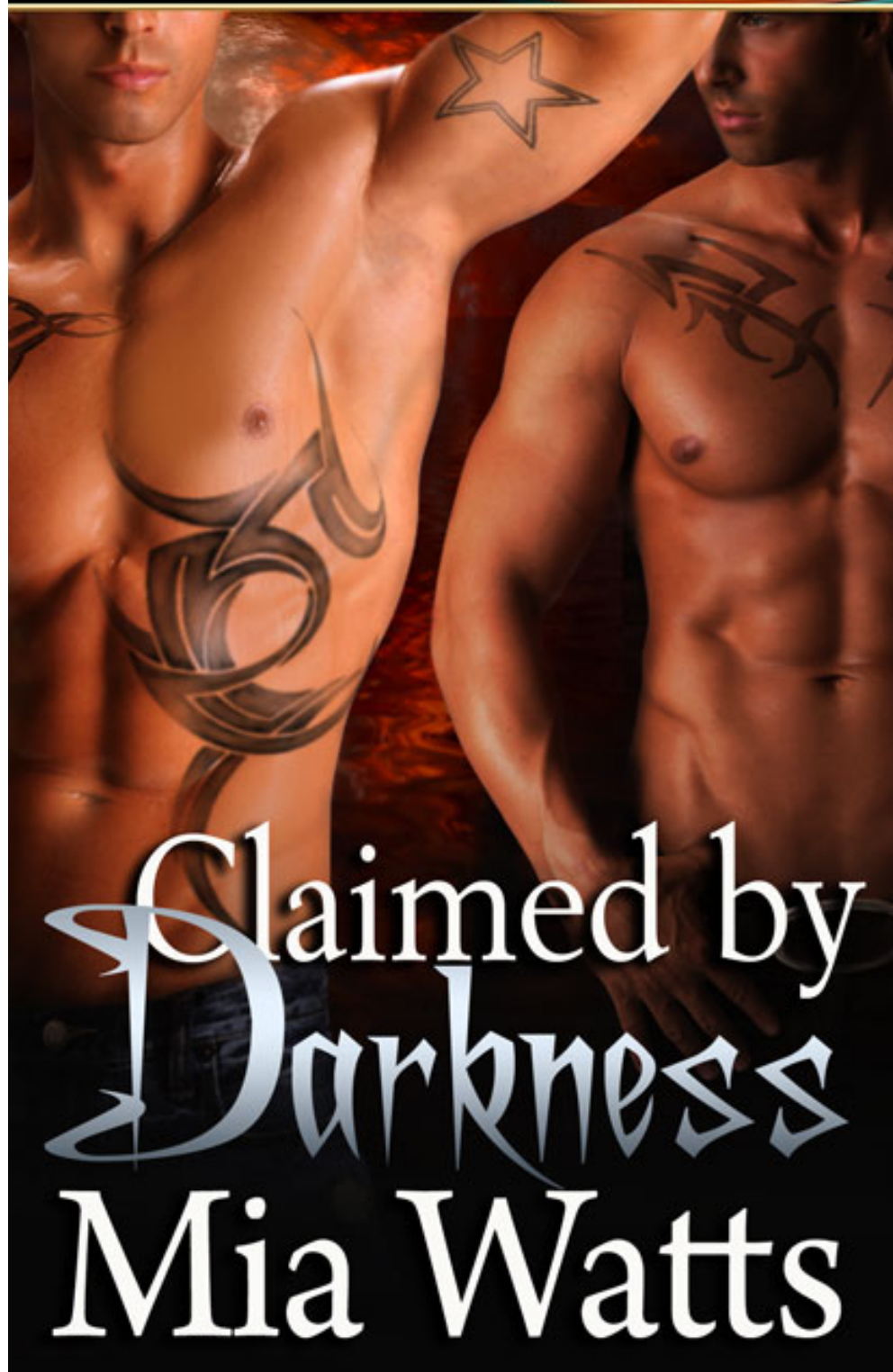


ELLORA'S CAVE *Spectrum*



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Claimed by Darkness

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# *CLAIMED BY DARKNESS*

**Mia Watts**

## *Dedication*

*To Helen Woodall for giving a girl a chance. Thank you.*

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## **Chapter One**

The heady, pulse-pounding beat drummed against Damien's chest and throbbed through his veins. It was the same in every age. Each generation defined themselves with music, claiming the beats and soul-driving rhythms as their own creations. Damien smiled as he studied the swaying bodies before him. Some ground against each other, others rocked in a semblance of dance. They were controlled by their urges, oblivious to their own frailty until one of Damien's kind took mortality from them.

Humans were such fragile creatures—arrogant, consumed by their own self-importance when the age before and the age following would not care about the fleeting moments of one person's life on the earth when the next generation came to take its place. And the cycle would repeat. Throbbing music, soul-binding songs, swaying in a primal dance of barely concealed sexuality as one flitted from moment to moment, struggling to make his importance stick before that generation too was forgotten like mist under the blaze of morning sunlight.

It carried notes of banality. Damien had seen it countless times. And yet this time, this particular collection of years had pierced his heart in a way none before it had and none after would compare. And it was one of the few times the pulsing music called to him with its primitive insistence that he mate. Hard, fast, with all the consuming demand that permeated each dark note. It was as basic to his soul as the deepest notes and fading remnants, rippling into the darkened corners of both his mind and the club where he now sat.

He draped his arm along the back of the blood-red couch, his fingers inches from Rik's shoulder. Inches which might as well have been miles. Rik's gaze was fixed on the undulating hips of a provocative blonde who had attracted his interest. She danced for him, her body slick with perspiration and glowing beneath the club lights.

Damien looked from one to the other.

Rik's lips tilted in a knowing smile. His hooded gaze egged her on as though no one else was with them. Unbidden, Damien saw flashes of insight he only ever caught when Rik's guard was down. As it was now, after a few beers and the music pumping around them. He saw flashes of Rik's desire to see the woman strip. To see her puny straps slide sensuously down her arms and bare her full, bobbing breasts.

Damien could empathize. The woman's curves were remarkable in a way that screamed augmentation but her nipples puckered with arousal as natural as any others. She slicked her tongue over her bottom lip, inviting his eyes to rest there, for him to contemplate kissing her. Rik accepted the invitation as mental flashes showed Damien the image of his friend devouring her mouth under the insistence of his lust.

Damien had loved many women in his four hundred and seventy-seven years. Plenty of men as well. But until he'd met Rik, he hadn't known the meaning of the word desire. It consumed him, ate him up from within each and every time they hung out together, yet Damien resisted the unnatural pull for the man he could not have.

"You want to share her," Rik said, not bothering to look at him.

The blonde turned, working her backside in hip-swiveling moves to hypnotize the sturdiest of resolves into sin. It was a valid remark. Rik had shared women with him before, offering them to Damien to either soothe his blood appetite or slake his sexual cravings.

Damien returned the favor, often in multiples. Rik probably thought Damien meant to reciprocate but in truth Damien liked watching Rik perform. He liked the raw, hot-blooded savagery of seeing Rik's cock drive deep into the willing pussy of an ecstatic female. He imagined Rik driving into him that way, replacing the softer feminine curves for his harder body and angled contours. It turned him on. Made him hard, now, just thinking about the wet slap of Rik's balls against his ass, the thrust and slam of his thick cock buried so deep in him he cried from pain and pleasure.

"She turns you on?" Rik asked, flicking a glance to Damien's lap.

Damien made no move to cover himself or hide his arousal. Having Rik's eyes on him made his balls draw up tight and the telltale tingle of pleasure tease the base of his spine.

"She likes you," Rik went on. "At the bar she told me she had a thing for brooding men and long black hair." Rik sighed with defeat. "I can't compete and you know it. You have this thing that drives women crazy. I wouldn't get in your way if you want a crack at her."

"No," Damien said, his voice a husky whisper. He smiled curiously, wondering at the reason Rik's lips turned down as he spoke. Was he sorry he offered the blonde to him, fearful Damien would take her? Damien had never discussed his relationships with Rik. That was one area of his life he never broached for fear he would confess his obsession for the human and scare Rik off.

Rik's ardent interest in women could not be mistaken. For Damien, if having Rik in his life meant keeping his own bisexuality in check, he'd do it. Being near the younger man was a balm to his soul. Damien would not risk losing him. There was too much at stake and a prophecy to prepare him for. He needed more time but the council was growing restless. It wouldn't be long before they insisted Damien bring him in. They'd seen enough. They were as convinced as Damien.

As if summoned, an invisible lure dragged Damien's gaze across the room to a pair of deep-set gray eyes which seemed to pierce the shadows despite the darkened room. Silently the gray-eyed man questioned Damien, sending him thoughts of dissatisfaction before directing his judgmental gaze toward Rik.

Damien vehemently rejected the judgment. *He's not ready.*

*Get him ready,* the other vampire snarled in Damien's head. *If he's The Keeper the conversion must happen soon.*

*Fuck you. He is The Keeper.* Damien's eyes burned hot and dry. He knew they were glowing an angry red at the vampire who faded into the shadows. Raith would be back

and if Damien resisted turning Rik, Raith would take care of it for him—and he wouldn't be gentle.

The human psyche could only take so much before it cracked. The last thing they needed was to create a psychotic savior for their kind. He would still serve his purpose but he'd be no good for anything other than DNA cloning. He certainly wouldn't be any good in the sack.

Damien wanted that, yet he knew his chances were slim. Rik was straight. He was also destined for greater things and for a mate meant to rule by his side as he led the vampire kind to salvation. Damien could hope to be his male consort except Damien didn't take seconds. It was all or nothing. He couldn't have all, so he'd have to settle for nothing. Content himself with watching Rik plow his magnificent cock into whichever woman caught his fancy.

Rik had no idea what was in store for him. In the twelve years they'd known each other, Damien had not told him of the prophecy or his suspicion that Rik was The Keeper. But from the time Damien had been a teacher's assistant in the university biology department and read his name on the roster, he'd known. The cold chill of anticipation had crept down his spine with the awareness that he'd found *him*. The One. The Keeper. Wolfrik Usher.

Rik's progression into the doctorate program and genetic engineering had only further sealed Damien's suspicions. The man whose first name meant king of the wolves and whose last name meant gatekeeper couldn't be a coincidence—not and be a critical lead in the cloning of DNA helixes. The culmination of the prophecy was coming and the vampire nation needed Rik's knowledge to survive.

The blonde undulated toward Rik, her eyes locked on his, her body prepared to mate. Damien could smell arousal on her, thick, hot, wet, seeping. She straddled Rik's lap, oblivious to the milling dancers and thrusting rhythm of the music which led her to act. She grabbed his face between her hands and kissed him with soft mewling gasps



Damien could detect easily over the din. Letting go with one hand, she slipped her fingers into her neckline and extracted a silver wrapped condom.

It was as though she were in a sexual trance. Reaching between them, she dragged down his zipper and stroked him under the semi-hidden protection of her red dress. Breaking the kiss, she lipped his earlobe. "I'm not wearing panties."

Rik's hands roughly lifted her breasts until they threatened to spill from the low-cut vee neckline. He slumped lower on the couch, turning his jaw to allow her room for necking and simultaneously locking heated eyes on Damien.

Damien's blood pulsed hotly as he watched his friend's eyes glaze over, his full mouth part as concentration and urgency etched an erotic pattern on drawn features. Damien could smell, taste, Rik's hot breath even from this distance. The pounding of Rik's heart overrode the driving pulse of the bass. Male pheromones permeated the air between them until Damien was nearly drunk with Rik's scent.

The blonde sheathed him with the condom then shifted, sighing as she sank down his length. Rik captured her gasp with a kiss. The blonde rose up on her knees and slid down his shaft, beginning a new rhythm each time her core took him to the root. Her head fell back and Rik hooked the skinny shoulder strap with his finger. He tugged it down just as he'd imagined, taking her breast in a mouthful. His eyes slid open and fixed on Damien's, seeing but not seeing. Rik's breath came heavily. His brow furrowed as the little blonde frantically rotated her hips on his cock. It was artless, rough, copulation for the sake of sex and gratification.

