenge accepted." Her lids dropped low over her pale blue eyes and her lips softened into a sultry pout. "I don't suppose if I said please, you'd give it to me?"

In the length of that one sentence, he went from visions of teasing her to teetering on the verge of giving her any damn thing she wanted. Miko had to rein in his testosterone and force a casual, "Probably not."

She glided across the pavement, her bare feet noiseless. When her breasts were within a half inch of his chest, she halted.

The citrus scent of her hair wafted toward him, tempting him to close his eyes and sniff. Not a good idea.

Her finger walked up his chest and twirled in the black, crisp hairs around his right nipple. "Pretty please, with sugar on top?"

Miko sucked in a breath and let it out slowly so that it wouldn't emerge in a groan. No sooner had he sucked in another than she leaned into him and wrapped her hand around his neck, pressing the front of her body firmly against his. The soft skin of her belly rubbed against his cock, making him ache.

All the air whooshed out of his lungs and his free arm circled her waist, pressing her tightly against his dick. With his other hand securely clutching the sought-after dress, he dipped his head to claim her mouth in a kiss.

No sweet, tentative exploring of mouths involved here. Miko plundered hers, his tongue thrusting in as if it were his rock-hard erection ravaging her pussy. His cock twitched against her fine hairs.

She ground her cunt against his penis, sliding her leg up his thigh, coming to rest on his hip. Her slick pussy rubbed against him, creaming him with thick come.

About to explode with his need, Miko pushed her to arm's length and laughed, angry that his laugh was at best shaky. "Think that will get your dress back?"

"Maybe."

He cleared his throat and dropped her arms. "It'll take a lot more than that."

It was at that last taunt that Talia Thorn, debutante and sweetheart of the upper-class social circles, launched a powerful side kick straight for Miko's gut. In a matter of two seconds, she had him flat on his back, the wind knocked from his lungs, wondering what the hell hit him.

She leaned over him, her eyes narrowed. "I'm a black belt in TaeKwonDo. Don't fuck with me." With the grace of a ballerina, she lifted the dress and shoes from his nerveless fingers and walked away.

So shocked by the attack and by the blow to his breathing capacity, Miko couldn't even enjoy the twitch of her smooth white ass as she rounded the corner of the nightclub. He knew one thing, though—the evening was beginning to show promise.

Chapter Two

Tamping down the twinge of guilt she felt for hurting the man behind the building, Talia slipped into her dress and shoes and entered the Three Dog Night Club through the front door like any other patron.

Only she wasn't any other patron. She was on a mission to discover the cure she sought for being turned into a werewolf. She knew how much her father hated the creatures and she couldn't bear to break his heart by telling him she'd turned into one of them. She wanted her old life back and, damn it, she'd get it. She wasn't Parker Thorn's daughter for nothin'.

For the past month, she'd been following leads and chasing unsubstantiated clues and she was only slightly closer today than she'd been the day her life had changed so drastically. She'd lost who she was, her ability to blend in with others and she couldn't tell her father what had happened because he hated all weres with a passion born of losing his wife years ago. Talia couldn't blame him, nor could she tell him about her own problem. It had happened one night at a charity function, in a crowded hallway. One moment she was moving along to the ballroom, the next, she'd been scratched by one of the other attendees, with only a vague image of a woman to go by. She'd assumed someone's diamond ring had made the long gash in her arm and shrugged it off with a little alcohol and ointment. That night had been a full moon. What had appeared to be a simple scratch manifested into a complete change of physiology. Talia had transformed into a werewolf. Now she was one of the enemy, with the same needs and desires as the rest of the werewolves.

Her father had been devastated and almost had a heart attack when her mother had died in an attack. When he'd learned that a werewolf had done it, he all but blew a gasket, wanting to eradicate every last werewolf in Memphis. And he would have if the

police force and city council hadn't just made a truce with them. But her father never forgot or forgave the entire species for taking his wife from him.

For that reason, Talia hadn't told him about her problem. She would one day, when she thought the timing was right. For now, she just wanted to find out if the rumors were true and there really was a cure.

As she paid her cover charge and entered the den of the enemy, she had to reevaluate her way of thinking. Since she was one of them, they were no longer the enemy. If she wanted information, she had to blend and pretend to fit in.

The music was sultry, the bass drum beating to the rhythm of her heart. Couples swayed on the dance floor, their bodies entwined, writhing and undulating to the melody. Talia gazed at the shadowy figures, her thoughts going back to the man in the alley behind the building. What would it feel like to sway against him like that? He'd been built like an athlete, broad shoulders, massive chest, narrow hips and a cock big enough to please any woman. She wondered if he was still lying on his back on the pavement. Served him right. He shouldn't have stolen her clothes.

She hoped like hell he wouldn't come in the bar and give her a hard time. He had to be a werewolf, why else would he be standing in an alley naked? The other option was that he was a pervert, in which case, he'd gotten what he deserved.

Still, he had been incredibly handsome. How many perverts looked like him? How many were toned to perfection and hung like a goddamn horse? Her breasts puckered, making her dress stand out at the matching points. Great! Now she'd have every leech in the club panting after her.

She fanned her heated skin and dragged her gaze from the dancers to scan the other patrons of the club. At first glance, the Three Dog Night Club looked like any other bar along Beale Street. If humans walked in, they'd never know the difference.

Talia knew better. Although some of the customers were obviously tourists and clueless, the others were just like Talia. Werewolves. She could feel it, smell it, even though she was in human form without benefit of her wolf's sense of smell.

Her contact was to meet her there between nine thirty and ten o'clock. She had time enough to settle in at the bar and look casual before he approached her. He had the advantage, knowing she was a blonde and would be sitting at the bar. All she had to go on was a voice. He'd have to find her.

She didn't like it, but it was all she had. This man, Alec, had contacted her after she spread the word among a small group of werewolves that she wanted to know if there was a cure that could change her back. Now all she had to do was wait for him. She slid onto a padded barstool at the corner of the bar and ordered a Tom Collins. From where she sat, she could watch the dance floor while she kept the entrance in her peripheral vision. Now, who would come through that door first? Her mysterious contact or the pissed off naked man from the back alley?

* * * * *

Once Miko could breathe again, he rolled to his feet and shook off the effects of Talia Thorn's powerhouse kick. Despite being bested, he couldn't help the grin creeping up the sides of his face. Damn, the woman had spunk and attitude to boot. And she was fast. If he didn't hurry, she'd get away.

By the looks of it, she'd gone into the club, how long she'd stay was the question foremost in his mind.

He fisted his hand and banged the back door loud enough to be heard over the music. Thank goodness his sister kept extra clothing for her brothers in case they were out and about in their werewolf form and found the need to enter the club on two feet. His sister's relationship with the owner had also given the brothers access to the club without being challenged by the Diablos.

A small sliding window slipped open and bright blue eyes similar to his own peered out. "Miko! What are you doing here dressed like that? Or should I say, undressed like that?" Lyka unbolted the door and held it open. "Get in before someone arrests you for indecent exposure."

"Sorry. I'm working tonight."

She laughed. "Working what, the streets? I'm sure there are hundreds of women who'd pay you plenty for that body." As he stepped through, she rolled her eyes.

"No, I'm on bodyguard duty."

Lyka stared out the doorway into the dark. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

Miko turned a confused stare at her.

She rolled her eyes and closed the door. "The body you're supposed to be guarding, dumbshit."

His lips pressed into a thin line. "Should be inside already. Had a little trouble in the alley." He rubbed a hand over his bruised gut. "Where's Rafael?" Without waiting for her response, he strode through the long hallway and entered the door leading to where Lyka and Rafael lived.

Lyka followed. "Out front. We have a big crowd tonight. He's helping by waiting tables."

"Good." Miko went straight to the coat closet and removed jeans, a button-down shirt and shoes he'd left there the last time he'd visited.

Lyka crossed her arms over her chest. "Who is she?"

Miko stepped into his jeans before he answered. "Who said it was a she?"

"She obviously got away and you're catching up. I wouldn't think you'd be as distracted if it were a man."

He'd never accuse his sister of being dumb. "Talia Thorn, daughter of Parker Thorn. Parker Thorn of Thorn Enterprises."

His sister's brows rose. "I've seen her on the news a couple times." Her brows climbed higher. "Fuck. Is she a tall, pale blonde?"

"Yeah."

"She's at the bar." His sister planted her hands on her hips. "Why did you bring her here? We like to think the club is safe for humans, but you know how it can get."

"I didn't bring her here." Miko slid into the jeans and zipped them. "And she's not human."

"What?" And here Miko didn't think his sister's eyes could get any wider. "Talia Thorn isn't human?" She shook her head. "What the hell is she?"

"Werewolf, like us." He pulled the shirt over his arms and buttoned it halfway up before tucking it into the waistband of his jeans. "Only not like us. She's solid white." *And you should see her run.* His groin ached, and not from the kick in the gut.

"Wow, little Miss Debutante, the belle of Memphis, a were." Lyka laughed. "I gotta get a closer look." She turned for the door.

"Don't. We can't make a big deal of it. I don't think her father knows about her, and I sure as hell don't think the society gossips do either." He slipped his feet into the leather loafers. "I'd just as soon keep it that way. You know Kyros' philosophy on public acknowledgement of the were-population in Memphis."

"The less people who know, the better." Lyka sighed. "Damn. I'd love to see the headline that would come out with that little bit of news."

"Forget it." He pressed a kiss to his sister's forehead. "Wish me luck. The last time I cornered her, she left me flat on my back in the alley."

Lyka's eyes narrowed and a sly smile crooked the corners of her mouth. "I'm liking her more and more every minute."

"Save it. She's just a job."

His sister snorted. "Yeah, right."

Miko left the apartment and hurried down the hallway. He emerged behind the bar.

With her gaze fixed on the entrance, Talia couldn't see him slip in from the back. Good. He could keep an eye on her from a distance.

Naked, she was magnificent. Dressed in the silky blue-green dress that only reached the bottom of her thighs, she was stunning, and Miko wasn't the only horny bastard in the place who noticed.

One after another, male weres sidled up to her on the pretext of asking her to dance. Miko bet they all wanted more than a dance from her. They all wondered and hoped tonight would be their lucky night to get into this pale blonde's panties.