It was as hot as hell.

Damien's teeth elongated, pressing the sensitive flesh of his lower lip. His eyes burned with a new heat and he knew they glowed with arousal. If Rik noticed, he didn't say anything, only bit down on the blonde's nipple with flashing white teeth, grinding it with tender brutality until the blonde shivered and screamed and Rik grunted his release.

Not taking his eyes from Damien, Rik released her nipple and laved his tongue over the bite mark. No blood but there could have been. A nod to his vampire friend in the midst of orgasm. Damien's cock throbbed painfully. He wondered what Rik would do if Damien pushed the blonde off his lap, peeled back the latex and licked his cock clean, nipping the thick vein underneath for mutual pleasure.

The blonde screamed, a different, terrified sound, nothing like the release of orgasmic buildup. Damien jerked his gaze to her, knowing too late that she'd seen his glowing eyes and distended fangs.

*Damn.*

She stumbled backward off Rik, yanking her dress into place as she careened toward the exit. Damien shot Rik an apologetic shrug, then disappeared through the crowd, out the back door and into the night.

Damien watched her high-heeled clacking stumble. She ran between parked cars past a group of drunken teens who hadn't been granted access to the club. Oblivious to the whistles they sent after her, her wild gaze darted over her shoulder but could not pin him. She sensed him, knew he watched her but could not see him from his vantage point atop the neighboring warehouse. It was like watching a bug scurry after lifting its rock. And just like them, she searched for her hidey-hole, her car, as though it would stop the inevitable.

Part of him seethed. She'd had Rik. Taken him inside her, made him come with her woman's hips and lingering kisses. She'd blithely climbed on his lap and ridden him. And Rik had let her, accepting it as part of his due. The growl Damien emitted hit low decibels. Barely heard by the human ear, it was nonetheless felt in its escalating menace of her person. An unwanted, invisible caress to the hairs on the back of her neck or the tip of an unknown sixth sense of preservation.

She was a trapped animal with only two possible fates. Either he killed her to silence her, to wreak his vengeance on her pleasure or he took most of her essence until

she was mindless and believed it all part of a hallucinogenic dream. Damien had a preference but he'd regret it tomorrow if he let himself go.

The clouds parted overhead on a weak beam of light. Where it should have illuminated, it only gave the depth of darkness more substance and form. It made the sound of her clacking heels echo more loudly if possible. Gravel skittered under her feet as she reached her car. Her hands shook as she unlocked the door.

Damien crouched, letting her primal instincts do the work for him. She was afraid. Closing his eyes, he scented the air. She drew his attention again with a curse and Damien dropped silently to the ground twenty feet from where she fumbled for her keys. Her breath froze and she circled, seeing nothing yet *knowing* like all prey knew, that she was being stalked.

He smelled Rik on her. It called to him, revving his adrenaline to the point where caution left him. He approached her. Near hyperventilation, her own breath kept her from hearing him, her fear-narrowed eyes locked on the keyhole instead of giving attention to her peripheral vision. He caught her by the shoulder and spun her around to face him.

She meant to scream but seemed incapable of sound. Damien leaned over her, smelling Rik's breath on her lips, his moisture on her breast. Fear and arousal mingled as one. Her pupils dilated and the smell of her arousal rushed up to greet him. She parted her lips on a sigh. "Oh God, yes."

Without bidding his fangs extended, stinging his gums in a painful tingle not unlike the onset of orgasm. His eyes burned with unnatural heat as his gaze darted from pulse point to pulse point. Her blood rushed through her veins with the urgency of her hammering heart until she could no longer take the strain and her eyes rolled back in her head, her body a rag doll he propped against the side of her car.

Leisurely, he tasted her lips. Without the woman's panic to hinder him, he licked them, tasted them, absorbed the flavors that sang of Rik. He cupped her jaw and gently urged her chin down with his thumb to open her for his quest. His tongue delved into

her mouth, stroking along her teeth and cheeks. Damien groaned as he kissed, lapped, seduced the traces of Rik from her. It intoxicated him. Rik's scent filled his nostrils, traveled along his tongue, bathed his lips. It hardened his cock to painful readiness. Unable to stop himself, he dragged down her strap to reveal the breast Rik had favored. Mimicking him, Damien took her into his mouth.

With the tip of his tongue he rolled the suck-swollen nipple seeking every wrinkled crevice for Rik's elusive taste. She moaned to wakefulness. He should have stopped but he couldn't bring himself to. His fangs lightly grazed her areola, mingling her blood with Rik's flavor.

Damien was shaking now. The image of Rik's heated gaze on him as he came greeted Damien and he fell to his knees before the newly aroused woman. He nudged her legs apart and in a daze she allowed him that freedom.

The silence of the lot was their blessing as he opened his mouth wide over her pussy. Damien shuddered. Rik's scent and flavor joined into musky perfection. *This* was Rik. She bore his aroma to Damien like coffee to a waking human.

His hunger demanded more. He couldn't have Rik. He wouldn't reduce himself to being a consort after the conversion either. This was his secret. His private lust for the man, the human, he could not claim. A vampire didn't lust after humans with this intensity. They didn't refuse themselves the taking either. Rik's destiny was different, larger than Damien's. An alpha in his own right, Damien's weakness for the human would be his downfall.

But here, in the cover of blessed darkness, in the silence of a vacant parking lot with gravel biting into his knees as he knelt at the intangible altar of Rik's essence, he would allow himself to be mastered by it.

Damien stroked his tongue deep inside her. She thrust her hips to his face. Rik's aroma didn't permeate inside her. The condom. Of course. Humans and their diseases. As a vampire he neither worried about contracting nor spreading disease. He couldn't. He was dead yet alive.

She thrust against his mouth again and Damien grabbed her hips, slamming her back against the car with the popping of flesh on metal. This was not about her satiety. It was about his. Rik's scent did not climb the walls of her hot little pussy, it lingered on her lips, her clit, the parts of her which had rubbed desperately against his groin for completion. So it was there Damien focused his attention.

He sucked her inner labia into his mouth, stroked them hungrily, released one for the other. He clamped down on her bud, ignoring the woman's free-flowing juices and guttural cries of ecstasy. Damien pinned her down as she writhed for more and he took and took, making her pussy so raw from the abrasion of his tongue that he tasted her blood just below the surface of her gossamer skin. It fired his hunger when he scented the saturation of hormones in her system which began with Rik's fucking and continued with Damien's relentless eating.

Opening his mouth wider, he pierced her on either side of her clit. She heaved sobs of pleasure. She tossed her head for want of containing it but her legs shook violently and she bucked hard, driving his fangs deeper.

He was drunk with it. He closed his eyes, reveling in the roaring of her blood, the taste of sweet copper and thick fluid laced with Rik's pheromones on her pussy lips. She dripped heavily from her empty opening.

"Fuck me," she gasped. "Fuck me, please. I can't take it anymore."

His eyes flicked open with annoyance that her whiny voice should interrupt his feast. Something darted across the lot. Lost in his sexual worship of Rik, he'd let his guard down. Damien extracted his fangs from the host. His hunter's intuition probed the shadows. Uneasily Damien gained his feet. *Werewolves*.

He glanced upward, the moon shone full through wispy clouds. "Fuck," he growled.

"Yes, please fuck," the woman begged.

He pushed her away. "Get in your car and drive."

"Will you come with me?"

He flashed his fangs at her and her eyes widened. The dullness in her regard, her pallor told him he'd drunk too deeply. She was no safer driving than facing down a hungry were. But there was still a chance.

"If I come with you it would be certain death. Right now you might get away before the werewolves attack."

No vampire in his right mind relaxed on a full moon. What the hell had he been thinking? A lone woman, an incoherent lusty vampire, an empty lot, a full moon and blood in the air? It was an invitation no were would resist. "Go." He commanded her, deftly unlocking her car door and shoving her inside.

Damien leaped to the top of the warehouse. The woman's car started up sluggishly as the shadows along the lot perimeter shifted and closed in. There was more than one. He counted at least five. The weres were getting bolder, more aggressive as their numbers increased and the vampire population diminished.

Raith was right. Rik's grace period had reached its end. Turning him was necessary.

Damien melted into the shadows. He had to return for Rik. With the weres out, he wasn't taking any chances on the savior of the vampire nation becoming a chew toy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Downwind from Damien, yellow eyes flashed over the muscled snout of the were Alpha. His canine mind instinctively knew they'd come upon something meaningful. But the moon serenaded his being into bloodlust and he barely resisted the primal demand to attack the vampire. It was information clouded by hunger and curse. Information he would have to decipher when he returned to human form tomorrow. Now blood and sex in the air drove his pack to hunt.

Across from him, Jaecar and Rinc howled into the night and charged after the retreating blue car. The others spread out in formation to pursue. It was on. The kill would be brought back to him. For now, Lothar suppressed his desire to kill and followed the lone vampire, setting up watch when he disappeared behind the door of

human stench and pounding rhythm. The vampire was distracted. Tailing him would be easy until Lothar recovered his mind enough to understand what he had seen this night.

With a tongue-lolling grin, he settled down to wait.

## Chapter Two

Rik followed Damien's departure. He hadn't been exaggerating when he said there was something about him which drove women crazy. It had a similar effect on men. More than one male head turned to admire the silent grace of his predatory walk.

Damien's loose-jointed gait rolled his hips into each stride. His legs moved with languid precision on silent steps. Rik's eyes moved up the vampire's jean-clad thighs to his firm butt and narrow hips. God, he had an ass on him. A nervous sexual flutter hit Rik in the gut. He had never met a man who'd made him *want* so bad.

The black dress shirt had been tailored to his broad shoulders and thick chest, draping perfectly as it tapered to a lean waist. There wasn't an inch of extra material and yet there was no puckering or pleating to tuck it into the hip-riding waistband. The perfection paired with well-worn jeans did visceral things to Rik.

Even the gentle cadence of motion as his shoulders swayed minutely into each step flowed like visual poetry. How long had they known each other? Rik had been in his final year of college. He remembered with absolute clarity the moment Damien's silver-blue eyes had first clashed with his. Rik had been slammed with lust unlike anything he'd previously experienced. Like a sensual fist pumping his cock, it had brought him from relative boredom to sudden painful arousal in the blink of an eye. He'd nearly shot in his pants. Chemistry. Damien had it in spades.

As he watched, Damien dematerialized through the club door. The room lost its luster. Music still pounded his eardrums, sweating bodies still awkwardly bumped against one another and though the lights pummeled the room with reds, oranges, blues and greens, the vibrancy seemed to have left with Damien.

Rik looked for something to capture his interest. Anything to prove to himself that he didn't have a Damien addiction. That he didn't need the vampire's presence to make



the act of living pleasurable. It was a relentless game he played with himself. Damien riveted him. Had since the moment they'd met and found a friendship which had endured everything, including the confession that Damien was a vampire. Secretly Rik used the vampire lure as the excuse for his fascination.

He assured himself he was still straight. He still found women attractive. Hell, he frequently found fuck-buddies to make the point, if only to himself. Somewhere in there, Damien had been added to the equation as well.

It has started simply enough when Damien walked in on him pounding the latest lab tech. Rik hadn't stopped. Damien hadn't left. Afterward it hadn't been an issue except that seeing Damien's silvery eyes flame red, his fangs, which he kept meticulously retracted, extended in his voyeuristic arousal, gave Rik some of the most powerful orgasms. Made Rik want to fuck his playmates harder in an unspoken desire to show his stamina and potency as a virile male, to the vampire.

Knowing that Damien got hard watching him fuck wasn't a turn-off either. Damien hadn't returned the favor. Rik had never seen the fuck-lust of the dominant vampire, only the sated and sore women who left his company, blissfully unaware that he'd drunk from them too. Rik would give his left nut to see Damien naked. To watch his face as ecstasy ripped his control away and laid him bare. To see him reach the pinnacle of orgasm because Rik had brought him off.