Miko knew something they didn't. Beneath that slinky scrap of a dress, Talia Thorn wasn't wearing panties. His cock twitched behind his zipper and sprang back to life. What was it about this woman that made him hard every time he looked at her? So, she was beautiful. He'd met lots of beautiful women. So, she was a beautiful woman and a were. Miko had met lots of those as well. So, her hair floated around her shoulders like spun moonlight, her pale skin resembled polished pearls and he couldn't forget she'd knocked him on his ass in a single kick.

Okay, so Talia was special. That didn't make his desire right. She was just a job. Protect her from the bad guys, make sure her night of partying was safe and get her home to Daddy. Then he could go back to his regular routine of hanging out with his brothers and kicking rogue werewolves' asses.

A man entered the bar, glanced around for a moment until his gaze found Talia. He took a deep breath, casting more furtive looks around the room as he pushed his way through the crowd to take the seat next to her at the bar. The way the guy acted, he wasn't comfortable in the place.

If Miko wasn't mistaken, this man wasn't a werewolf and he knew he was in were territory. What the hell was he up to? He leaned toward Talia and spoke softly.

The hackles rose on the back of Miko's neck.

Talia turned her back to the entrance and pretended to take a sip of her drink.

"She is very pretty, isn't she?" Lyka stepped up to her brother, her gaze on the girl at the bar.

"Do me a favor, will ya?" His gaze never left Talia. Did she know the guy? "Ask Johnny to eavesdrop on their conversation. I'd like to know what they're talking about."

Lyka stood with her hands on her hips. "Look, our customers have the right to private conversations without the staff listening in." Her expression softened into a

grin. "Besides, I think I need to work the bar for the next few minutes to give Johnny a break."

"Lyka..."

"Don't worry. I'll behave myself and only listen." She sauntered away, stepping behind the bar with Johnny. A moment later, Johnny, cigarettes in hand, headed for the back door and a smoke break. After mixing a drink for another customer, Lyka attacked the counter with a wet rag near to where Talia and the man sat.

Talia leaned toward the man and whispered something, her face tight and angry. When she glanced up, her gaze panned the area in front of her, including the shadowy area behind the bar. Her glance collided with Miko's.

Did she recognize him as the naked man in the back alley?

Pale cheeks suffused with color.

Oh yeah. She'd recognized him. A small sense of satisfaction filled Miko and he gave her a very slight nod.

Without another glance, she grabbed the hand of the man sitting next to her and dragged him onto the dance floor. Then she proceeded to wrap herself around him like a fucking leech.

Miko pushed away from the wall, his fists clenching at his sides. What the hell was she trying to prove? Did she even know the guy?

After a turn around the floor, Talia casually glanced his way, her eyes narrowing. She laughed out loud and her dance partner looked at her, a confused expression on his face. Not that he seemed to mind her unusually aggressive behavior. His hands were all over her, smoothing down her back to cup her ass.

And she let him!

Blood rushed to every one of Miko's extremities at once. His fists clenched and unclenched, his feet moved restlessly on the tiled flooring and his head felt like it would explode. Not to mention his cock was as hard as a goddamn steel beam.

If she was trying to make Miko crazy, she'd succeeded.

What she failed to recognize was that she was making every other male in the place just as rabid. Weres of all shapes and sizes found an excuse to cross the dance floor and sniff the beauty, accidentally bumping into her until her dance partner finally spun and faced one of them, shouting, "Leave her the fuck alone!"

One particular were sniffed the man and growled, his nose extending into a vicious snout. He snarled. "You gonna make me, human?"

Talia, stepped between them, shoulders flung back, feet planted in a ready stance. "No, but I might."

The challenger's nose returned to human form and he sniffed a long, suggestive sniff, his gaze coursing over her from thighs to breasts. "Come on, baby. And here I thought the night was going to be boring."

Miko picked that moment to join the fray. "So did I, but you're not going to touch my little woman." He hooked an arm around her waist and pulled her close, quickly so that she couldn't land another heel to his midsection. He smiled down at her. "Isn't that right, sugar lips?"

A low rumble sounded deep in her chest as she growled a warning. Instead of taking him down in the middle of the dance floor, she smiled at the other weres and the human standing beside her. "I believe it is my babycakes's dance." She gave the human an apologetic look. "I'd love to dance with you again when you can be a little more forthcoming." Her look turned to a glare.

He shrugged. "Whatever, bitch."

Miko growled at the man.

The human scurried out of range, taking his seat back at the bar.

The rock music settled into a slow, sensual rhythm and dance couples crowded the floor, forcing Miko and Talia closer together.

"I could have handled him by myself." She attempted to pull away from him, but his arm tightened around her waist.

"I know that from personal experience. I stepped in to save him from you, not the other way around."

Her brow wrinkled. "You got what you deserved for stealing my clothes."

"I didn't steal them, I was just holding them for you." He tugged her closer, crushing her hands between them so she couldn't use them to scratch his eyes out. "Didn't your father ever teach you the basics about men?"

"Like what?"

"Never tease a man. It makes him hard and crazy." His hands sank to her hips and he pulled her against his rock-hard erection.

"Hmm, you could have a point." She rotated her hips in beat with the band, her belly pressing hard against his cock. "Men do have a problem controlling their baser instincts."

"Yeah, and my instincts are pretty damned base at the moment." His hand slid over her ass and down to her bare thigh. "Do you always dance without panties?" The hand on her thigh rose beneath her dress and cupped a smooth, naked cheek.

She hooked her calf around the back of his leg and rode her cunt across the top of his thigh. "Makes dancing much more interesting."

Miko's fingers found their way to the slit between her cheeks and he followed the line down to the tight round entrance of her asshole. "I'd have to agree with you on that." He poked a finger in and felt her muscles squeeze around his finger.

Talia's chest rose sharply with the air she sucked in, pressing her breasts closer to him.

He could smell her arousal and feel cream soaking through his jeans where her cunt rested on his thigh. "Like that?"

“As a matter of fact, I do.” She leaned into him and nipped at his throat, her hands circling his neck to pull his face down to hers where she bit into his lip, sucking it into her mouth. When she let go, she glanced over his shoulder.

With a raging hard-on, Miko half expected Talia to be as deep into the interaction as he was. That she was looking back at the human she’d been dancing with before was unnerving and frankly annoying.

Talia’s hand slid down his front and she cupped his cock.

Not believing it possible, Miko’s penis swelled even bigger beneath the ever tightening denim. He was ready to throw her over his shoulder and march back to Lyka’s apartments for a quick fuck. To hell with Talia only being a job.

After a meaningful squeeze, she stepped away. “Maybe next time.” Then she sprinted for the doorway.

“What the fuck.” Miko hesitated long enough to rearrange his trousers, and then he ran out of the Three Dog Night Club after her. He could easily see why Parker Thorn had hired the equivalent of a bloodhound to keep up with Talia. She definitely had her own ideas of what she wanted and when she wanted it. Unfortunately, it wasn’t him and now.

Out on Beale Street, he looked both ways. Couples and small groups of men and women strolled the sidewalks in the light from the streetlamps. None of them resembled Talia.

Then he saw pale blonde hair catch the glare of a passing car. Still in human form, Talia ducked into an alley a block away. As long as she didn’t transform to wolf, he had a chance of catching her pretty quickly. He walked quickly past a small group of inebriated young men and women who were singing at the top of their lungs and giggling like schoolgirls. When he cleared the band of partiers, he broke into a jog and rounded the corner where Talia had disappeared. The alley was empty.

Damn. He picked up speed and emerged onto the next block. He caught a glimpse of Talia ducking between buildings two blocks ahead. And she wasn't by herself. Keeping to the shadows, two men followed her half a block behind.

A woman screamed somewhere in the direction Talia had gone. At first Miko thought it might be the party group making noise until the woman screamed again. This time, her terrified cries made Miko's blood run cold.

His heart thumping against his chest, he raced to catch up with Talia and the two men. He hoped like hell he wasn't too late.

Again, the alley was empty. The woman's screams had stopped, giving Miko no clue as to which direction to go. When he emerged onto yet another street in downtown Memphis, he heard the vicious growls of animals, the distinct guttural snarl of angry werewolves.

He followed the sound to the back parking area of a Memphis souvenir shop where he found Talia, her dress gaping in front, revealing one of her luscious round breasts. Her eyes were wide, her face flushed and scared. Cornered by two half-transformed wolfmen with the distinct dark red coloring of the Lobos del Diablos pack, the odds were against her.

Something lay at Talia's feet. Something not human and not werewolf.

The two weres in mid-transformation growled and moved closer. "You killed her." The one wearing a black T-shirt with a scorpion printed on the back, bared his teeth in a snarl.

"No," Talia said. "She attacked me. I fought back, but not hard enough to kill her. She just died."

"You must be one of the rogue pack that's been killing Diablos in the city." The other werewolf crept closer, circling Talia. He crouched slightly, as if ready to pounce on her.

Miko stepped forward. "What's going on?"

The two werewolves turned angry snouts full of razor-sharp teeth toward Miko. "Back off, Draco." Scorpion Shirt snarled. "We see how well you and your brothers take care of their own in the city. This rogue killed Monique."

"She's not Draco and she's not Diablo." Scorpion shirt's partner jerked his head in Talia's direction. "That makes her a rogue in Diablo territory."

"Dracos and Diablos share the city." Miko knew what that meant. Hell, he'd killed a few rogues himself when he knew they were responsible for deaths of other were-creatures or humans. Or if they were responsible for turning more humans to weres. "If she said she didn't kill Monique, she didn't."

"Do you see anyone else standing here?" Scorpion shirt challenged.

"No, but she just got here herself." Miko moved closer to the body.

Growls rumbled in the two weres' chests.

He knelt beside Monique and turned her over.

All those standing in the back alley gasped.

The female Diablo appeared to have partially transformed from human to were, but something had gone terribly wrong. Her human face was swollen, her skin was a hideous purple and yellow and pockmarked where the hair follicles hadn't developed to allow the wolf to come out in her. Her eyes were wide and bulging, her mouth opened as if in her final scream.

Talia turned away and vomited.

Chapter Three

Her stomach roiling, the contents refusing to stay down, Talia faced the men in front of her. "I don't know what happened to this girl. When I came into the alley, she was in mid-transformation. She attacked me. I only fought her off to protect myself. Then she screamed and died. Just died..." The image replayed in her mind. Monique's last scream was as if she were being ripped apart from the inside. She'd reached out to Talia as if begging her to save her from her fate.