He shoved the thought from his mind, excusing it as normal male curiosity for another male's prowess. Yeah, it was a long shot but it gave Rik an out. Two men sharing the same apartment, dipping from the same pool of female companionship, it was bound to get territorial on a basic level. It was Darwinian, a survival of the fittest phenomenon. That truth alone summed it up.

"He left you."

Rik jerked in surprise as a man dropped onto the couch next to him. "Excuse me?"

The man nodded toward the back exit. "Damien. I'm surprised he left you alone."

There was something charismatic about him. Graceful, if a man whose lethal attractiveness would be called so. "You know Damien? I thought I knew all his acquaintances."

He smiled. His full lips parted and drew back in a feral seduction, displaying pronounced canines. His gray eyes flashed red, confirming Rik's perception. A vampire. The vampire held out his hand. "Raith."

Rik took the proffered hand in a firm shake. He wasn't afraid. If anything, Rik was curious. Though the man was definitely attractive, Rik wasn't the least bit interested. To date, only Damien had inspired lustful fantasies. What was it about Damien that had Rik ready to switch teams?

"Rik," he answered, simply.

"Dr. Wolfrik Usher. I know." Raith's smile returned. "I confess you are a surprising human. I'm not sure what I expected from The Keeper but I am pleased you are strong and confident. As a leader should be."

Rik's blood chilled. He released Raith's hand but did not falter in his stare. He knew his regard would be considered a challenge, a male threat but he didn't like the way the vampire had implied Rik had a service to provide. The *Keeper*? A *leader*? What had he meant? "I think you have the wrong guy."

"I have the right one. Don't I, Damien?" Raith's grin curled wickedly.

Raith hadn't broken their eye contact so neither had Rik. He hadn't seen Damien return. How had he missed it? The room seemed to breathe around him again, to imbue Rik with warmth and energy.

"I told you I'd handle it," Damien said.

"So you said."

Rik held Raith's look. The vampire's smile grew until his eyes crinkled and amusement lit the gray depths. Rik canted his head and lifted a brow.

"Enough," Damien growled. He grabbed Raith's shoulders and hauled him to his feet. "You will leave now."

Raith bowed his head slightly, smiling one last time at Rik. "I understand," he told Damien. "I will give you twenty-four hours and then he will hear the truth from me."

Rik watched him leave. Damien watched Rik, who felt Damien's silver-blue gaze on him marking Rik's reaction to the new vampire. He didn't return Damien's look until Raith was gone. "Want to tell me what that was about?" Rik asked.

"Let's go home. I'll explain it there." Damien didn't seem happy about it.

They left the club together, passing the line that circled the block as hopefuls waited for entry. They walked on. Damien studied Rik's tight profile. Something was bothering him. He tried to peer into his mind but hit a wall. Not many humans had the ability to block a vampire. It was another mark in favor of his suspicion that Rik was The Keeper. He rarely let his guard down and right now it was particularly impenetrable.

Rik moved stiffly, as though distracted. His shoes tapped the sidewalk. Anyone coming around the corner would assume Rik walked alone as Damien's own tread remained silent.

Damien felt the heaviness against his back like a physical presence, too late to react appropriately. The snarl and flash of fangs sinking into Rik's forearm cracked bone. Rik howled in pain. The yellow eyes of the werewolf flashed with menace as he stood over his intended prey. The wolf's head reached Damien's mid-chest.

Alarm scalded his senses. In defense Damien's teeth stretched and his eyes glowed with murderous intent. Moving slowly around to face the wolf, Damien hissed a warning. "Back off, Lothar. He is mine."

Rik gripped his injured arm at the elbow. Trapped in the monster's bite, there was no way for him to break free. He'd lost a lot of blood and the aroma of the fresh spill delivered a punch which was both erotic and threatening. It was Rik's blood Lothar spilled. It enraged Damien.

“Is it true he is the chosen one?” Lothar snarled around Rik’s arm. “There are those among my kind who would see him impotent.”

Rik burst to his feet. He succeeded in ripping his flesh further but his free hand swung around and landed a blow on Lothar’s snout. Lothar yelped and whined, releasing his prize.

Damien caught the bunching of muscle beneath midnight fur and darted forward to intercept the next attack. He sat astride the great wolf, his hands fisted into the dense fur at Lothar’s neck. In a flash, Damien bit down on his jaw, scraping as he went before ripping Lothar’s ear completely off.

Lothar howled. He shook himself to be free of his attacker but Damien held on. He didn’t know why Lothar attacked alone but it was to their advantage. A lone vampire and a human could not stave off an attack from the entire pack. With a mighty shake Damien was flung free. Lothar’s huge head drooped on his shoulders, his golden eyes were wary. Slowly the animal backed away. “Be warned, Damien.”

Damien barred any advance against Rik by crouching low, ready to spring. The blood scent was thick in the air. It coated every odor with Rik’s unique smell. It made Damien dizzy, crazy with lust and hunger. With the urge to feed claiming him, he didn’t trust his heightened perceptions. Not like this.

He dropped a hand on Rik’s chest, pleased to feel the rise and fall of human breath. He still lived but the damage had been done. Looking down into his friend’s face, he saw Rik had lost consciousness. Damien’s chest squeezed. No longer an outsider to the ways of the darkness, Rik would begin to change. The innocence of humanity would leave him.

Damien wanted to shout, to demand that it was too soon but the time for caution had passed. The prophecy had begun.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Why do I feel like I've been run over by a truck?" Rik asked Damien, his voice gravelly and harsh. He looked down at himself, feeling the blood rush from his face at the red-drenched bandage on his arm.

He was in his bed with his clothes removed and nothing more than a thin sheet covering his hips. Even that modesty had slipped low and the nest of black hairs at the base of his cock was visible. Fortunately the pain, or loss of blood, left him flaccid. An erection now wouldn't be missed nor misunderstood. And yet despite the searing pain in his arm, he felt the familiar tickle of lust stroke his balls like a wicked finger.

"Worse, you've been bitten by a werewolf. You have a month until you are fully turned." Damien frowned at his own words. His silvery gaze dragged over Rik's upper body.

Rik groaned as he dropped his head back on his pillow. Let the vampire interpret that as pain if he wanted. Only Rik would know it was sexual frustration for the studied look in Damien's eyes as he inspected the visible parts of him. Rik was half tempted to kick off the sheet and let him look his fill. Who was he kidding? Damien had all the same parts. It wasn't likely Rik's body impressed him. Besides, from what Rik had seen, bare chest and once a glimpse of perfectly sculpted ass cheek, the man's body was chiseled stone. He could only imagine Damien's cock was equally impressive and could put Rik's to shame.

"You block your mind in your sleep. I haven't known a human capable of doing that. But more significantly, you blocked your mind while you were unconscious." Damien's words fell matter-of-factly.

"Can't have you peeking in the vault," Rik muttered. He tried to prop himself up on one arm but got woozy.

"Lie down," Damien commanded.

Rik shot an irritated glare at the pompous vampire. With a stubbornness meant to show his strength, Rik pushed the pillows against his headboard and scooted back. The sheet didn't follow. He flicked a glance at Damien.

The vampire's jaw clenched with steely determination and his gaze didn't waver from Rik's but he did take a seat on the side of the bed. So much for showing him some cock to swoon over. Instead of seeing desire in Damien's eyes as his gaze licked over Rik's naked chest, he saw flared nostrils and elongated fangs. Anger?

"What do you have to hide from me?" Damien said through tight lips.

"Interesting that *you* say that. I believe there is an underworld secret you were meant to fill me in on. How about we address that concern first," Rik said, calmly. He left the sheet around his thighs. Call it suicide. Call it stubbornness. He wanted the man to look, damn it.

"You going to cover that?" Damien asked.

Rik grinned. "Why? You've seen it before. I believe you undressed me and put me here after I passed out. You've certainly seen my stash in rigid action too."

"My first and only look at your cock was in undressing you tonight. You typically have it buried in some woman's pussy, making her scream."

"Are you complaining? You seem to enjoy watching," Rik countered.

Damien's eyes narrowed to red slits. He smiled and his fangs glistened. "There's a lot of blood in the air, Rik. Don't fuck with my head. It could be fatal for you."

Rik's smile faltered. "Shit, man. You aren't going to bite me. Are you?" The idea of Damien's fangs piercing his flesh, of feeding the vampire's bloodlust was instantly appealing.

Uncertainty flickered over the vampire's face. His eyes leveled on the skin over Rik's heart and he turned his head as though to listen better. Damien closed his eyes and scented the air. "I smell adrenaline. I hear your heart pounding with excitement." He opened his eyes and fixed on Rik's. "You *want* me to bite you."

The statement hung heavily in the air.

Rik tried to laugh it off but humor caught at the back of his throat. "I guess I'm curious."

Damien felt himself inexorably drawn to oblige him. He'd tasted Rik off others but he'd never tasted from the source. Rik was naked. Damien wanted to look at him. Biting Rik, especially with his blood perfuming the air, kept Damien on edge. "Biting is as much a sexual act as fucking," Damien said quietly.

Undressing Rik while he was unconscious had been a temptation Damien couldn't resist. With only his arm injured there had been no need to remove all his clothing but Damien had been in the throes of heightened awareness for the man. He'd barely held off pressing his tongue to Rik's wound. Perhaps he shouldn't have as his saliva held healing properties but Damien couldn't trust himself that far.

Rik in naked glory. That had been unavoidable. Damien had caressed him in his slumber. He'd held Rik's sac in his palm, marveling when his cock stirred despite the pain and blood loss. His testicles had weighed heavily on Damien's palm, his penis rolled to the side, hanging lower than his balls. Even in repose Rik was thick and long. His plum-colored head flared generously and Damien imagined taking it into his mouth to tongue the ridge, to examine the texture with his fangs.

Awake, Rik left his groin uncovered. He would have buried himself under several comforters if he'd known the pure heated lust coursing through Damien at the combined intoxication of fresh blood and naked flesh.

He'd studied Rik. Every inch of him. He'd run his hand over his bare chest, thumbed his nipples, slid his fingertips beneath his balls into Rik's crack to stroke the rosette. He'd almost taken Rik into his mouth—had shaken with the need to do so.

"I see," Rik said.

"I don't believe you do," he replied.

Rik could not possibly know what he asked of Damien. If Rik had been awake to watch Damien nuzzle his balls, lost in his scent, he *might* understand a portion of his desire. If Damien bit him, he wasn't sure he could resist the carnal treat of taking Rik

and plunging into his tight hole. "There are female vampires who would enjoy a snack if you are pressed to experience it."

Rik's gaze faltered. "No thanks. I trust you. The rest of your kind gives me the creeps."

Damien flashed his fangs at the human. He had been unable to draw them back in the presence of so much stimulation. Rik shifted uncomfortably and Damien had the urge to kiss his finely chiseled lips, run his tongue over the cords in his neck, tempt himself, yet deny himself. It was an unwise thought. "Never trust a vampire when there's blood in the air."

The man's eyes traveled over his face. They lingered on his fangs, his lips. "What happens to me now? I turn into a wolf, right?"

"Yes."

"Can it be stopped?"

"Perhaps. Raith told you of the prophecy, did he not?" Damien asked.

"He mentioned something about it and The Keeper. This is a good time to tell me everything."

"My kind has held a prophecy for centuries. It is written in an ancient language but translates to tell of a human male sent to deliver the vampire nation. The vampire nation, strong and sure, will reach an age of destruction. Food will be scarce and changelings will not survive. The vampire numbers will dwindle. With great magic a savior will take the good from the weres and give it to the vampires to stay their fall. It will make them strong and raise them from the dust. They will be called by a new name. As a phoenix rises from its own ashes, so shall the vampire."

"What does this have to do with me?"