Staring at Monique's tortured face, the two weres slowly transformed back to their human form. One of them ran a hand down his hairless face. "If you didn't do this, then why were you following her?"

"I wasn't."

Two more Diablos showed up in the alley. "Trouble?" one asked.

"Yeah. Monique's dead and we think this rogue killed her."

"I didn't kill her." Talia shifted her feet into a ready stance. The odds were mounting against her. If she didn't make a run for it soon, she'd be ripped to shreds by this pack of weres, and her quarry had already gotten away. She suspected he had something to do with Monique's death. If she didn't want more information out of him first, she'd tell this rabid pack what she knew. But she needed the information Alec had only partially given her.

Talia raised the broken strap of her dress, covering her exposed breast and stared across the pavement at the man she'd practically made love to on the dance floor a few minutes before. Was he friend or foe in this group? With her options fairly limited, she chose him as her ally. "I was in this alley to meet up with my lover." She stepped closer to Miko. "Wasn't I?"

Miko pulled her against him, holding her so tightly, it hurt. "Yeah, she and I were planning on a little late-night fuck to celebrate our anniversary."

"Then you were in on the killing with her."

As one, the four Diablos turned on Miko and Talia.

Okay, so maybe she was better off on her own. When Talia tried to insert a little distance between them, Miko's arm tightened.

"I wouldn't if I were you." The sound of more voices entering the alley made Talia's heart thump faster in her chest. Could the situation get any worse? She turned to face two very large men with coal black hair and icy blue eyes, just like the man standing next to her.

The arm around her waist relaxed a bit. "Ah, my brothers. Your timing couldn't be better."

"Miko, I thought you were working." The black brows on the younger looking of the brothers rose high on his forehead. "You call this work?"

"I couldn't let you two have all the fun, now could I? Besides, I brought my work with me." He tucked her close against his side.

"Work? What do you mean work?" She stepped out of his arm and stood in front of him, her arms crossed over her chest, one hand still holding the side of her dress up. Had he been following her? A sinking suspicion crawled into her gut.

Daddy's babysitter. Damn, and here she'd thought he was interested in her for...well...for a good fuck. She didn't know which was worse.

"We'll talk about it later." He stuck an arm out and moved her to the side so that he'd have clear access to the four men between him and his brothers. "Don't get in the way."

"Need a hand cleaning up this mess?" The older brother tipped his head toward the body on the ground before shooting a pointed look at the four members of the Lobos del Diablos.

"As a matter of fact, no." Miko's eyes narrowed at the Diablos. "I think these gentlemen were just about to leave."

"Why should we leave? Someone killed Monique and I say it was her!" The big mouthed, scorpion-clad Diablo poked his finger in Talia's direction. "If you don't give her to us, we'll just have to kick some Draco ass and take her." The man ripped his shirt off and howled. Hair sprang out on his arms and face.

"Calm down, Andre." Another man stepped into the alley.

"What is this, a freakin' convention?" Talia threw her arms up. All she'd come for was a bit of information. Now it appeared she was in the middle of a turf war.

The man beside her nodded at the newcomer. "Rafael."

"Your sister told me you might need a hand with the blonde." He glanced at the dead woman on the ground, a shadow crossing his face. "What happened?"

Everyone talked at once.

The man named Rafael roared, his snout stretching, his teeth lengthening into that of a vicious canine. "I'll hear it from the girl."

"I have a name." Talia muttered and then told Rafael what she knew. "I didn't kill her. She was already dying." She wasn't happy about the number of werewolves surrounding her. Nor did she like standing next to a grotesquely distorted dead woman. To her dismay, her stomach burbled and threatened to launch yet again. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a prior engagement." She turned to leave, but Miko's hand reached out and stopped her. "If you don't let me go, I'll barf on your shoes."

Her captor released her and she ran for the minimal privacy of a dumpster where she tossed the remaining contents of her stomach.

A hand smoothed the hair back from her face. A large, warm hand. "Come on. Let me take you home."

"I'm not going home yet." She straightened and stepped away from him, holding her dress over her breast. "Besides, I don't even know you."

"My name is Miko Bastian. And after the dance in the bar, I'd say we know each other well enough." He hooked her arm and led her to the next street. "I have an apartment a couple blocks from here. You can change into less revealing clothing there, and then I'll take you home."

"No." She tried to pull loose, but he wouldn't let her go. "Look, I'll be home in two hours. If you meet me there, I'll tell my father you were with me the entire time."

"No. I'll take you home now."

"No." Her lips firmed. "I'm not going home until I get what I want."

"Woman, we're through arguing. You're coming with me." He moved quicker than she could think, scooping her up and tossing her over his shoulder in a fireman carry. With the air temporarily knocked from her lungs, Talia could do little more than squeal.

"That's the way to do it, Miko! Women love a man who takes charge." The younger of his brothers howled with laughter.

With her legs trapped against his chest in the tight clamp of his arms, all Talia could do was pound her fists against his back. Her dress rode up and she would have mooned everyone she passed if it weren't already so late and the streets where he took her weren't already deserted.

Thank the gods they didn't pass anyone and the paparazzi hadn't gotten wind of her little escapade.

Cool air against her warm ass made her even more aware that her butt was right in Miko Bastian's face. The thought made her cream, which only made her madder. She shouldn't be turned on by this barbaric display of male domination.

But she was.

Pounding his back with more force, she demanded, "Put me down."

"Not until we get to my apartment."

"Put me down or I'll scream so loud the police will be on you so fast you won't know what hit you."

One of the hot hands on the back of her thighs let go.

Good, maybe he was about to see reason.

That hand came down hard on her ass in a stinging smack.

"Ouch!" Her skin stung from the force. And the stinging only made her more aware of him and his hand now resting over her cheeks. "What the hell was that?"

"I take it you've never been spanked."

"Never." And she'd never been as excited by the anticipation of more. What was wrong with her? Did she have a little S&M in her? Talia Thorn, Daddy's good little girl, who'd had occasional flings with men, but never one so domineering.

"Maybe it's about time you were spanked." He raised his hand again.

Instead of flinching like she should have, she raised her ass into the air to meet his next swat, biting down on the "yes" rising up her throat.

Shame filled her at the same time as desire surged throughout.

She had to end his control of her or she'd have an orgasm here on the streets. Already her pussy dripped. All he had to do was reach around the rounded curve of her ass and feel her wetness to know. Hell, he was a were, he probably could smell her response to his treatment. "Put me down. I'll go with you quietly."

"Not until we get there. I don't trust you."

She leaned against him, her hands pushing against his back, noting that the muscles beneath his shirt were as hard as granite. What would his skin feel like, stretched taut over his hulking physique? "Could you at least cover my ass?"

"No. I'm enjoying the view."

"Jerk." She smacked his back once more, a thrill of anticipation shivering across her body. Would they ever get to his apartment?

He slapped her ass, this time with less force. "We're here." He took the steps two at a time to an upstairs garage apartment at the back of an old house that looked deserted. Once inside, he kicked the door shut behind him before shifting her in his arms and

letting her slide down his front. His hands smoothed over her thigh and up to her buttocks. Her dress rose up over her ass to her waist by the time he let her go.

Dizzy from being upside down for the past five minutes, Talia leaned into him for a moment. "About time." The way he'd manhandled her had left her body intensely aware of his. She felt at a disadvantage and she couldn't determine whether her knees were weak because of her wild ride or because of her rising desire. She could smell her own lust for this beast of a man who'd started something on the dance floor back at the Three Dog Night Club. He'd started something Talia now wanted to finish.

Once she'd had him and got him out of her system, she'd get back to her search.

Talia pushed away from him and grasped the hem of her dress. *Take this, Miko Bastian.* With slow, deliberate precision, she lifted the dress over her head, wriggling her body with just enough twists to make a grown man beg. Then she tossed the dress to the corner and planted her hands on her naked hips. "Are you going to get me those clothes or do I have to find them myself?" she said, when what she really meant was *forget the clothes and screw me!*

* * * * *

Standing in the muted light shining through the window from a streetlight, Miko stifled a rising moan. Then he tipped his gaze to the darkest corner of the room, anywhere but at the supple, naked body flagrantly displayed in front of him.

Her pale skin glowed in the shadows, a beacon to his rising desire.

Miko's zipper pressed painfully against his granite-hard cock.

Talia Thorn was quickly becoming a thorn in his side and other more immediate places. If he didn't get her home in the next twenty seconds, he'd ruin his chances of getting an endorsement for their security firm from the richest man in Memphis. Being a werewolf had its advantages and disadvantages, however, he still had to earn a living like any human.

For the two-hundredth time since he'd quit the police force to go into business with his brothers, Miko wished he was back pounding the pavement looking for bad guys. Talia seemed a lot more dangerous than a rabid werewolf or a strung-out druggie.

"What's wrong, babysitter? Cat got your tongue?" A long, tapered finger walked up his chest. "Or are you afraid of a little skin?" She pressed her naked breasts to the front of his shirt, her hips grinding into his, her pelvic bone pressing against his tightly leashed penis.

"Ah, hell." He grabbed her arms and crushed her body to him, growling in her ear, a low guttural sound he didn't recognize as his own. "Don't tempt me, woman. You're a job, nothing more."

Her calf wrapped around the back of his leg and climbed upward, until her wet pussy soaked through the denim covering his thigh. "Nothing?" she breathed into his ear.

The scent of her purely feminine skin and the warmth of her breath against his neck ignited his blood, rushing south until his cock burned with the need to plow into her. He had to get away before it was too late. "I'll get your clothes, damn it." When he tried to force her away, his hands played traitor, refusing to push, instead pulling her harder against him.

"Who am I kidding?" He bent his head, his lips crashing down on hers, his tongue sweeping past her teeth to twist and tangle with hers. Her mouth tasted of mint with an intoxicating flavor of alcohol. Delving deeper, he rubbed his dick against her naked body, frustrated by the thick fabric of his jeans.

Talia's arms circled his neck, the silky skin sliding across his shoulders to entwine behind his head. Her delicate fingers combed through his hair, tugging him ever closer.