"The man will be bitten by a were but before his conversion is complete, he will reach his destiny and halt the progress of tainted blood. He will find his mate and usher



in a new people, a stronger people, bringing harmony where once there was enmity between the werewolves and the vampires, after a time of tribulation.”

“I was bitten. But all that other stuff sounds like mystical mumbo jumbo, Damien. I can’t figure out a child’s magic kit. How do you expect me to make magic, real magic, which will save your kind? And since when were you dying out?”

“You are the lead in your genetic engineering department. You are working on DNA coding in a private section of your lab with all the latest equipment available. You fit the physical description of the savior and you have been bitten by a were. Add to that your name and ability to block psychic interference.”

“My name?”

“Wolfrik means king of the wolves. Usher means gatekeeper. Our prophecy describes a man who is claimed by the lycan and who is The Keeper, who guards the future of the vampires.”

“What does your psychic-blocking savior look like?” Rik folded his arms across his chest.

It brought the bloodied cloth wrapping directly beneath Damien’s nose. His nostrils flared and he found himself licking his lips to keep from drooling. “He has hair that rivals the rays of the forbidden sun. His eyes are deep pools of sanctified water. His body is strong and well-formed, the image of unmarked perfection. His blood runs rare and pure. He is a god among men.” Damien heard the hushed reverence in his words. Surely Rik would see as he had.

Rik snorted. “So he’s blond-haired, blue-eyed, fit and packing with an unusual blood type. You’re forgetting the unmarked part was altered,” he said, holding up his arm.

“You were unmarked before last night. And the savior is bitten by a were which begins the transformation necessary to spur the savior into making his magic,” Damien returned.

"The kind of research you're talking about takes generous grants and years of study. I have a month."

"The vampires have been waiting for you. You cannot possibly use all the money we have held aside for this moment. You already know where to start in your own salvation. It is a quick step to reach ours."

"Fine. What about the mate? Is she hot?"

Damien almost winced. "Your mate is a vampire. All that is known of her is your legendary love which brings hope to our people." His voice felt rough in his throat. There was no hope for Damien to claim Rik. He should be soothed with the knowledge that he had been drawn to Rik whom he'd been searching for and who was the living god of his people. He *should* find such a man attractive, desirable.

"Why can't you bite me and convert me into a vamp instead of a were?" Rik asked suddenly.

"Our condition is as saltwater. If you leave a glass of saltwater out, the water evaporates leaving only salt. In some cases it turns brackish. Our blood carrying the vampirism virus is like that water. It has distilled over centuries of survival. It is no longer viable but brackish. If we attempt a conversion, we kill our hosts. Over the years our kind has been decimated by slayers, weres, stupidity. Less than a thousand of us remain worldwide."

"How did I get lucky enough to stumble across two of you?"

"There are twenty-three in this area," Damien answered.

Rik was silent for a minute. "What if you bit me but didn't try to change me? Would the were virus hurt you?"

"Not at this stage. Weres and vampires live a cautious existence. We avoid them at full moons but otherwise they live normal humanlike lives the rest of the time. If you don't want to get bitten, you don't antagonize them to change between full moons. Hollywood has made them out to be a nightly menace. Very few rogues are out there. Speaking to the virus, we ingest the blood and while it does flow through our veins, the

symptoms are different. It's more of a power surge in early stages. My kind never drinks from a fully converted host. It would sicken us like slow poison and result in death."

"So it's a safe *high* to bite someone like me," Rik concluded.

The blood coursing beneath the surface of Rik's skin sounded like a dull roar to Damien. He could smell the slight change in his chemistry but it wasn't unpleasant. "Yes."

"Bite me," Rik commanded softly.

"You lost a lot of blood. Biting you would serve no purpose except as a sexual experiment." Damien growled. "You will be feeling enough discomfort as the were virus takes hold."

Rik leaned forward. "I feel fine. Weres have healing properties too, don't they?" At Damien's reluctant nod, Rik continued. "Then bite me."

Damien rose to his feet. The temptation was too great for him to stay in the same room. Rik's eyes seemed to glow with an inner light. It made Damien pause to look again. Could he be changing so quickly? He turned from his human friend and walked to the door.

It was more instinct than sound which had Damien spinning as Rik pounced on him, throwing Damien against the wall. Rik grabbed his shirtfront and snarled in his face. Were-yellow overlaid his blue eyes until they glowed fathomlessly green. Rik was turning faster than usual.

"Bite me." Rik's voice dropped to dark tones unlike his natural speaking voice. Like warmed velvet, it wrapped around Damien and called to his soul.

Damien flashed his fangs in warning. He was already dancing on the edge of sexual predation. "I'm not fucking biting you, Rik. If I bite you now I'm going to fuck your brains out." He shoved Rik off him, surprised by the unnatural strength in the man. Rik should be passed out or weak, not shifting and careless.

Rik caught his footing and charged again. This time he went for Damien's throat. Damien deflected, barely. He hissed. Rolling, he pinned Rik to the closed bedroom door. A low growl rumbled from Rik's throat.

Rik didn't move but he eyed Damien warily as he drew his face close. "I'd. Fuck. You," Damien said slowly, making sure Rik understood exactly what the dilemma was.

The were-human's eyes went wild. "Fucking fuck me already, fucker."

Damien considered it for a moment. Rik's cock pressed its swollen length to his abdomen and as Damien debated taking Rik, finally, Rik's cock pulsed. Damien groaned as every memory of tasting him secondhand flooded his senses. Rik's pheromones were heady, his erection prepared for a thorough sucking. God, Damien wanted to. He wanted to take that length in his mouth, bite down and bring him off as Rik shot down his throat.

Instead he stepped away. "You don't want that. You think you do but you'd be pissed when you returned to normal."

Rik swiped out curled fingers, angrily scoring Damien's chest. "Don't tell me what I want, vampire."

His chest stung from the strike. Damien leaped the distance. Holding Rik's head roughly to the side, Damien dragged his teeth over Rik's neck, teasing him. Slowly, he touched the tips to his artery, giving Rik a second to reconsider. Damien's chest squeezed with need. His cock jerked and Damien sank into his neck.

Rik's guttural cry of pleasure washed over Damien and he released Rik's head to do as he chose. Damien didn't expect Rik to bury on hand in his hair, to hold him in place against his neck. He didn't expect Rik's other hand to reach inside Damien's jeans, wrapping his fingers around his aching penis. Damien shuddered with need. His Rik wanted him.

## **Chapter Three**

Rik threw his head back, banging it on the door. He wanted more, deeper. He wanted Damien to eat him alive. Pleasure tingled to the tip of his fingers, curled his toes. The sharp pain of teeth invading his neck married with the hot, licking tongue and full, stroking lips undid him.

He sank his hand into Damien's silky black hair, pulling him closer to silently beg him to take more. His arm throbbed with use, complained against the cording of his muscles around his injury as he demanded from Damien. But he ignored it, reveling in the raw carnality of the blood bite.

Rik's other hand fumbled at Damien's waist. Like interrupting a large cat during a meal, Damien emitted a low growl in his chest. The growl turned to a purr when Rik grasped his cock and squeezed. He stroked the vampire from tip to root, convulsing his fingers on the thick rod when Damien's hands clawed at his ass.

Damien broke his deadly kiss, gasping for air as he did. "God, Rik, fucking let go of my cock or you'll have more than a fist full."

"That's what you said when I told you to bite me." Rik's body felt languidly sensual. Damien started to move but Rik gripped tighter on his penis.

"What do you want?" Damien asked, his voice hoarse.

"More," Rik said.

Damien's eyes flared brilliant red. Rik smelled Damien's arousal and wondered if his heightened sensitivity to smell was a were ability. He didn't remember knowing what arousal smelled like but that Damien was hard and smelled of dark sex was enough for him. And right now he wanted that black head bobbing on his cock. He wanted the smoldering eyes looking into his and Damien's gorgeous mouth sucking him. Was it too much to hope he'd bite him there too?

For the first time since he'd recognized his attraction for the vampire, he willed Damien to see what he was thinking. He wanted the powerful man on his knees and sucking him like it was the best meal he'd eaten.

The vampire's eyes widened. His lips curled around his fangs. Damien's steady red gaze burned hotter and Rik could feel him probing his mind. Instantly, Damien dropped to his knees and he buried his face in Rik's groin.

"Holy shit," Rik shouted. His legs nearly buckled. Damien's hot breath stroked his balls, drawing them up tight. He inhaled sharply then flicked his tongue over the sac, taking Rik into his mouth. Rik's cock pressed insistently against Damien's cheek.

Hard teeth pressed the softer sac, hinting at the dangerous position Rik was in. He wondered fleetingly why in hell he would willingly ask a vampire to go down on him. In one annoyed grimace, Damien could castrate him.

Damien pressed his hands on Rik's thighs, pushing them apart and taking advantage of the splayed crack. He stroked down that opening to Rik's anus, rubbing his finger over it with soft brushes. Rik howled. It built from low in his gut and rolled over itself up his chest, along his throat and shook the room with canine force.

He clasped Damien's head in both hands and shoved his cock between Damien's parted lips. "Take it," Rik insisted gruffly.

He did. Eagerly. Damien's mouth closed over Rik's cock, greedily sucking down his length until it hit the back of his throat, then he took Rik deeper, swallowing him. With one hand he rhythmically coasted over Rik's anus while using his thumb to massage the base of his scrotum.

Rik's hips jerked. Fangs scraped the side of his engorged cock and he could no more control his mindless thrusting than he could stop breathing. Rik rammed his cock deep in Damien's mouth. He held the vampire's head to keep him in place and he used his mouth, fucking him over and over. Saliva and blood mixed with spurting semen which Damien took to wet Rik's anus.

He slid a finger inside Rik, pumping him slowly and wiggling his finger in the untried sphincter until he could add another and another. Damien sucked enough blood to prolong Rik's orgasm, pulling hard on the artery when he would otherwise swell and ejaculate down Damien's throat.

Rik panted. Sweat broke out on his naked skin and still his buttocks flexed and thrust over Damien's firm lips and wet tongue. Rik keened. He demanded in shouts that Damien take more. His balls slapped against his lover's chin and there too, the growth of day-end whiskers tickled and stimulated until he thought he could not bear it further.

His anus was spread wide. It burned. It tingled. And all the while Rik pleaded for Damien to fuck him blind. Finally, the sizzle of anticipation prodded his spine, wrapping it tightly until sparks traveled upward and Rik spurted violently into Damien's waiting throat.

He continued to pump, shouting and flinging his head from side to side as the alpha vampire took him, spent him and finally sucked him clean.

Damien barely had time to remove his fingers when Rik collapsed to the ground with him.

Dropping his head on Damien's shoulder, he gasped for breath. But Damien wasn't finished. He hefted Rik over his shoulder and carried him to the bed where he dumped him on the covers. He reached for the bedside table for lubricant then stripped his clothes from his body.

Rik stared in exhausted fascination. Every sculpted inch of Damien was exposed for the first time. His olive skin glowed in the bedroom light. His lips, roughened from the blowjob, were puffy and traces of Rik's cock blood rimmed his bottom lip.

"You're gonna fuck me now, right?" Rik panted. He eyed the broad ridge jutting from Damien's groin. "I think that's going to hurt."

"I warned you," Damien growled. Shoving Rik's knees up and wide, he grabbed the lubricant and squeezed generous amounts on his cock and into Rik's anus. Then

placing the tip of his penis against Rik's ass, he commanded Rik to take a breath and let it out.

Rik obeyed and Damien shoved in. Having already been prepped during his blowjob, it was surprisingly less painful than Rik anticipated.

Damien stared deep into his eyes. After pulling out slowly, Damien rocked forward. His thrust was forceful enough to arch Rik's back and the first slap of Damien's balls to his ass gave him an erotic high Rik hadn't thought he'd reach. Damien repeated the motion until Rik indeed thought he'd lose his mind from the pleasure.