Miko's hands drifted downward to cup the backs of her thighs and he hiked her up his body, wrapping her legs around his waist. Then his fingers clasped her buttocks and he ground into her, imagining how it would feel to slide into her wetness.

Another low, guttural growl welled in his throat.

She clasped his face between her hands and ran her tongue across his lips without digging in for more. A tempting tease he wouldn't tolerate. "What's wrong, babysitter? Am I getting to you? Wanna fuck me?" She wiggled her ass, her cunt pressing down over him.

Miko spun with her in his arms and strode to the bedroom where he dropped her on the bed and then stood back, crossing his arms over his chest to keep from touching her. "I won't fuck you."

A smile spread across her lips, her lids dropping low over ice-blue eyes. "Wanna bet?" She lay back on the bed, her hands skimming over her breasts, one venturing downward over her flat stomach. "Ummm...this feels good."

The scent of desire hung in the air like a promise. Anger warred with raging carnal need. Miko turned to his dresser and rummaged through for a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. He almost closed his eyes before he turned back with the offering.

Her fingers dove into the shiny juices oozing from her pussy, thrusting and swirling around the drenched entrance.

Miko lost his grip on the clothing and his restraint. He took two steps, closing the distance between them, before his brain kicked back in. "No." He stood firm, determined.

Talia pushed to a sitting position and grabbed his hips before he could move away. With a quick flick of her thumb and forefinger, she'd loosened the button of his jeans. In a slow, steady glide, she lowered his zipper. "Yes," she said, equally as determined to have him as he was to remain hands-off.

Unfortunately, Talia was winning in the determination department.

Unleashed from the tight confines, Miko's cock sprang forward, right into her open palms. Her long, tapered fingers circled him, the cool soft texture in stark contrast to his stiff heat.

With every intention of pushing her away, Miko froze when her mouth lowered over him, taking his length between her teeth. Pleasure exploded from point of contact,

flinging shrapnel of sensations to every part of his body. His fingers dug into her hair and pulled her closer until his cock bumped against the back of her throat.

Her hands gripped his hips, guiding him in and out in a sensual rhythm that had him tied in knots, ready to erupt like a teenage boy at his first sexual encounter with an experienced woman. He squeezed his eyes shut and willed his body not to come too soon, preferring to draw out the intensity.

Talia had other ideas. Her fingers reached between his legs and cupped his balls, massaging them together like Ben Wa balls. One narrow finger found the crack in his ass and followed it to his anus.

His butt muscles clenched and his entire body screeched to a halt.

When her finger pressed against the tight ring, she sucked his cock as deep as it would go into her mouth.

The pressure on his anus, her hands cupping his balls and his cock sunk in the warm cavern of her mouth combined to throw Miko over the edge. He came, his seed spurting into her throat.

Instead of gagging and pushing him away, Talia swallowed and lapped at his dick, swirling the cream around and around, prolonging the ecstasy. When he could take no more of the bombarding sensations of pleasure and pain, he pulled free, his knees shaking.

Now that he'd taken the dark road, he wasn't going back. He no longer gave a rat's ass whether or not Parker Thorn found out the bodyguard screwed his daughter. Now that Miko had tasted Thorn's kiss, he wanted more.

Talia stood and pushed his shirt up over his head and then bent to shove his jeans down his thighs, her hands hurried, her breathing on the ragged side.

When he was as naked as she was, he backed her up against the side of the bed and laid her across the comforter, her calves dangling over the edge at the knee. He nudged her legs wide with one of his own, and stepped into the V. "You think you have me wrapped around your little finger?"

She held her pinky up, a sexy grin widening her lips. "Right here, mister." Then she dipped that pinky into her cunt.

Oh yeah, she had him wrapped all right. "Two can play that game."

Miko leaned over her, his cock poised against her cunt. But he didn't penetrate, instead he pressed his lips to hers in a gentle kiss, his tongue darting out to taste his own musk in her mouth.

She squirmed beneath him, her hips rising in an attempt to connect her pussy with his dick.

He wanted nothing more than to drive deep inside her. Fuck her until they both lay exhausted in the sheets. But he had to teach her a lesson first. His mouth hovered next to her ear. "Now for lesson one. How to beg for what you want."

Her chest rose on her gasp, pressing her breasts against his. "I don't beg," she gasped.

"You will." His mouth moved down her throat, pressing feathery kisses to the pulsing beat at the base. Nipping her gently, he followed her collarbone to the center and moved downward between her full, rounded breasts. "Your skin is the color of skim milk."

She gave an unladylike snort. "I'm overcome by your flattery."

He latched onto one breast and sucked it into his mouth. "Mmmm...you don't taste like skim milk."

"Thank God." Her back arched, pressing her breast deeper into his mouth.

His hand found her other breast and tweaked the pebbled peak between his thumb and forefinger.

A soft moan resonated in her chest, escaping her lips on a sigh.

Miko didn't want a moaning sigh from this woman, he wanted her to scream out his name. He renewed his assault on her, increasing the drag on her breasts until he let

it go with a pop. Like an animal, he ravaged his way down her torso, nuzzling, biting and lapping at the swells and dips along the way.

"Ah geez, will you get there already?"

"Are you begging?"

"No." Her hand on top of his head laced through his hair in a kneading motion, as though she was torn between pushing him away and tugging him closer to the goal.

He hovered over her curly mound, his hands smoothing along her inner thighs, coming close, but not close enough to touch her clit or pussy. With practiced care, he pressed a thumb across her cunt for a brief moment.

A soft gasp accompanied her bucking hips.

"When will you beg, Talia?"

"Never." Her voice lacked conviction.

A little more torture would push her over the edge and she'd be crying out his name, begging him to finish what he'd started. Miko's lips curled into a smile. Yes, he'd have her begging.

He parted her folds and touched her clit with the tip of his tongue.

Talia arched away from the mattress. "Holy—"

Another tap to that most sensitive point had her fingers pulling his hair out by the roots. "Hey, ease up on the hair."

"I can't!" She tugged him again, her hips rising to close the gap between his mouth and her clit. "Please, Miko."

"That's more like it. I love a woman who begs."

Her body stiffened beneath him, and for a terrifying moment, Miko thought he'd gone too far. One more swipe of his tongue against her swollen nub had her screaming.

"Miko! Fuck me. Fuck me now!"

"Not yet, sweetheart. I've more work to do." He bent to the task of bringing her to the edge and over the top.

He licked and lapped at her clit, moving down to taste of her cunt, the warm, wet juices filling his mouth, titillating his senses and rejuvenating his own desire. His cock swelled, lengthening and hardening into a solid shaft. Yet, still, he wasn't done with Talia.

Her heels planted in the mattress and she pushed upward, pressing hard against his mouth.

He sucked her clit between his lips and rolled the highly sensitized flesh between his teeth, nibbling gently, tonguing vigorously until her body grew rigid.

"Oh God." Her hips jerked, her cunt drenched with her orgasm.

Before she could fall back to the earth, Miko flipped her onto her belly.

On her own, she raised her ass, her legs parting enough to show her dripping pussy.

Miko climbed to his knees, grabbed her hips and drove deep inside her, filling her tight channel with the hard length of his dick.

She lay with her face pressed into the mattress, the comforter clenched in her fists, her ass lifted high and bared to his view, the sweet white globes soft and sexy in the darkness.

Her juices coated his penis and he rocked like a piston hammer, slamming in and out of her. When he rocketed to the edge and toppled down the slope of a deeply satisfying orgasm, he held her close, his cock buried inside her as far as it could go. When the spasms slowed, he pulled free, his dick still hard and eager.

With gentle care, he touched the wet tip of his cock to her anus. "Do you want it? Say the word and I won't."

"Oh, Miko. Fuck me in the ass." She came up on her hands and leaned back into him, forcing herself over his cock.

The head slipped inside, her anal ring tightening around the bulbous end of his cock. The intense pleasure was so great that Miko felt his penis swelling even more, the

pressure insanely exquisite. He held steady, his breath trapped in his throat, his hands resting, each on a cheek of her fantastic ass. A rush of excitement urged him to move again, to breathe and pump in and out until he crested the wave of a massive orgasm that shook him to his very core.

When he at last pulled free, he scooted off the bed and bent to lap at her pussy one last time. Then he lay beside her, pulling her into his arms, spooning her backside, his wilting penis tucked between the rounded mounds of her butt. Exhausted by the night's events, he yawned and snuggled closer to her. He could get used to fucking Talia Thorn. The last thought drifting through his mind as he fell into a troubled sleep was what would her daddy think?

A moment later—or was it an hour—Miko awoke to an empty bed. He leaped to his feet, scrambling into his jeans and shoes. How long had she been gone?

After forcing his snout to elongate into that of a wolf, he sniffed the air. Good, she hadn't been gone more than fifteen minutes. He could find her just by following the scent of their combined passion.

Chapter Four

Talia liked the warmth and strength of Miko's arms around her and she'd almost fallen to sleep in a happy haze. Until she remembered why she'd come out at night on the Memphis streets in the first place. Her mystery man, Alec.

Although he hadn't given her much to go on, she had to follow through on his clues. If she didn't, she'd never find the cure to her recent development and her father would be heartbroken when he learned what she was.

Having successfully escaped the apartment without alerting her watchdog, Talia hurried toward the Triad Health Corporation located in a huge building in downtown Memphis, overlooking the swirling, muddy waters of the Mississippi River.

She'd grabbed Miko's discarded shirt, her torn dress and sandals on her way out. Behind the garage apartment, hidden by overgrown azalea bushes and wisteria vines, she made her transformation. She moved faster on four legs than she did on two. A bell chimed in a church nearby, reminding her the hour was late, nearing midnight. Her father would expect her home by two, or he'd send out police units to search for her.

With her clothing clamped between her teeth, she crossed the deserted streets and, avoiding the streetlights, she made her way to the corporate district. As if the streets themselves slept, an uncanny hush blanketed the city deserted of daytime foot traffic. Only the hum of an occasional big rig rumbled in the distance to break the eerie silence. Intermittent headlights blinded her, cars streaking by in a hurry to get home. She moved in the shadows, although the darkness did little to hide the white of her fur. Hell, if she had to be a werewolf, why couldn't she have been black to blend in with the more obscure corners of the city?

When she reached the twenty-five-story building of Triad Health Corporation, she ducked behind a loading dock to make her transformation, pulling her dress and

Miko's shirt over her head to cover her body. She hesitated. Now what should she do? Perhaps she'd been wrong to think following a lead to a corporate building at night would get her anywhere. She circled the building from a distance, imagining the security such a place had.

Talia knew security systems as a user, not a hacker. Sure, her father had them in every building he owned and a state-of-the-art system installed in their home. But how did you get past locked doors and a security guard probably armed with a gun? She stopped in the shadow of an alley and stared across at the building, willing an answer to come to her. As she saw it, she had three options. The first was to go home and forget about finding the cure to her affliction. The second option was to go home and come back the next day under the pretext of applying for a job or asking the president of the corporation for a donation to one of the charities she volunteered for. The third was to march into the building and try to walk past the security guard as if she owned the place.

Impatient by nature, Talia went for the last option. Just when she stepped from the alley, an arm clamped around her waist and a hand covered her mouth.

Her heart leaped to her throat and for a brief moment, she froze. Not for long. Survival instincts kicked in and she fought her attacker, willing her body to make its transformation so that she might tear the brute apart, limb by limb.

"Don't scream," a low voice growled in her ear, warm breath lifting the loose hairs around her neck. She knew that voice and the scent.

Talia relaxed against Miko.

When he dropped his hand and turned her to face him, she got a full look at him standing in the shadows of the alley, completely naked. His cock stood at attention despite his semi-exposed location.

When her gaze connected with his penis, her cheeks burned, her body flaming to life. "Do you always go around the city naked and sporting an erection?" she managed to say, forcing her eyes to shift upward.

"Only when I'm trying to catch up with a slippery client. The erection is part of the whole transformation process. It'll go down in a few minutes."

"Must be tough." She had to admit, her body was usually more sexually aroused right after she shifted from wolf back to human. That had to be the explanation for the current wave of lust washing over her. "Why didn't you stay in bed? I can find my way home without you, babysitter."

"Your father paid me to watch over you."

"Yeah. I bet he didn't pay you to sleep with me, did he?"

"No." Miko grinned. "Just one of the perks of being a bodyguard." His hands traveled over her body, coming to rest on her butt.

Fighting her own attraction to this man, she forced a nonchalant quirk to her eyebrow. "If you're going to hang around, you might want to find some clothes so the cops don't pick you up for indecent exposure."

"I kinda like the freedom of it, don't you?" He grabbed her hips and pulled her against him. "And remember, I know what's under that dress. Or rather, what's not." He ground his cock into the silky fabric and he nuzzled his nose against her neck, nipping at the vein pulsing a wild staccato.

If a woman could get a hard-on, Talia would have one. Her head dropped back to give him greater access to her throat and cleavage. She'd never been so brazen as to make love in an alley, but with Miko, there were lots of firsts.

His hands grasped her ass and lifted her, wrapping her legs around his waist. He pressed her back against the brick of the building behind her. After several attempts to find one of her breasts through the fabric of his shirt and her dress, he yanked his shirt over her head and tossed behind him. Then he sucked her nipple deep into his mouth.

Talia gasped and pressed his head to her, wiggling her cunt over the tip of his cock, wetting it with her juices. She wanted him inside her, filling her, fucking her with her back against a hard brick wall, surrounded by the night and the chance of getting caught.

Excitement shivered across her as she lowered her ass, taking his dick fully inside her. If her father only knew what she was doing with his hired help. "We really shouldn't."

Miko pulled back, the tip of his cock just barely in her cunt. "I could stop. Just say the word."

"No!"

In a slow, delicious glide, he slid back inside her, stretching her vagina with the sheer girth of his rod.

She'd never had a lover like Miko. She would never have considered a werewolf before...well, before she'd become one herself. Now, the thought that he was half animal only made her hotter for him. Resting her arms on his shoulders, she lifted up until she was poised at the tip of his cock, then slammed down over him. "Fuck me, werewolf. Fuck me like you mean it."

He grasped her thighs and held her still. "I never do anything I don't mean. And I mean to fuck you like a bitch." With a wickedly sexy slant to his eyes, he slammed into her.

The bricks against her back bit into her skin, but she welcomed the pain along with the force of each thrust, reveling in his brute strength and overpowering sensuality. Moans mingled with the sharp slap of skin against skin echoing off the towering walls of the buildings in the narrow alley.

Wave upon wave of electric current ripped through her body, shooting her over the top to blast into a cataclysmic orgasm. "Miko!" Her entire body quivered and jerked with the power of her climax, her cunt slick with their combined juices.

Still he slammed into her. When Miko thrust into her one last time, he drove into her so hard that she'd have the pattern of the brick indented in her back for a long time to come. He held her there, buried deep inside, his dick jerking out his seed, filling her womb.

As they both fell back to earth, a long black limo slid past them on the street, pulling to a smooth halt in front of the Triad building.

Miko slipped his cock free and dropped Talia to her feet. Together they peered around the corner of the building and across the street to the limo.

A woman with attractive silver hair stepped out of the building.

Talia gasped. "Damn, that's her!"

"Who?"

Anger shot through her and she stepped away from Miko, her feet poised to race across the street and confront the classy woman crossing to the limo.

Before Talia could take a step, her father emerged from the building and handed the woman into the waiting limo, climbing inside with her.

* * * * *

Miko recognized Olivia St. John from the pictures he'd seen of her in the Memphis Herald newspaper. The man he recognized as Parker Thorn, Talia's father.

Talia's gasp made Miko look twice. What was so unusual about her father meeting with an attractive woman, maybe even a business associate? When he turned to ask, he noted the bright red flags in her cheeks and a wild gleam in her eyes. "What's wrong?"

Talia didn't answer, pushing away from him to run out onto the road. The limo pulled away from the curb and shot forward, leaving her standing in the middle of empty four-lane street.

Her arms clamped to her sides, her fist bunched into tight knots, Talia stood glaring at the rapidly disappearing vehicle, her chest rising with each short, shallow breath.

Miko followed her out into the street and ran his hands over her shoulders. "What is it, Talia?"

"I know her."

"Who?" Miko asked. "Olivia St. John?"

"Not so much who she is, but what she did." Talia stared down the empty street, as if willing the limousine to reappear.

Lights glared, heading straight for Miko and Talia.

"Come on, we need to get out of the way before we're hit." Miko hooked an arm around her waist and tried to lead her to the curb.

She resisted. "It doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does." He swept her up into his arms and strode back to the dark alley before the occupants of the car could get a closer look at them and make the connection that Miko was completely naked. He didn't need to explain to the cops why he was streaking the streets of Memphis in the middle of the night.

He set Talia back on her feet and tipped her chin up, staring down into dull blue eyes. "Maybe you can explain?"

"I was at a party a month ago. One that Olivia St. John was hosting at her penthouse apartment."

"So?"

"She walked by me and somehow scratched me." Talia stared down at her arm where a pale pink, three-inch scar marred her beautiful forearm.

Miko hadn't noticed until she pointed it out. "Olivia scratched you? Was she carrying a knife or something?"

"I thought it might be one of her diamond rings and ignored it. But now..." Talia's eyes narrowed. "Now that I'm no longer human, I think she might have been the one to turn me." Her lips curled back over her teeth. "That bitch turned me into a werewolf." She knocked Miko's hands away and strode toward the street. "I'll kill her if she so much as touches my father."

Before she stepped into the light from the streetlamps, he jerked her hand, pulling her back against the wall of his chest where he trapped her in his embrace. "You won't catch them now."

Her brows drew down over the bridge of her nose, and she glared at Miko's hands holding her shoulders. "Let me go. I have to keep her from hurting my father."

"We don't have any idea where they're going and since they aren't on foot, we can't follow a scent trail. The best you can hope for is that he's taking her back to his place. Has he ever brought a female guest home that you know of?"

Talia's stiff body eased up only a little, but she answered, "Yes."

"Then let's get to your house where we can confront your father."

Talia yanked her dress over her head.

Miko almost forgot what he'd just agreed to do with her as his cock sprang to instant attention.

She really had a beautiful, supple body, her skin as pale as cream silk. And she was transforming into a solid white wolf.

Miko pulled his lust under control and shifted into his wolf form. He hadn't completed his transformation before Talia was racing away from him. It didn't take long for him to catch her and together they ran through the streets lined with tall buildings and corporate headquarters until they moved into the older part of Memphis where large, ornate mansions of a bygone era graced the avenues.

When they arrived in front of Parker Thorn's gated residence, they eased through a gap in the fence and waited in the shadows of the ancient magnolia tree beneath Talia's bedroom window. It was there that they completed their shift back into their human form.

Miko gathered his clothing from his earlier strip show prior to chasing her through the streets of Memphis. Before he climbed into them, he ran his hands over her shoulders and down her sides to her hips. "You first." He hiked her up to the lowest branch and after patting her bottom, watched her ascent, admiring her smooth rounded ass and still-wet cunt glimmering in the muted lights spaced throughout the yard. His constant state of arousal was killing him. He fought the urge to yank her back down out

of the tree so that he could make love to her on the blanket of the highly manicured lawns.

When she was a good body length ahead of him, he climbed the tree behind her and entered through her bedroom window.

She'd grabbed clothing from her drawers, tugging a shirt over her head. "A car just pulled up out front. I bet it's Daddy. I'm going to check." Before he could say a word, she'd ducked through the door, closing it behind her.

As a werewolf, Miko was used to being in strange places naked, but he'd never felt so much like a teenage boy caught with his hand in the proverbial cookie jar of his girlfriend's pants. He slipped into his jeans and buttoned them.

Parker Thorn would not be happy to have the hired help screwing his daughter. And Miko wouldn't blame him for being angry. But he and Talia had bigger issues than sleeping around.

If Olivia was the one who'd turned Talia into a werewolf, then she could possibly be the leader of the rogue pack. The Dracos and the Diablos hadn't known the head of Triad Health Corporation, a leader in the human corporate world, was a werewolf. Unless they got close enough, they wouldn't have known. None of them moved in the higher echelons of Memphis society.

Miko wanted to get word back to his brothers. Zarek would want to organize a meeting between himself and the leaders of the Diablos to determine the damage and possible implications.

Talia slipped back into the room, her face flushed, her gaze directed at his naked chest. Her tongue swiped across her lower lip.