Rik refused to look away though. The way Damien's eyes burned for him, the viciousness of his bared fangs and tight jaw, the fingers biting into his hips with each pleasure-filled stretch to his ass, were better than he'd fantasized.

"You can do better than that, vamp," Rik said, egging him on.

The challenge was issued and Damien picked up his pace until Rik's head slammed into the headboard. He reached up to hold himself away from it as the pleasure building in his testicles burned up the length of his cock. Erect so soon after Damien's work. It was almost an insult to the incredible gift Damien had given him and yet Rik's cock didn't care.

Damien swallowed on a guttural cry. His cock filled Rik on every inward strike. Pleasure streaked up Rik's cock and thick, viscous fluid spurted from his tip to anoint their chests. Damien watched, seemingly fascinated by the jerking cum. He leaned down as he pounded Rik's ass, catching some on his lips only to lick it off. It was enough to make Damien come in hot, stinging jets within Rik's body.

He coasted to a stop and looked down at Rik. His red gaze dimmed to a gentle glow and his fangs retreated halfway in his satisfaction. "You all right?" Damien asked.

The urgency he'd felt earlier had faded. Rik had a sense of wariness for having let his guard down, for allowing himself to ask for something he'd never wanted before from a man. Since meeting Damien, it had all revolved around him. This cat and mouse attraction he'd had for the vampire was a weakness he never thought he'd give in to.



It was the were blood. It had to be. Like other animalistic cravings, he'd been infected, lost his inhibitions and demanded reciprocity from Damien who had been weakened in his bloodlust. Now satisfied, the animal in Rik retreated and left him to deal with the pieces left over.

Damien had warned him to back off. Rik had pressed him to bite anyway. Damien had said Rik would regret it later when he was better. In a way, he'd been right. His actions may have changed things between them forever. Would Damien resent him for this? Would he feel taken advantage of?

Shit. He'd demanded a blowjob. He'd taken the vampire's head in his hands and rammed his lust-crazed cock into Damien's mouth until he came. No alpha male, no matter the species, accepted submission gracefully. Hell, even Rik didn't. If he'd been able, he would have flipped Damien and taken him up the ass instead.

What the hell was he thinking?

Rik was straight. Damien only slept with women that he knew of too. How did two dominant men end up with their cocks stuck inside each other and be okay with it?

"You have regrets," Damien said.

He looked disappointed. He pulled his cock from Rik's body. Rik involuntarily groaned for the loss but Damien rolled to his back beside Rik and stared up at the ceiling.

"You don't?" Rik asked.

"I warned you," Damien said bitterly.

"I'm not myself."

"I wasn't either. Your blood is thick in the air. I told you I'd fuck you. But you insisted I bite. Listen to me next time."

Damien rolled silently to his feet and walked to the en suite bathroom. Rik marveled at his muscular grace, feeling his cock stir inexplicably. He'd had the vampire

and been had by him. His cock didn't seem to care that Damien was a man nor that its owner was exhausted. It was ready for more.

Rik rolled to his side, watching Damien clean himself with a wet washcloth. Pain shot up his arm and his muscles trembled with fatigue. Rik dropped back onto the bed. If there was something he could say to smooth things over, he would.

"Hey, we were both out of our right minds," he said, tossing out an excuse. "I shouldn't have pushed you and I wouldn't have if I hadn't been under the influence of canine heat."

Damien leaned against the door, still naked. He folded his arms over his chest and stared his silvery gaze back at Rik. "I know."

"It doesn't mean anything. Male animals in the natural world do that all the time. It's biological fact."

"Uh-huh."

"So basically we were taking care of some urges. It's not like it's going to happen again."

"Of course not."

Rik swallowed past a lump of disappointment. "We'll just pretend this never happened."

"Sure."

"Fine," Rik agreed, not at all convinced it was. He had just relegated the best sex of his life to a mistake and the only thing he wanted was Damien pounding into him all over again.

"Go to sleep, Rik." Damien collected his clothes, snapping them off the floor. His hand came down on the light switch, dumping Rik into darkness seconds before the bedroom door opened and closed, leaving him alone.

Rik sighed into the darkness. "That went well."

## **Chapter Four**

Damien hit the shower, letting the hot water sting his shoulders and run down his body. He'd known better than to bite him. Rik should have been too weak to do what they just done but the were virus was strong in him. Did he even have a month before the change was final? Rik seemed to be changing far too quickly, drawing on the were strength in his sexual frustration. He'd heard of it happening. The animal instinct to mate when it first hit human blood was intense. It was like male puberty but a hundred times stronger, like it was for a man becoming a vampire.

If he'd handled himself better he would have recognized the symptoms and avoided Rik for the randy young were he was becoming. Instead he'd been muddled with blood scent and lust for the human who finally seemed to want him back.

Steam enveloped him, embraced him. Damien reached behind and cranked the knob to full hot. His hair hung in wet ropes past his shoulders. The water nearly scalded him but it was a more welcome pain than the combination of fear and loss stabbing his chest.

Rik seemed to think they'd submitted to uncontrollable forces of the unnatural world on the human body, taking and giving sex to quench an unquenchable thirst brought on by their mutual change. Damien had centuries to perfect his restraint. He had no excuse for taking advantage of Rik's weakness.

But Rik had opened his mind to Damien. He'd let him see what he was thinking and Damien had been powerless to resist the erotic image of exactly what Rik wanted Damien to do to him. It had mirrored every one of Damien's dark desires. That image, cloaked in Rik's red-hazed lust and piercing gaze, had stripped Damien of his control.

The water cooled and Damien turned off the shower. He stood for a moment in the steam as though it were mist on the moors, deep, dense and echoing with indistinct sounds. Instead the door creaked, popping as it adjusted to temperature and moisture.

Throwing back the shower curtain, Damien stepped out and dried off. His cock was still hard. His body was in a perpetual state of ready arousal since meeting Rik. Having now penetrated him, seen his face contort with the bliss of orgasm, there was no keeping his cock in order. He saw Rik's face, heard his rasping breath, felt the glove-like heat stroking over his cock, the fiery spurt of cum hitting his throat and chest. He experienced it over again each time he closed his eyes.

He'd remember it for many lifetimes to come and all of it would be laced with regret for losing Rik before he'd fully found him.

He opened the door to his room and pulled on a pair of drawstring pants. He threw back the covers and crawled in for the night.

If he could have held off, kept his cock in line, he would have maintained their friendship for years before succumbing to his desire for the human. Now he'd lost a friend for a glimpse of the lover destined to be worshipped and take a vampire mate. It would kill Damien daily to know what he had lost.

The sheet tented over his erection. Damien stared down at himself. Moonlight from the remaining hours of the night spilled through his window to caress his bare chest. His skin, still dewy from the shower, glistened mutedly.

One hand behind his head, Damien dragged the fingertips of the other down his sternum to the edge of the sheet across his abdomen and back. Rik's rich taste was still on his tongue. Damien closed his eyes as his fingers tickled over his chest, teased his nipples and probed the contours of his abdomen. Damien had been right. Tasting Rik from the source had been nectar to his tongue. Rik's unconscious murmurs and grunts of pleasure echoed in his mind.

Lazily he tried to test Rik's thoughts only to find them shuttered, though the gray-black aura radiating around the edges hinted at Rik's condition and mood. Damien

returned to memories of Rik's facial color heightened with arousal, his lifeblood calling to Damien from his veins. Dragging down the sheet, Damien loosed his drawstring and freed his cock. The tip shimmered in the weak light. Already he seeped pre-cum.

Using his thumb, he slicked the moisture over the crown of his cock. He stared at it, trying to see his engorged flesh as Rik must have. Damien continued fondling his chest at a leisurely pace. He kicked off his pants and the rest of the sheet, fully baring himself.

He pinched his nipple and hissed at the sharp pleasure it brought him. His fangs distended, pressing his bottom lip. He brought his other hand down to stroke the underside of his cock with an open hand. Damien fell into the sensation, watching his body respond to his coaxing, seeing himself twitch eagerly for more of the same. Another drop formed and Damien touched it with his finger, brought it to his lips. He tasted different from Rik. Not as sweet.

Breathing was not something required of a dead man. It was something Damien did to blend in or refused himself when he sucked cock. Now he allowed breath to enter and expel, trying to imitate the sound of rushing air he'd heard from Rik. It aroused him, made life seem possible and gave him auditory proof of his body's growing insistence that he continue at a faster pace.

Something moved to his right. Rik stood in the doorway, still naked, his body hard. His eyes fixed on Damien's stroking hand. Damien wondered briefly if his imagination had materialized him for the purpose of this fantasy but Rik's rough breathing was very real.

"What are you doing?" Rik asked, hoarsely.

Damien dared him to interrupt. His look traveled Rik's body, stopping to appreciate the protruding evidence of Rik's arousal. Damien licked the seam of his bottom lip between his fangs. "What the fuck does it look like I'm doing?"

"I thought we took care of that already."

"Apparently, I wasn't finished. Why are you up? You should be resting." Damien continued his almost painfully slow stroking, dipping down to capture his balls, riding

up to thumb his slit. All the while, he watched Rik watching him. His eyes glowed feral green.

Rik held up a fist clenched around a bottle. "Ran out of aspirin. Wanted to see if you had any."

"Vampires don't need painkillers."

It was an excuse. Rik knew Damien didn't take medicine. Medicine didn't work on him. Why had he really come? The conversation dropped off. Rik continued to watch. Damien continued to stroke.

Rik's cock jerked, moistened at the tip. Damien wanted it on his tongue. He wanted to get that fat cock in his mouth and bite down. He wanted to fist his ass and pump and see if Rik had a breaking point where he'd admit not only getting off but getting off by Damien's mastery.

Rik cleared his throat. His voice was still gruff. "I could, uh, take care of that for you." He tried to shrug like it didn't mean anything. "We aren't gay. It's just a favor. It'll be one of those things we pretend never happened once we get past this, have girlfriends."

The vampire fisted his cock, tugging it up until he moistened the head then tasted it from his finger for Rik's benefit. Rik took an involuntary step into the room.

"We aren't in a relationship. Haven't even kissed or anything personal like that. Just two guys getting their rocks off. Just sex. Just fornication without strings," Rik muttered, his eyes glowing for each upward stroke of Damien's cock. "God. I've never seen a guy jack off before."

"We taste different," Damien said, indirectly inviting Rik to try.

Rik flung the empty aspirin bottle to the side and strode toward Damien laid out on the bed. Damien's eyes caught every twitch in Rik's cock, watched it sway heavily from side to side with each urgent step. When he reached Damien, Rik froze as though waiting for permission.

"You sucked me off," Rik offered lamely. He inhaled deeply. "I can smell you. Is that part of my change? Can you smell me?"

"I smell you. I smell your arousal and I can hear your blood pumping through your veins as though you have been running."

"So you want me to suck you off or what?" Rik asked, baring his teeth at the vampire for making him ask.

Damien could taste the hormones pouring off Rik's skin and into the air with the urge to rut. It had to have been difficult to ask to be the submissive in a sex act. It wouldn't come naturally for Rik. Damien suspected it was much the way he felt taking Rik in his mouth. He had craved it like he craved forbidden sunshine. It had resulted in his penetrating Rik forcefully to prove his dominance afterward.

He spread his legs, displaying himself to the stubborn human. "Take what you want. Don't pretend I'm forcing you to decide."

"I never said you were forcing me. You couldn't force me to suck cock."

"I can take care of my own needs," Damien said. Damien began to pump, thrusting his hips upward to meet the downward stroke of his fist. His other hand touched his body, pulled his nipples, kneaded his balls all with violent care. He moaned and hissed, keeping his eyes open on Rik's face, watching his expression change from fascination to need to sharp lust. Damien held off his orgasm but it became harder to do so every time his hips lifted from the mattress to pound his fist.

Rik fell on him. He grappled with Damien and they rolled. Damien straddled him but Rik bucked upward and took him to the bed again. Damien scooted backward, snarling. Rik grabbed his hips and swallowed Damien's cock in one smooth motion. Damien hissed through vampire teeth as the liquid silk of Rik's mouth milked him without apology.