Miko wanted to kiss the nervous look off her face. They had done nothing to be ashamed of. Talia was a grown woman capable of making her own decisions about whom she slept with.

"I'm going down to corner my father before he has a chance to head to bed. Join me in the study when you're dressed."

"I'm ready." He stuck his feet into his shoes and strode toward the door. As they descended the stairs, he pulled the polo shirt over his head and tucked it neatly into his jeans.

Talia entered her father's study ahead of Miko. He let her get inside before he entered.

"Talia, my dear. You're home early from your night out." Parker had his back to the door, rifling through a stack of papers on his desk.

"Daddy, it's past one in the morning." She crossed her arms over her chest. "What kept you out so late? I thought you had a business meeting?"

He straightened the documents before he gave his daughter his full attention.

Miko chose that time to step up behind Talia.

Parker's face darkened as he stared from Miko to Talia and back again. "What are you still doing here?"

"You hired me to keep an eye on your daughter."

"Miko did his job. He kept me safe while I was out." She glanced back at Miko with a hint of a smile before she faced her father, her jaw set in a rigid line. "What were you doing with Olivia St. John tonight?"

His eyes narrowed. "We had business." Parker Thorn moved behind the desk, increasing the distance between himself and his daughter. "How do you know I had a meeting with her? And why do you care?"

"I saw you and Olivia coming out of the Triad Health Corporation building less than an hour ago."

"Yes, yes I did. Like I said, she and I had a business meeting."

"I don't trust her, Daddy."

His bushy white brows angled toward his nose. "Why?"

"I can't say. But if you love me, you'll stay away from her."

"I can't do that, Talia." His lips tightened into a straight line. "She's working on a drug that could solve our crime problems in Memphis. I'm helping fund the program." Parker's gaze shot to Miko and he looked away quickly.

Miko didn't like that shifty look. What was Parker Thorn hiding from his daughter? "What crime problem would that be?"

Parker straightened to his full height, an impressive figure of a man even though he was a good four inches shorter than Miko. "It's a cure to an affliction that has turned this city upside down." He stared at Miko as he rounded the side of his desk to stand squarely in him.

Talia shot a glance between her father and Miko before stepping between them and laying a hand on her father's arm. "What affliction, Daddy?"

"Werewolves." He said the one word as if it was enough.

Silence filled the room with tension.

The hackles on the back of Miko's neck rose. He could feel the hairs springing up on his arms, and he fought the instinctive response to danger. The response that would transform him into his animal form, obviously the form Parker Thorn hated most. "Let me get this straight, you consider werewolves an affliction and the source of all crime in the city?"

"Yes." Again, his answer was directed to Miko, he had yet to look into his daughter's eyes.

"No, Daddy. You can't." Talia's eyes pooled and she blinked away the moisture.

Miko wanted to reach out and pull her into the protection of his arms, to guard her from the pain her father's words inflicted.

"Olivia St. John has her pharmaceutical research department working on a cure. They think they have it." Parker's eyes lit with excitement. "Don't you see? We can help werewolves reclaim their lives."

"And how do they propose to test that cure? Sacrifice a few weres to the cause?" Miko stepped closer. "You'd play God to come up with a cure? What if the were species of Memphis don't want a so-called cure?"

"But they will." Parker's hands spread wide. "Who wouldn't want to be normal again? Living life as they were meant to live...as humans."

"Some of us weren't born human, Mr. Thorn. You act as though we could change what we are with a magic potion."

"Perhaps it won't work on those who were born to it, but it will work on those who've been turned." Finally, he faced his daughter, his gaze softening. "It has to."

Talia's tears spilled over and slid down her cheeks. "You knew?"

He nodded and held out his hands to her.

She stepped back, distancing herself from the first man she'd ever loved. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I wanted you to be the one to tell me." He took another step toward her, dropping his hands to his sides when she backed up yet again. "I saw you make the change one night. I admit, it was a shock. But once I got past it, I went in search of anyone who could help. That's when I found Olivia."

"You should have come to me first, Daddy." Talia's tears had dried and her lips formed a tight line.

"I thought I was doing what was best for you, darling?"

"Maybe you think you were." She linked her arm through Miko's. "I'm a werewolf now, Daddy, and I'm not willing to be someone's experiment for a cure to my 'affliction'. She looked up into Miko's eyes. "Can we go back to your place? I don't belong here."

"But, Talia—"

"Please, can we go?" She pulled on Miko's arm.

Miko wanted to stay and play the scenario out with Parker Thorn, but the pleading look in Talia's pale blue eyes was his downfall. "Let's go."

As they stepped into the foyer, Talia looked back over her shoulder. "I'd be careful with Ms. St. John, Daddy. She's not who you think she is."

Parker Thorn's face had taken on a gray tinge, his eyes pressed into a worried frown. "What do you mean?"

Talia shook her head before replying softly, "She's the one who turned me."

Chapter Five

Back in Miko's apartment, Talia stared out a window, standing with her back to the room. She'd thought her life had its complications since being turned, but now it was so much worse. Her father was working with the enemy, as far as she was concerned.

Miko was on the phone behind her. "Lyka, have you seen Kyros? I can't get him on the cell." His shoes made soft tapping sounds on the tile floor as he paced back and forth behind her. "If you see him, get him to call me. It's important. I'll fill you in later." He flipped shut the phone and the tapping moved in her direction.

When Miko's hands cupped her shoulders, Talia stiffened. "I have to leave."

"Do you want to go back to your father's house?" He pushed her hair aside and dropped a kiss at the base of her neck, setting a rash of nerve endings on fire.

"No." Talia willed herself not to respond, knowing she fought a losing battle. "I have to find Olivia and stop her from turning anyone else, including my father."

His lips paused in mid brush across her skin, his hands tightening their grip on her arms. "It's not safe out there. There are rogue werewolves roaming the city and you don't want what happened to Monique to happen to you."

"You can't make me stay." She tipped her head to the side, allowing him full access to her entire neck.

"I think I can. Besides, we're not going anywhere until I speak with my brothers." He smoothed a long blonde strand of hair behind her ear. His touch was gentle, his fingers strong and sensuous.

Despite her determination to find Olivia and put a stop to what she was doing, Talia leaned into his hand. "Do you think she scratched me on purpose, just to get my father's funding?"

"Sounds like it."

"She can't get away with it. What if the cure they're working on kills weres?"

"I think it already has."

She turned in his arms, her eyes wide, the image of a female werewolf in the painful grip of a tragic death. "Monique?"

He nodded.

Talia drew in a deep breath and let it out. "You think what happened to Monique tonight was a result of someone experimenting with the 'cure'?"

"Yes. I can't think of anything else that could have had that effect on her, and there have been others."

"Oh God." Talia pushed a hand through her hair and stared at Miko's chest without seeing him.

"What?"

"The man I was dancing with in the bar." She stared up into Miko's face. "I bet he's the one who did it."

Miko grabbed her elbows. "Who was he?"

"I'm not exactly sure. I only know him as Alec. He contacted me when I spread the word on Beale Street last night that I was interested in finding a cure for the scratch of a werewolf. Alec called me and told me to meet him in the Three Dog Night Club if I wanted answers. But then he wouldn't tell me unless I went outside with him."

"And you didn't because I was dancing with you?"

"That's right." Her heart hit the bottom of her gut. "I bet he was planning to use the cure on me. When I didn't go along with his plan, he got Monique instead." Her head grew light at the memory of the dying woman reaching out to her for help.

Miko pulled her into his arms. "We'll get him. Just as soon as my brothers report in, we'll go after Alec."

Talia buried her face in Miko's chest and breathed the scent of him. Everything about him gave her strength, made her stronger. If he could live the life of a werewolf in the midst of humans, she could too. He made it seem so easy, so natural. "Do you ever get used to living in two different worlds?"

His chest vibrated with his chuckle. "It's all I've ever known."

She leaned back and stared up at him. "I didn't want to believe people like you existed, even after my mother was killed by a were. Then I became one."

He found her teary eyes irresistible and dropped a kiss onto each eyelid, tasting the salty tears and thinking they were as spicy as she. "I didn't know a woman like you existed until I was assigned as your babysitter."

She choked on a laugh and sob at the same time, and then her hands circled the back of his neck, drawing him down until her lips hovered beneath his. "What's happening here?"

"Honey, if you don't know by now, then you've got a lot more to learn about life than that werewolves exist in Memphis." He claimed her lips, his hands sliding down her back to cup her ass. Pressing hard against her buttocks, he ground his cock into her belly. "I think we have time for one quick lesson."

"I'm a quick learner." She shucked her shirt and jeans in record time and waited for him to step out of his. "Could you move a little faster? And I thought men were impatient."

When he'd cleared his jeans, she planted her hands on his chest and walked him backward into the small bedroom until his knees hit the bed.

Miko toppled backward, grabbing her hand as he went.

Talia fell on top of him, loving the feel of his skin against hers. She straddled his hips, positioning herself over his erect penis. "Do all werewolves have such..." She cleared her throat. "Healthy-sized equipment?" She dropped down, allowing his dick to dip into her wetness.

Miko drew in a sharp breath, his hips rising, pushing his cock deeper.

With the ease of someone who did one hundred lunges a day, not to mention Pilates three times a week, she rose on her knees out of his reach. "Not yet. You didn't answer my question."

"Why does the answer matter? Isn't one penis enough for you?"

She dismounted and sat next to him, studying his shiny cock, damp with her juices. "I don't know. Do you keep more than one bitch?"

A smile tipped the corners of his mouth. "Only if I can get away with it. Which isn't often. Why, did you have another one in mind for me?" He's brows rose. "Besides you, of course."

"I could appreciate the beauty in more than one partner. What do you say? Do you think we could add one of your handsome brothers to our little playtime?"

His fists tightened and the muscles in his jaw twitched. "No. And playtime is over." He flipped her on her back and had her pinned before she could take her next breath.

"I take it you don't share your toys with your brothers?" She chuckled.

"I don't share my woman with my brothers."

His words sent a thrill through her. "Is that what I am, your woman?"

Another growl rumbled in his throat. "Did anyone ever tell you that you talk too much?"

She gave him a thoughtful look. "No."

"You do." He ended conversation with a hard kiss. Then he proceeded to lay siege to her body, starting with her breasts and working his way down to her pussy. He spread her thighs, pressing kisses from the back of her knee all the way to the tuft of hair covering her mons. There he parted her folds with his thumbs and flicked her with the tip of his tongue.