His balls rolled in Rik's fingers, puckered under each forceful stroke of his testicles inside his sac. Pleasure built in his pelvis and Damien fought to knock Rik off, so heady was his arousal that he wanted nothing more than to fuck Rik up the ass. Rik's growing

were strength brought on by the sex act kept Damien pinned and soon Damien's bucking became sensual grinding of his hips against Rik's mouth until finally, blessedly, his balls tightened, his spine sang and searing cum jolted from his body.

Rik took it. He sucked it down and rolled his tongue around Damien's length, milking every bit of his semen then flicking the tip of his tongue around the purple head and into the salty slit.

Damien was stunned. Very little surprised him anymore but Rik's demanding mouth and his ability to pin down his vampire strength was completely new and a bit exciting. No man was stronger than a vampire. But Rik could have his way with Damien and Damien wouldn't be able to stop him. And he wouldn't try to stop him.

"I think you bruised my throat," Rik said.

Rik was still straining and hard. Damien grabbed the lube from his drawer. Like Rik he kept his supplies close at hand. "I'm going to fist your ass now while I jack you off."

"The hell you are," Rik countered.

Rik took the lube away from him and readied his cock. Damien had only seconds to process what Rik had done because of his inability to see from his vantage point. But it was hard to ignore the piercing pleasure and pain when Rik lifted Damien's leg in the air and breached his ass.

Damien roared. "Warn me next time you want to split me in half."

"No time. I have to fuck your sweet ass."

Damien didn't want to make it easy for the smug human. Instead he flattened his foot on Rik's chest and shoved him off. Rik flipped Damien to his stomach before wrapping his good arm around his waist to haul his ass into the air. Rik penetrated him again and Damien's face hit the pillow with the force. The new position made Damien curl into himself with pleasure on each internal strumming of his prostate.



Rik couldn't have all the fun though. Damien thrust backward, taking Rik to the root and making him grunt as their balls slapped together. The double sensation of soft slapping and forceful fucking intensified the growing pleasure until Damien was again hard.

His lover seemed to know, or else wanted his hand on Damien's cock, because he reached around and stroked him until both were screaming over the edge of sexual madness into the spurting oblivion of each other's bodies.

Collapsing together, Rik didn't withdraw. He didn't let go of Damien's sticky cock either. "I think I liked that more than I should have," he confessed.

"If we keep doing this, we're going to have to find a way where I'm not the bitch," Damien growled.

"Don't even think about making me the bitch," Rik countered.

"You still think this is an exchange of favors?"

"There hasn't been any kissy face. This is just getting off."

"And if I forget and kiss you?" Damien asked, feigning irritation.

"I'll fucking punch you." Rik pulled Damien tighter into his embrace. "Tomorrow I'm working on a cure for this thing and finding me some prime pussy to snack on."

Damien yawned. "Fine. I'll watch. Keep your ass in the air so I can take care of business if I get hard." If this was all of Rik he was going to get, he'd make the most of it.

"Whatever."

## **Chapter Five**

Rik moaned in his sleep. He dreamed of running naked through the woods so fast his feet didn't touch the ground. The wind blew his hair off his face. Overhead the moon called to him with its siren beauty, filling his heart to overflowing with light. His body tingled, sensitized by the ticklish caresses of leaves to his flesh as he raced past.

It sent jolts to his groin. He ran faster, laughing into the dark as anticipation built inside him. He began to perspire in his quest which turned the thrill of the hunt into the search for sexual fulfillment. It was close. So close. A nearby twig struck his nipple with gentle discipline. Rik raced ahead, turning his torso into the branches, into the leaves to catch their smacks to his skin. His erection throbbed and bounced.

In the midst of his crazed dash, Rik felt the sensuous embrace of someone stroking his cock. But he was alone on this run, his breath the only labored rush he heard. His feet rustled the leaves on the forest floor. His cock, contained in its lush comfort, no longer bobbed freely. His testicles no longer swung loose between his thighs.

The caress changed, rippling up his cock, thrummed his excitement beyond reason. The dream changed with it. Now he sprawled beside a waterfall. Alligators lurked below the surface. He was aware of them though they were unseen and had vampire fangs.

Rik's hips surged up as his cock was persistently tended. Something caught his nipple. He looked up into the moon whose beams of light, like hands, stroked his body as a lover. It called to him for proof of his desire, for his ejaculate to anoint the night.

Lightning streaked over him, concentrating on his loins. The stroking increased and Rik cried out until he was mindless with the pursuit of an orgasm. He arched off the ground, only his shoulders and heels still touching.

The stroke turned hot, wet, succulent, licking over him like an insatiable lover. Hands grabbed his ass, pinning him into the heat which sucked him, demanded his seed. Rik yelled as he exploded and the moon murmured its approval. The sound of his own voice calling out in the dark woke him an hour later.

Rik's eyes flew open to see Damien's lips around his cock. While Rik still pulsed out his seed, Damien's white fangs flashed in the morning light, then sank into his groin. Impossibly, Rik came again, or still, he wasn't sure which except that he didn't want Damien to stop. Grabbing his head, Rick held the vampire to his artery, shivering each time Damien's tongue lapped at the spill from his bite.

"What the fuck, Damien?" Rik shouted when another spurt of hot semen squirted into the air and landed on Rik's abdomen.

Damien looked up. "I got hungry."

"No shit."

Damien smiled from behind Rick's penis. "Better not be. I'm going in."

He stroked Rik's anus, soothing it, arousing it. Cool gel touched him intimately. The vampire had been prepared for a nighttime fuck-fest.

"You woke up too soon. I didn't have time to prepare you."

Damien probed the tight opening with his crown. He had Rik suitably pinned down and now sated, Rik couldn't call upon the new sexual strength he seemed to find when he was primed. Damien pushed in. Rik had a second to force his ass to relax and take him. Rik grunted with the effort but after Damien worked a few short strokes, his body began to adjust.

"Fuuuuuuck," Rik rasped. It seemed to take forever but finally Damien was seated. His balls rested against Rik's ass, cool and ticklish.

"You ready?"

"Does it matter? Why don't you just stick a fist up there too?"

Propped over him on thickly corded arms, his shoulders bulging with solid muscle, Damien glared. "Stuff some pillows under your head and look." He waited while Rik did, though he saw the smile Damien couldn't hide when Rik muttered sharply about being his bitch.

Once he had elevated his upper body, he looked down the still lengths of their bodies. This position brought him closer to Damien's face than he'd been before. Kissing distance. Whatever he'd been thinking stalled. Damien was a great-looking vampire. Up close his angular features, harsh in the shadows of night, were elegant and spoke of ancient breeding. His red-hazed eyes didn't hide the silvery sheen beneath. Though his eyes narrowed on Rik's face, each black eyelash stood out in sharp detail.

Damien's nostrils flared. His eyes locked on Rik's lips. He looked at Damien's sensual mouth. He had firm, full lips which looked like they would be both powerful and soft if kissed. Damien's hair tickled Rik's cheeks, his forehead, adding to the sense of intimacy by being hidden behind his dark curtain.

"Look," Damien said, his voice harsh with need.

Damien hadn't moved inside him. Poised and ready to fuck with his thick cock filling Rik's body, he waited until Rik looked down their bodies again. Damien's arms were pillars beside his shoulders. Rik was completely caged in Damien's muscular torso. Carved chest hovered over carved chest. Twin hair trails followed down their bodies, an undeniable map to their joining.

Damien's abdomen tightened, defining his six-pack and Rik felt a surge of lust to see his own waking cock reach toward Damien's body. As he watched, the underside of his penis touched Damien's hard belly. Tightly coiled hairs teased him and Rik stifled the urge to rub his cock into them.

Rik darted a gaze back up to Damien. Was he as turned-on by the way their bodies looked together?

"You looking?" Damien asked. His body quivered. His fangs grew out to touch his bottom lip.

This close, Rik could see the depression a hard tooth made against tender flesh. God, he wanted to suck those teeth. "Yeah, I'm looking."

"Not at my mouth, moron. I want you to watch me fuck your ass."

Rik sucked in a sharp breath but did as Damien bade him. Rik's eyes now where they had been commanded, Damien began a slow ride. He pulled out. Rik grunted. Damien pushed in, inch by inch. Rik swore softly as he watched Damien's thick cock disappear only to feel the invasion deep inside.

Over and over Damien committed to Rik's slow fucking. If Damien wanted to prove a point that what they did went beyond favors, he succeeded. Rik no longer worried that he'd taken advantage of Damien since Damien was the one who'd sucked his cock until he woke up shooting into the vampire's mouth.

Still, the slow heat building between them with every glide of Damien's cock inside made it impossible for Rik to chalk up his attraction as a passing thing. Having Damien like this was something he wanted to keep happening. Would the vampire feel the same way?

Damien's abdominals crunched and released, a visual aphrodisiac adding to the desire snaking through Rik's body. He could feel the slick texture of Damien's sweating hips on his inner thighs as Damien tried to keep the pace slow and torturous for them both.

No longer able to stand the onslaught, Rik wrapped his legs around Damien's hips, using his thighs to draw him in and increase the pace.

"My turn to fuck you the way I want to," Damien protested, baring his fangs.

"Your teeth don't scare me, asshole." But Rik did stop pulling him, leaving his legs in place to feel the power, the flex, of Damien's ass and hips as he got fucked by the dominant vampire.

His now fully extended cock wanted attention. He had been twisting the bed sheets to keep from reaching for Damien. Changing his mind about the tactic, he let go and wrapped his arms around Damien's torso, flattening their bodies together and hissing

with pleasure when Damien's hard body and crinkled hair abraded the length of Rik's cock and his stimulated nipples.

Damien gave a harsh laugh. "You keep that up and I might have to kiss you after all."

"Try it and I get the holy water from the next room."

"You have holy water in the apartment?" Damien snarled the words into Rik's neck.

"I'm rooming with a vampire. What do you think?" Rik answered.

"I think I'm going to collar your flea-bitten ass and keep you chained in your room as my personal fuck-pet."

Damien reached between them and stroked Rik's cock. Rik shuddered, so close to the edge. Suddenly Damien sat up, changing positions so he could watch himself work Rik's hole. "Touch yourself," he commanded.

"Not because you told me to. I'll jack off because you're a lousy lover who can't do two things at once."

Damien stopped pumping. "I could keep this pace until we both end up with blue balls so I can stroke you, or you can masturbate while I watch which affords me the pleasure of holding your hips in place while I pound your sweet hole with everything I've got. Choice is yours."

Rik grabbed his cock and pumped himself. Damien grinned with feral satisfaction. Rik would let him win this time so long as Damien fulfilled his end of the deal. And he did. Damien's fingers speared Rik's hipbones. Piston-like, Damien slammed into Rik's ass.

Rik kept his eyes on the sheen of sweat over Damien's ripped abdomen, the glossy black curls and the violent fucking which jogged Rik's balls.

"Come for me. I want to see you come for me," Damien growled. "Fucking hot to see you shoot all over yourself for my cock."

His words sent Rik over the edge. His hand jerked himself roughly until he jetted musky cum over Damien's chest. Damien, too, roared unceasingly, pounding into Rik's snug sheath as he exploded high and hot inside him.

Rik gasped for breath. Damien looked down on Rik. He scooped a finger over the evidence of Rik's orgasm and sucked off his finger without breaking eye contact. "You have a male vampire's cock buried in your ass. You jacked yourself off for his pleasure when commanded to do so. I think you have some issues to resolve." He lifted their joined hips and slapped Rik's ass cheek. "Until I decide otherwise, this ass is mine. I will be fucking it nightly. Any questions?"

"How the hell will you get it up to take my ass if I'm milking you dry with my mouth, you arrogant son of a bitch?" Rik argued.

"Good. Glad we got that settled. You should eat something to keep your strength. You have a cure to concoct and a vampire to keep satisfied."

"I can multitask. You could hang out under my lab desk, sucking me off while I work."

Damien's toothy grin returned to normal. His silver-blue eyes sparkled down on him. "Now you're talking."

\* \* \* \* \*

They'd showered separately. Hadn't uttered a word over Rik's coffee and Damien's bag of blood. They'd even gone back to their own rooms to rest throughout the day so Rik could heal and sleep. The silence was uneasy despite what they'd shared.

Damien awoke as night fell, feeling the usual stirrings of hunger. He cleaned up and went for the fridge, piercing the blood bag with his fangs. He didn't bother warming it as he preferred but walked with it to pound his fist on Rik's door. The apartment was silent.

He tried the door. His cock stirred with hopeful interest. Rik's room was empty, his bed made. "Son of a bitch!"

Damien stormed back to his room, throwing the empty blood bag on the kitchen countertop as he passed. Rik hadn't left a note. Of course he hadn't. Damien wouldn't have either, would have expected to maintain his solitary alpha existence in their dubious relationship. But hell if it wasn't annoying to guess where Rik was or when he'd be back. Fucking inconsiderate of him.

Damien threw on a pair of black slacks, tucked in his silver-sheened tailored shirt and cinched his leather belt around his hips. He didn't bother to tie his hair back, preferring to let it hang just past his shoulders. Snatching up his heavy steel watch, he found his black shoes and socks and headed for the door as he completed dressing.

There was only one place he thought Rik would be. The lab. His changing scent would bring all the curious out to find the source. With the moon still mostly full, the altered human-wolf would definitely be a draw to both lycan and vampire alike. Idiot.

There was the full-on hormonal sexuality too. If Rik stumbled across another person who aroused him, there was little chance of him not slaking his lust.

Rik was his responsibility. In his exhaustion, Damien hadn't heard Rik leave the apartment.

When he pulled up he saw Rik's black Mustang out front. There were other cars in the lot, tipping Damien off that Rik might not be alone. Well, hell, it would make confronting Rik that much more complicated especially if Damien wound up with a hard-on he'd have to explain. The idea of sparring with Rik did that to him.

He found Rik in the lab, wearing a sexy white lab coat and standing shoulder to shoulder with a tiny curvy woman who stared up at him with huge doe eyes. The woman's parted lips and quick breaths were unmistakable signs of her state. She was turned-on. Damien could smell her pussy from the doorway.

Humans didn't have the same awareness of scent his kind or the lycans did, but they reacted to the overwhelming pheromones. This little thing didn't stand a chance. Rik pointed to his clipboard and commented on the data he'd found. She was oblivious, ready to orgasm at his slightest command.



Damien watched, finding the dynamics stimulating.

The woman shrugged out of her lab coat and unbuttoned the top four buttons on her blouse. Her breasts threatened to tumble out of her blouse. They quivered over her trembling heart and rapid breaths. Rik watched her undress and slowly put aside the clipboard.

"Petra, what are you doing?"

"I'm hot. It's-it's hot in here," she answered. "You should take off your lab coat too."

"I'm fine but you look flushed. Maybe you should take off more."

"Okay," she breathed.

Without turning to face him, Rik spoke. "Damien, you going to stand there or join in?"

Petra gasped and turned to Damien. She had a pleasingly plump body with doughy flesh at her cleavage and round, soft legs. Damien smiled at her but spoke to Rik. "I wondered if you knew I was here."

"I can smell you. Of course I knew you were here." He looked at Damien then, his blue eyes tinged with green. Ah, he was ready to fuck. It was difficult to miss the way Rik's eyes dipped to Damien's pants.

"Who is that?" Petra asked Rik, her voice filled with awe.

"My roommate. Petra, meet Damien. Damien, this is Petra. She's hot and eager to remove her clothing."

"Oh! I don't, I mean..." Petra trailed off, her gaze darting between the two primed men watching her with growing interest.

Rik leaned into her. He seemed aware that she was seduced by his nearness. Damien smiled.

"Only if you want him here, Petra. You can always say no," Rik said, soothingly.

"You mean... Dr. Usher, are you suggesting that we – all three of us – could..." She was licking her lips now.

It was her decision. They all knew it. Rik's pheromones had only loosened her inhibitions and revved up her natural sex drive. Neither man would force her but the idea of sharing a woman with Rik was fascinating.

He loved watching the man fuck. He did it like it was an all-consuming drive and his partner the whole of his existence. It was intoxicating when directed at him. When directed at a woman, Damien had the impression Rik was screwing her for Damien's benefit, his voyeur friend.

Damien crossed the floor to them, his gaze holding Petra's. "My dear, you are a beautiful little package. Just say the word and I will happily join. If you prefer Dr. Usher alone, I will merely watch."

She looked from one to the other and laughed nervously. "I've always wanted to try a threesome. I'm not the kind of woman men find attractive."

Her hunger for them seemed sidetracked by her own feelings of inadequacy. That wouldn't do. Petra was full-figured and lush. He could practically taste the fullness of her thick pussy lips and fleshy abdomen. If it was to work out that way, he needed her to know she was desirable in every way. That both men wanted her.

Rik moved behind her, catching her waist in his hands. He looked at Damien over her head before nibbling on her earlobe. His eyes didn't leave Damien's face. His intent was clear – he wanted to fuck the woman for Damien, share in her with him. "Does my kissing you make you uncomfortable, Petra?"

"No," she sighed, closing her eyes and leaning against him. "I've wanted you for so long."

"This probably won't happen again. Are you comfortable with that?" he murmured in her ear and she shivered. "No matter what you decide, your position in my lab will not be affected."

"Oh, good. I should be worried about that, sexual harassment and stuff."

"Are you?" Damien asked.

"No." She shivered again when Rik's hands cupped her wide hips. "Maybe I'm using you two."

Rik smiled against her neck. "Good girl."

Damien stepped up to her. He finished unbuttoning her blouse, dropping it to the floor when he freed it from her body. Making short work of her bra, Damien murmured approvingly over her heavy breasts. He loved the way they swayed their downward-pointed nipples.

He enjoyed breasts in all their shapes and sizes. Never understood why women underwent surgery to change them. Petra's were abundant, sexual. Her areolas were dark and wide, her nipples thick fat pebbles, telling him she'd had children. He lifted one, stroked her fine skin, traced her blue veins with his fingertip.

"Your breasts were made for adoration," Damien murmured.

Encouraged, Petra arched her back at once, leaning into Rik's oral caresses and displaying her chest for Damien. He held one breast to his mouth while he fondled the other. Rik reached into his pocket and fumbled with his wallet before producing an accordion of wrapped condoms. Damien didn't need condoms. Rik knew Damien couldn't give or take disease from the woman, nor could he get her pregnant but Petra didn't know that. For her sake, Damien accepted half of Rik's find and slipped them into his pocket for the appropriate time.

Rik caught the hem of her skirt and dragged it upward. Damien caught a flash of sensible white panties and had to smile. This was a woman who had not set out to seduce or be seduced. It made her gift all the more appealing in its genuineness. He determined to be extra careful to see her needs were met.

Petra squirmed a little. "I don't want to be naked. Please," she whimpered.

"It's okay, love, we don't have to undress you. Would you like to see Damien naked? I would. He has a magnificent cock. Would you like to touch it?" Rik offered.

Damien lifted an eyebrow at Rik for his secondhand generosity. Still, he made a slow show of removing his watch, his shirt, his socks and shoes. Then when he was certain he had her full attention and Rik's, he took her small hands and placed them on his belt. "I'd like you to do this. I'd like your hands on me wherever you wish to put them."

Part of him wanted Rik jealous too. Damien was aroused but not to the point where he couldn't control his fangs or eye color. That seemed to be a trait he saved for Rik. But having Rik watch him strip for the woman excited him. No wonder Rik didn't mind when Damien watched him fuck pussy. In all his years on this earth he had never found such a thing appealing.

It all came back to the man before him. Rik changed everything.

Her hands shook as she tugged on the leather belt. The buckle jangled open in the still room. Rik hefted her breasts, pinching and rolling her nipples until her hands were shaking over Damien's zipper. Knowing he was about to lose his pants, Damien palmed the condoms.

The zipper lowered, his cock sprang forth. He stepped from the pants pooled at his feet. Petra moaned as she wrapped her small hand around him and squeezed. He handed her a condom and she dressed him awkwardly.

"Turn around, love. Strip Rik. I want to see his cock in your hands. Wrap your lips around his head and taste him. Make him beg. Lick his balls. Stick your little fingers in his ass the way he likes it but part your thighs when you are on your knees. I want to sample your creamy pussy."

She was breathing so fast, Damien was concerned she'd pass out. Petra did manage to fumble her way through removing Rik's jeans and t-shirt though. Rik stepped out of his tennis shoes and toed off his socks to help. He laid his condoms on the lab table where she could reach for them if she wanted him to take more than her mouth.

Both men were naked. Of her own accord, Petra wiggled out of her skirt and shimmied shyly from her panties. Damien squatted down and replaced the high-heeled shoe she stepped out of. "Leave these, love. You are as sexy as hell and I like the effect."

He looked up at her, past the lightly dimpled bottom he was aching to explore. She smiled nervously back. Rik curled his hand around the nape of her neck and drew her into a kiss. His mouth took hers, claiming it with barely controlled intensity.

Damien's hand slid up the inside of her thigh, coming close to her apex before stroking down to her knee. He repeated that motion a few times, angling higher until his fingers brushed her labia. With his other hand, he cupped Rik's balls, stroked back to his anus to tickle the puckered hole then forward to massage his sac.

Rik took Damien's hand and brought it to his penis. Pre-cum oozed from his tip. Damien rolled it over the head, pinched his flared crown gently, then roughly stroked the throbbing vein on the underside.

Petra had turned her attention to Rik's cock. She gave a surprised squeak to find Damien's hand already there. "Oh God, that's so sexy." Linking her fingers with Damien's, they worked Rik's penis together.

Damien picked up his pace, tickling Petra's outer lips with his free hand. She panted against Rik's mouth. Petra widened her stance for Damien.

Rik brushed their hands away from his penis and hopped up on the lab table which put his cock at chest level for Petra. She eagerly lapped at his cock, mewling like a delighted child over its favored candy. She was clumsy and Damien couldn't help but grin over the mounting frustration in Rik's countenance.

Leaving it to her to traumatize Rik's cock into almost-orgasm, Damien positioned himself on his knees between her legs. With Petra bent slightly at the waist and her legs apart she was accessible to Damien for petting.

Damien parted her thick lips, holding them aside with both hands as he dragged his tongue over her pussy. Petra whimpered and parted her legs farther. He felt a slight thrill that her padded body could suffocate an eager eater and that he wanted her folds

to offer him token resistance. He also wanted Rik to watch but he was clearly occupied with the teasing licks and soft, wet sucks being administered to his straining cock.

He tongued her until she forgot Rik's cock and began to surge against Damien's mouth. Rik, frustrated, found his way to the floor in front of her and began dueling with Damien inside her leaking pussy. Her dew laced Rik's tongue and Damien found excuses to trail his tongue over Rik's.

Petra began moaning. Rik locked his lips on her clit as Damien thrust his tongue into her body and over her anus. He used saliva and her cream to slick her hole until he could reach his fingers inside her and slick her juice over his condom. Then he stood and probed her ass. She registered only marginal alarm, being more interested in Rik's lips on her clit.

Damien thrust gently against her body. Finally feeling her hole relax, he embedded himself and gave her a moment to accept him. Rik's mouth took Damien's balls, sucking gently.

"Petra. You should be sucking Petra," Damien growled.

At that moment Petra screamed her orgasm and Damien knew Rik had merely substituted his fingers for his mouth on her clit. Rik sucked him a couple more times before standing up with Petra in his arms. He rolled on a condom and shoved his cock inside her, filling her channel.