Talia ground her heels into the mattress and her ass rose six inches from the comforter. "Oh geez!"

"Like that?"

"Do I like that? Hell—"

He flicked her clit again.

"Yes!" Her fingers dug into his hair and she pulled him closer.

How could one little touch cause so much pleasure? That was her last coherent thought before she catapulted to the heavens, screaming out his name in on long, lusty breath.

At Talia's peak, Miko climbed up her body and slammed into her, driving his cock deep into her tight pussy, slick with molten desire.

With each of his thrusts, she rose up to meet him. "Harder," she panted. "Faster."

He gave her everything she asked for and more, sliding in and out at a steadily increasing tempo until the bed squeaked and the headboard banged against the wall. With his final thrust, he raised his face to the ceiling and howled.

His cock throbbed inside her cunt, hot as a poker and drenched in their combined fluids. When he dropped to the bed beside her, he preserved their connection, pulling her against him until her breasts pressed against his ribs and her face rested against a taut brown nipple. She reached out and nipped it.

"Hey, that hurts."

She chuckled, unrepentant. "Did you really howl?"

"Yes, I did. You bring out the beast in me." He slapped her bare ass. "I noticed you raised a ruckus of your own. What was it? Oh yes. Faster. Harder," he mimicked her.

"I did not!" She smacked her palm against his chest.

"Yes, you did." He pinched her distended nipple.

A wrestling match ensued lasting until they broke apart, breathing hard and lay back against the pillows, the comforter long since fallen to the floor.

"Do you really think Alec might have given Monique the cure?" Talia turned on her side and ran a finger across Miko's collarbone. "You'd think they'd have tried it out on lab rats first."

"I don't think that rats are the same as humans or werewolves. And Monique was born a werewolf. Perhaps their formula only works on turned weres, like you."

Talia shivered. "She was in such pain when she died." She laid her cheek against his beating heart. "I hope I never have to witness something that horrible again. Poor Monique."

"So do you think werewolves are an affliction?"

Her hand stopped tracing the muscles in his upper arm. "Some."

"Some?"

"Just like with humans. There are good ones and bad ones. There, are you happy?" Her lips curved around a smile.

"I could be," he said, his voice not much louder than a whisper.

When Talia opened her mouth to ask him what he meant, his cell phone rang, interrupting the moment.

"That has to be Kyros." Miko rolled out of the bed and hurried into the other room, his naked ass as impressive as the rest of his gorgeous body. "About time."

Talia retrieved the comforter from the floor and tossed it on the bed, then followed Miko into the living area.

His back was to her and his body was completely rigid. "What the fuck? When?"

She circled him and stared up into his tense face.

"I'll be there in five." Miko stared down at Talia, his gaze looking through her instead of at her. "We'll get him back." Miko flipped shut the phone and stood for several seconds breathing hard. "And then we'll kill the bastard."

"What happened?" Talia strode across the floor and laid a hand on Miko's stiff arm. "Who will we get back and what bastard do you plan to kill?"

Miko closed his eyes and breathed in and out several times to calm the urge to burst into wolf form and rage through the city ripping into every human in his path.

A soft hand on his arm brought him back to the garage apartment “Talk to me, Miko.”

“Alec captured my brother Zarek and plans to test his formula on him.”

“No. It’ll kill him!”

“I know that and you know that, but Alec can’t seem to figure it out. He’s killed two more werewolves over the past two nights, apparently testing different batches of the stuff. That’s three werewolves in all.”

Talia shook her head. “Good God. We have to stop him.”

“Kyros is on his way to Triad Health Corporation. We think Alec might be taking Zarek back to the lab to perform experiments on him there.”

“Come on, we have to hurry.” Talia ran for the door.

Miko beat her to it. “No. You shouldn’t come. Kyros said Alec is armed.”

“I’m going. I have as much at stake in this as you do. Maybe more. My father’s money is behind this cure. I can’t let it tear the city apart. If he knew the full extent of what was going on, he would withdraw his funding immediately.”

Miko stood fast. “Look, Talia, I don’t want what happened to Monique to happen to you.”

“And I feel the same way about your brother. Now are you going to stand there and argue or are we going to go find your brother?” She pushed past him and out the door.

She’d completed her transformation before she reached the bottom of the stairs.

Miko followed suit.

Together, they raced through the streets of Memphis to the Triad Health Corporation headquarters.

Kyros and a half dozen of the Draco pack waited in the alley across from the entrance.

When Miko and Talia joined them, they turned as single entity and converged on the entrance to the building, triggering the sliding door motion sensor.

"What the fuck?" The security guard stared at his monitor, then up over the top of his desk at the pack. His face turned white and he fumbled for the gun on his belt.

Before he could pull the weapon, Kyros and Miko were on him, the full force of their wolf bodies knocking him on his back. Kyros stood on his chest while Miko pinned the wrist holding the pistol to the ground.

When the man struggled, the two brothers growled a warning.

The guard shook so hard he dropped his gun.

Another wolf grabbed it between his teeth and moved it out of reach.

Athan and Hektor, two of Kyros' trusted advisors, took over from the brothers and motioned them away.

Kyros transformed into his human form and stood tall. Miko did the same. When they headed for the elevator, Talia joined them in her naked human form, her face flushed a deep red.

"Not used to running around the city in the buff, are you?" Miko shot her an understanding look.

"Doesn't bother me a bit." Kyros grinned across at her as he leaned over the guard. "Where's the lab?"

The man shook his head. "I d-d-don't know."

Kyros' eyes narrowed. "Hektor, help the man remember."

The hulking black wolf with the hints of red in his fur shifted his teeth from the man's wrist to his throat and clamped down hard enough to make his point.

"Where's the lab," Kyros repeated.

The guard whimpered. "Basement level one."

"Let's go." When Kyros turned toward the elevator, the guard stopped him.

"You can't get in without a key card."

Miko reached down and snagged the one on the guard's belt. "Thanks."

Miko turned to Talia. "Stay here. We don't know what we'll see in the lab and I'd rather you weren't in danger."

"You're wasting your time, big guy, and I'm getting cold just standing around." She didn't wait for his permission, but pushed past him.

Kyros turned to the four wolves still on all fours awaiting his next instructions. "Simon and Titos, come with us. The others take the stairs in human form."

The elevator door dinged and slid open. Kyros, Miko, Talia and the two wolves stepped in. As the doors closed, the stairwell doors slammed in the hallway.

Miko glared at the wolves standing with their noses turned to Talia, sniffing her in places they had no business sniffing. "Back off."

Kyros, his gaze on the digital floor indicator, chuckled. "You can't blame them. She's a beaut." He cast an assessing glance over Talia's body.

His blood boiling, Miko wanted to shove a fist into his eldest brother's smirking face. "Back off, Kyros."

Kyros raised his hands and turned his attention to the door. "No problem. I can see the No Trespassing signs all over her."

Talia flushed from head to toe, but pushed her shoulders back and stood taller, her head tipped back so that she stared down her nose at Kyros. Her entire attitude said, *if you can stand naked and not feel stupid, so can I*.

Miko's chest swelled with the admiration he felt for this woman. Still, he wanted to push her behind him and hide her gorgeous body from other ogling male gazes. Would the elevator ever get to the basement level?

A *ding* indicated they'd arrived.

Miko pulled Talia behind him and out of the way of the opening door.

Kyros and the two wolves leaped through as soon as the door was wide enough for them to negotiate.

The hallway they found themselves in was empty, with two doors leading off the bare white walls. Miko headed for the one with the card reader and sliced the guard's card through it. The lock clicked and he pushed the handle down. "Please, Talia, stay here until we clear the room."

"Okay," she answered.

Miko's eyebrows rose. "What, no argument?"

Talia shrugged. "I don't want to distract you. Someone could get hurt."

A hint of a smile twitched the corners of Miko's lips. Then he turned his attention to saving his brother. After a glance at Kyros and the two wolves, he eased the door open.

A sharp bang sounded from within and a bullet hit the wall next to Miko.

Miko and Kyros threw themselves into the room, rolling to the side. Simon and Titos, already on all fours, jumped over the two men and entered the room, racing across the vinyl floor tiles polished to a high-gloss finish and slippery consistency. They slid behind cabinets and held their ground as another shot rang out.

Miko glanced back. Talia hadn't entered. He breathed a sigh and hoped she'd stay in the relative safety of the hallway.

"Kyros! Miko! Don't move." Zarek yelled.

"That's right. If you try to hurt me in any way, your brother gets it."

Miko's heart stuttered in his chest. His brother was still alive. At the same time he realized they had to use hostage negotiation skills to talk Alec out of killing all of them, starting with Zarek. He'd pretty much flunked that area of training at the academy. Now what?

"Alec, the cure doesn't work." Talia entered the room, wearing the maintenance man's overalls she'd found in the service closet. The crotch hung down to her knees and she'd tried to roll up the pant legs in a hurry. One of the legs had come loose and bunched at her feet.

"It works, I tell you!" Alec held a syringe to Zarek's throat. "It has to work."

Her breath caught in her throat. "Is it the same formula you used on Monique earlier?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Alec's gaze didn't meet hers.

Anger bubbled up inside, but Talia kept her voice calm. "Don't bother lying. You used it on her, didn't you?"

"How did you know?" Alec asked.

"Lucky guess." Talia held out her hands. "I saw what it did to Monique. Alec, it was a terrible, terrible way to die. You can't use it on any more werewolves. Put the syringe down." She inched closer.

"Don't, Talia." Miko reached out to stop her, but she dodged his grip. She knew she could talk this man out of this, given enough time.

"Don't move or this werewolf gets the needle," Alec screamed. He touched the sharp point to Zarek's neck.

Zarek cringed. "Just how bad did you say it was for Monique?" His hands and feet were tied and he had a leather strap around his neck that was chained to the floor.

"Grotesquely painful. She screamed as her body tried to transform. Monique died in a gooey mess of fur and flesh, crying out for help." It hurt to recall Monique's dying throes, but if it helped save Zarek, she'd describe it in all the horrible details.

Alec flinched. "It wasn't supposed to react that way. I tested the formula, dammit!"

"On what? Lab rats?" Miko took a step closer. "There's a difference between rats and humans. And a difference between born and turned werewolves."

Talia waved her arm at the scientific equipment scattered across the laboratory. "You probably tested it on werewolves who were turned. Monique and Zarek are born werewolves. Their chemistry must be different. You can't use that formula on them. Put the syringe down. Please." She moved closer until she stood within five feet of the man holding a gun in one hand and a syringe to Zarek's neck.

"No! It's the cure! It has to be!" His hand shook. "It has to be."

"Why?" Talia made her voice soft, soothing. The man wasn't a vicious killer. He was tortured by something else.

"Because it has to cure her." His voice faded into a mutter, Talia barely heard.

"Who, Alec? Who does it have to cure? Maybe we can help."

"I can answer that." A female voice sounded from the door." Olivia St. John stepped through the entrance, followed by Talia's father.

"Daddy?" Talia frowned. "What are you doing with her?"

"I came to confront her about what she did to you and to tell her the deal was off."

"But she's dangerous. She could turn you into a werewolf or kill you."

"I know why she did it. I know why she turned you." His lips pressed into a firm line. "I don't agree with her reasons, but I understand them." He turned to Olivia. "Do you want to elaborate?"

Olivia sighed then stared across the room at her. "I'm sorry, Talia. I had to keep the funding going for the formula. Our backers were impatient and pulled their grants. I knew, given enough motivation, that your father had the financial strength to complete the necessary research."

"And making his daughter a werewolf was the motivation." Talia shook her head. "That's pretty drastic, don't you think?"

"I'd run out of options." She glanced across at Alec. "Didn't I, dear?"

"Yes. But I won't give up. I'll find the cure." He stood taller, his jaw firm, his love for Olivia shining from his eyes.

"Maybe it's time we did give up. Maybe it's time we accept the fact I'm no longer only human." She crossed the floor and held out her hand. "Give me the syringe, Alec."

"No. This has to work." Alec held the syringe away from her grasp.

Olivia reached out her hand to him. "If you want to test it on someone, then test it on me." She raised her brows. "Do you believe it'll work? Believe it enough that you'd try it on me?"

He shook his head, tears welling in his eyes. "No." Then he handed the syringe to her and gathered her in his arms. "I only did it because I love you."

"I know." She held him close. "I believe in you, Alec. I believe you love me and would do anything for me. But what we've done is wrong. We can't keep killing people." She stared across Alec's shoulder at Talia and curled her hand around the syringe, injecting the drug into her wrist. "If you want to test the drug, test it on me."

"No. Give me the syringe." Alec pushed her to arm's length and stared down in horror at the syringe dangling by the needle from her wrist. "No!"

Miko inched across the room toward the pistol lying on the counter next to Alec.

With one arm around Olivia, Alec grabbed the weapon before Miko got there and waved at him. "Get back!"

"Alec, I feel strange." Olivia clung to Alec, her face turning a startling shade of gray. Hairs sprung out on her arms in splotchy patches.

"Oh, Olivia." Alec held her up, clutching the gun in one hand. "Why?"

"We were responsible for the deaths of those other werewolves. Because of the drug, they died. If it was going to work, it had to work on me, not others."

"But I had to do it. How else could I find a cure for you?" He pushed the hair away from her face and stroked her cheek.

"Can't you see? There is no cure." Olivia's knees buckled, her face stretched and pulled grotesquely. Her body jerked and she fell from Alec's one-armed hold to the floor. There she shuddered, her arms and legs twitching and thrashing.

Alec dropped to his knees, tears streaming from his eyes, the gun clutched in one hand, his other reaching out to touch Olivia one last time. "I'm so sorry. I did it out of love for you."

As Olivia's body stilled, Alec raised the gun.

"Get down!" Miko pushed Talia to the floor and covered her body with his.

But Alec turned the gun on himself. He pressed the barrel to his temple and pulled the trigger.

"No!" Talia squeezed her eyes shut, the sound of the shot reverberating in her head. If not for the warmth and solid comfort of Miko's body over hers, she'd have come apart.

After a long silence, those left alive in the room stirred.

"Kyros, could you unleash me from this thing?" Zarek struggled against the bindings around his wrists. "We need to get out of here before the police arrive to clean up this mess."

"Hang on. I'll have you out in a minute." Kyros unbuckled Zarek's collar and held it up. "Have to admit, I've felt like using one of these on you guys a time or two. Maybe I should keep it."

"No!" Miko and Zarek spoke at once.

Miko moved, allowing Talia to push to her feet. She avoided Olivia and Alec's bodies and turned to her father, her hands held out. "This shouldn't have happened. None of it should have. I should have told you sooner."

Her father stared at the bodies on the floor, his face pale, the lines etched deep around his eyes. "No, it shouldn't have." He gathered Talia in his arms and held her close.

After a moment, she pushed far enough away to look him in the eye. "I know you want me back the way I was before I was turned, but can't you find it in your heart to love me no matter what I am?"

He took her hands and squeezed, the grip so tight it was almost painful. "I'll always love you, Talia. You're everything to me."

"Maybe that needs to change as well. I'm a grown woman. I can't live with you forever. You need a life of your own."

"Are you trying to tell me something? Does that mean you're moving out?" He glared at Miko. "Are you moving in with one of them?"

"If by one of them, you mean werewolves, then maybe I am." She shot a shy glance at Miko, the feel of his arms around her still warm inside her. "Only I haven't been invited yet. But there is that possibility."

"Consider yourself invited." Miko smiled.

The tilt of his lips was gentle and stirred so much longing in Talia that she wanted to run to him and throw herself in his arms.

Her father's face turned a bright red and his mouth opened and closed several times before he finally sighed. "I just can't get used to the fact my little girl is all grown up. Add to that she's also a werewolf." He shook his head. "I've hated werewolves for so long, it's been hard for me to learn that they have a right to live here as well. It's a lot for an old man to take in all at once."

"I know." She hugged her father. "But I'll always love you. Never doubt that." She kissed his cheek and hugged him close. "As for the formula, it has to be destroyed."

"We'll take care of it." Kyros shot a look at Miko. "Get Talia and Mr. Thorn out of here. We'll perform damage control before we let the security guard loose."

Talia finally looked at the two bodies lying on the floor in a spreading pool of Alec's blood. Her stomach churned and threatened to upend.

"Don't look. There's nothing you can do for them." Miko pulled her against him and hid her face in his chest. "Everything will be all right now."

"Will it?" She stared up into his eyes.

Epilogue

Talia lay in Miko's arms back in his garage apartment. Her father was safely at home and all record of their arrival and subsequent departure from the Triad Health Corporation headquarters was erased from the tapes and the security guard's memory. The guard would find the bodies on his nightly round and call the police, completely unaware of how it had all come to pass. "How did Kyros manage to erase the security guard's memory?"

"That's a secret he learned when he served in the Iraqi war." Miko blew a warm stream of air against her neck. "He won't show me that little trick."

She snuggled closer, tweaking the tip of a hard brown nipple. "Monique's death was so senseless. As were Olivia's and Alec's."

"All in pursuit of a cure." Miko toyed with a strand of her long blonde hair, brushing it over her right breast. He swept the ends up her neck to her cheek. "Are you disappointed there isn't a fix for your condition?"

Her hand cupped his cheek. "No. Although, if I hadn't been searching for the cure, my father wouldn't have had to hire a bodyguard. So, In my search for a cure, I found you." She kissed his lips, her tongue delving into his mouth and sweeping across his. "Is there a future for an ex-socialite and a bodyguard?" She didn't say what she really meant – two werewolves from different worlds.

"I'd say we're made for each other." He positioned himself between her legs and deepened the kiss, the hard ridge of his cock pressing against the warm wetness of her pussy. "Besides, I don't think there is a cure for what we have."

"And what is it we have?" She pressed her heels into the mattress and raised her ass off the bed, thrusting herself upward to engage his penis.

He moved out of reach. "At the risk of sounding all mushy, I'd say we have a good start at love." He kissed the tip of her nose. "What would you call it?"

She stared up at him, her breath caught in her throat. "Even though we haven't known each other very long?"

"You're a woman, don't you believe in love at first sight?"

"I kicked you in the gut."

"Hey, you did, didn't you?" He frowned, but not for long. "That's when I fell so hard."

She swatted his shoulder. "On the pavement."

"Yeah, but there's something about a woman who can take care of herself." He nudged her pussy with the velvety smooth tip of his dick. "It makes me hard just thinking about the way you danced with me."

"If just thinking makes you hard, imagine the possibilities of this." She reached for him, encasing his steely rod in her hands.

"Not so fast." He sucked in a breath and let it out, obviously affected by what her fingers were doing to him. "You never answered my question."

She leaned forward and nipped the tip of his nipple. "What question? I seem to have lost track." The heat of his cock between her palms was making her creamy and impatient for him.

"What would you call what we have?" He waited, refusing to go further until she answered.

Talia smiled up at him. "I'd call it perfect." She loosened her hold on his cock and cupped his cheek. "I've never felt this way about a man before. It's like I'm on fire all the time. It scares and excites all at once. I think I could love you, Miko Bastian."

"Then I'll have to make you quit thinking." He came to her, filling her with his passion and his warmth. His cock moved in and out of her wet cunt, swelling to fit her

completely. Taking one of her full breasts into his mouth, he nipped at it, rolling the nipple around on his tongue, while his dick slid gently in and out of her pulsing sex.

The slow-moving motion only made her want more of him, faster and harder. Wanting to free the animal in him, she dug her heels into the mattress, meeting him thrust for thrust, her pussy clenching around his thick, hard shaft.

The pace of their lovemaking increased until Miko slammed in and out of her so hard, his ferocity made the headboard bang against the wall.

When she shot over the edge and exploded into a million sparkling bursts of sensation, Talia knew. This man-beast was precisely what she'd been missing in her life. Now she was complete.

About the Author

I've written for Ellora's Cave since September of 2006 when my first release *Trouble with Harry* came out. Since then, I've expanded from reluctant genies to werewolves, chameleons, vampires and witches. For me, reading and writing gives me the freedom to explore strange new worlds and write the characters and creatures clamoring to escape my mind. I like writing everything from romantic comedy to dark and sexy suspense. Mostly I like to escape into other worlds whether grounded in reality or complete fantasy. Come...escape with me!

Myla welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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