Damien could feel Rik's heated length through the thin wall of skin separating them. Damien pumped her ass. Rik fucked her pussy. They found a rhythm which quickly had Petra wailing, her eyes rolling back in her head. Rik met Damien's gaze over her shoulder. His eyes were green with hunger as they settled on Damien's lips.

Damien's fangs stretched out, the dry heat he was so familiar with burned his eyes.

"Fuck her, Damien. Fuck her hard," Rik rasped.

He did, pumping her hard enough to make the woman's body hop and grind between them. Damien lifted her breasts to Rik, holding them together for him to alternate between the two nipples. Rik received them. He clamped down on her

puckered peaks, biting and soothing with rolling licks of his tongue. He blew over one wet nipple then switched to the other.

Her sheath began to tremble and Damien moved faster inside her, grunting as he came. Seconds later Rik joined him and Petra's internal muscles contracted around him on her second orgasm. She slumped against Rik.

Damien wasn't done. He wanted the taste of Rik's musky cock. He pulled out of her and stepped around her to kneel at Rik's feet. He wasn't going to hear the end of this, he was certain but some needs had to be met. Damien peeled off Rik's soiled condom and sucked him clean, then lifted Petra easily to the lab table and splayed her wide.

## Chapter Six

Damien nuzzled her pussy, smelling, tasting. He'd gone from licking off Rik's penis to wanting pussy? "What are you doing?" Rik asked.

"Tasting you. Your scent is on her," he growled. Damien shot him a glance and Rik saw the bright red irises and deadly fangs which had been mostly missing through his taking of Petra.

He watched in fascination as Damien continued to root around her pussy, laving his tongue on some parts of her labia, sucking other portions between his lips, his expression like he'd found the richest chocolate.

Petra thrashed, seeming to want more. Rik should be giving her attention but Damien's quest for his scent on her pussy made lust spiral low in his gut. Rik blindly reached for the paper towel dispenser by Petra's hip. Moving behind Damien, he rolled off the condom and disposed of it. He'd meant to wipe Damien clean but found himself pressing his limp cock to Damien's ass and reaching around to fondle Damien's fluid-slicked prick.

Already Rik was growing hard. Damien gave a low growl.

Damien worked her nub, hungrily devouring her pussy like a feeding animal. He grunted happily even when she rocked against his face. Petra's abdomen fluttered with another orgasm and Damien reared back to sink his fangs on either side of her clit. Once there his tongue worked like mad to keep her aroused and the blood flowing into his mouth. He sucked, Petra's orgasm went on interminably.

Rik got stiff knowing Damien had been overwrought in his quest for more of his taste and plunged inside the feeding vampire. He fucked him hard, grinding up as the root of his cock hit Damien's hole. His balls slapped the vampire's ass and Rik pumped his fist over Damien's erect cock. He shouted his triumph when Damien jetted cum on



his fist and the floor. He switched holds, taking Damien's hips in his hands and slamming into his body hard enough to hurt his balls when they slapped, hard enough that Damien struggled to maintain his bite on Petra's streaming pussy.

Finally Rik came and previously unknown energy coursed through him. Without thought, Rik folded on Damien's back and he bit down, sinking his human teeth into the vampire's shoulder. Except Rik tasted blood.

Petra screamed and passed out. Damien snarled, pivoting in such a way as to dislodge Rik and face him in a single move. His eyes still blazed red, his fangs, tinged with blood, were extended. "You bit me."

Rik didn't know why but it made him intensely satisfied. He wanted to bite the vampire again, hear him howl as Rik fucked him. Even now, his new were hormones were prepping him for another fuck-fest. His cock tingled, his balls felt heavy with need. Being a were promised to be a virile undertaking.

"Yeah. I'm gonna bite you again." Rik gnashed his teeth, surprised to feel two sharp points on the ends of his upper canines. They grazed his lip and he tasted Damien's blood mingled with his own.

"Do you know what you just did?"

He didn't, not the way Damien was putting it. Damien was either very turned-on or completely pissed off. Rik snarled and leaped at Damien, sinking his teeth into his shoulder. Damien took the invitation of Rik's unprotected neck to bite him back. Rik yelped. Pain seared his shoulder from the bite.

Just as quickly, Damien wrapped his fist around both their cocks and began to thrust them together. A howl started low in Rik's chest and rippled up through his body to fill the room. Eerily it bounced off the walls and seemed to spur Damien on. It was over almost as fast as it started. Damien's pumping, the rolling of their cocks together in his large fist brought them both to climax swiftly.

Panting, they stumbled wearily. Rik glanced over at Petra. "How did she sleep through that?"

Damien glanced too. "When you bit me, I took more than I should have from her. Even stimulating her clit wasn't working to keep her blood flowing to me. I took too much. That's the second time in as many days," he said in disbelief. "I haven't been this careless since I first turned. She'll be fine if lightheaded when she wakes."

"We could take her home."

Damien returned his attention to Rik. "Do you know what you did?"

"I came a lot," Rik offered with a grin. "I may have a butt cramp from pounding your silky ass."

Damien's smile was unhurried, sliding into place with self-satisfied deliberateness. He took Rik's face in his hands. "You bit me while you fucked me." His fangs retreated, his eyes returned to their normal silver-blue color though they shone with amusement.

Rik liked the way the words tumbled from his lips. Wanted to lick those lips but he wasn't gay so that was probably out of the question. He had the strongest urge to cup Damien's flaccid cock and nip him all over his shoulders and neck. He wanted to nuzzle Damien's cock, his ass, lick it, feel its texture on his tongue. He felt like a fucking overstimulated puppy. It didn't seem exactly wrong to want to lick Damien but the pieces of his human mind balked at the temptation.

"You claimed me as your mate," Damien said, his voice husky. "I won't hold you to it as you didn't know but you should be aware that if witnessed, it would be permanent."

Rik's nostrils flared. Mate? Holy hell. He hadn't meant to mate with Damien. Fuck him mating, but not *mate* mating. Shit. Absently he realized the shock had cured him of his small, pointed canines.

Damien's words sank in. "Not hold me to it, huh?" Why did that disappoint him? It would be a disaster to permanently attach himself to a vampire male. He'd done stupid things for a fuck before but this one had to be at the top of the list.

"You're going to have to hit me, Rik."

“Why?”

Damien’s lips touched his. Rik had been right. They were both powerful and soft as they closed on his. Rik’s lips burned for firmer contact so he stepped into the kiss, bringing their naked bodies together.

Damien’s tongue pressed Rik’s mouth, which opened to accept him. He had the sensation of being dropped over a precipice. Rik clung to him, tipping his head to the side to better taste Damien’s mouth. His tongue coasted over the fangs Damien couldn’t quite keep retracted in the passion of their kiss. Damien shuddered at the sensual taste of his fangs. It turned Rik’s knees to jelly.

Damien couldn’t seem to maintain his proud control when it came to Rik. It was a triumph that shot straight to his cock.

Hands caressed Rik’s ass cheeks, pulled them apart, letting cool air touch the sensitive rosette. Rik gasped and in response Damien kneaded his flesh. Rik’s fingers stroked his back and shoulders while their tongues sparred and tangled with one another.

“I can’t believe I want you again,” Rik said, breaking off. “How is this possible? I should be dehydrated or dead by now.”

Damien laughed. “The weres are a very prolific race. As are vampires. Once a willing partner is found who can keep up, there’s really no reason to withhold carnal pleasures.”

“But there is. I have to find a cure and I can’t do that if all I can think about is cock.”

“Any cock in particular or just cock?” Damien asked.

Rik gave him a shove, putting distance between them. “I can’t even decently enjoy pussy if you aren’t around. Ever since you started watching, something is missing if you aren’t in the room.”

“I enjoy watching you fuck. Watching the women scream when they cannot contain their pleasure for you. I like seeing them fall apart and you plunging into their sheaths

as though they cannot satisfy your hunger. I like your eyes on me while you're fucking them. Because I know where you'd prefer your cock to be now. What you haven't said is whether any man would do, or do you need me specifically?"

Rik shook his head slowly in disbelief. Was the vampire actually confessing a weakness? Was he asking Rik to need him, want only him? His heart rejoiced at the thought Damien could want him as badly. Could Damien be thinking about him in more than temporary terms?

Damien's silver eyes turned cloudy. "Ah, then you don't care who watches."

"What?" Rik realized how Damien must have interpreted his headshake. "I haven't wanted another man to watch me." But damn if he could explain it adequately.

Opening his mind had worked before. Had it been a fluke or had Damien seen the images as Rik intended him to? He tried again. This time Rik opened his mind, trying to show his thoughts as memories from as far back as their first meeting, imbuing those images with the sexuality of his feelings for Damien. It was a risk but easier than saying the words out loud.

The vampire's gaze narrowed on Rik the minute he opened his mind. His look glazed as though seeing something far away. Rik hoped the vampire saw his first erection for any man had been for Damien at that first meeting, that arousal climbed Rik's spine when Damien's eyes turned hot and his fangs grew from watching Rik fuck, for every halfhearted attempt Rik had made in trying to see Damien's naked body. He showed Damien images of Rik jacking off alone in his room to forbidden thoughts of Damien watching him or touching his turgid tip as Rik came.

He sent him every shuddering thought of fantasies involving Damien coming to him, ignoring all others who would stand between them, to take Rik in his mouth and demand Rik's pleasure with a simple word.

And he must have received them all for the look of pure lust he wore.

"You gettin' the picture?" Rik asked warily.

"I was wrong. I will hold you to that bite."

His stomach flipped in a crazy, queasy motion. "You will?"

"Too bad Lothar didn't bite your ass twelve years ago. Would have put me out of my misery a lot sooner."

"Except I'm trying to find a cure. Won't that change things?"

"Only if you let it. You claimed me as your mate. I'm accepting the designation. Find your cure. Rule the wolves and the new vampire race but you're my piece of ass now. I'm not sharing you with anyone."

"Not even fuck-buddies?" Rik said, a smile kicking up the corner of his lips as he nodded at Petra's limp body.

"I like pussy as much as any man. I like watching you claim it too." Damien shrugged. "As long as it comes back to the two of us in the end, a little pussy now and then is fine by me."

Rik laughed. "That can be arranged. You think she got enough or is she going to wake up and want more?"

"You have work to do. You keep thinking of DNA sequences and I'll wake her up nice and slowly," Damien said.

"Leave her spread out so I can watch. I might want to jump in again if she's interested."

Damien bent over Petra's pussy. He licked her folds as though he had all night. Rik didn't like the idea of Damien being naked for anyone to walk in and see, so he tossed the vampire's pants at his back. "Get dressed. It took me over twelve years to see that ass naked. No reason to let you go flaunting it now."

Turning his head to Rik while he spoke, Damien smirked, caught the pants easily before they fell. In silence they dressed. Rik did stop him to wipe dried cum off his chest before helping him button his shirt. Now dressed, Rik complete with lab coat, Damien walked to the other side of the lab table to better reach Petra's breasts. He buried his

face in one generous mound. "Your arm is healed," he said as though doing nothing more titillating than flipping through a paper.

"Uh-huh," Rik agreed, trying to remember what he had intended to do next. "Circulation promotes healing. Poor circulation is responsible for abscesses in people with circulatory problems like diabetes. Considering all our recent blood-pumping activity, I could heal a colony of lepers."

"I've always found science rather sexy."

It distracted Rik to see him cup and stroke Petra's breasts, to stop to roll a nipple. Damien took the other one in his mouth. Petra moaned from far away, her fingers twitched. Good, she was coming around. Rik snagged his clipboard and hit a key on his computer to wake the screen.

"I'd love to join you and prove how sexy science is but I really need to work out the kinks in this segment I've been manipulating," he answered. Unfortunately, his libido was more interested in watching Damien's hands-on experimentation.

He purposefully turned back to the computer and tapped in a test run for the computer to work out some changes to his formula. If he could adjust the current cancer formula to target the were virus, he'd have a better chance.

The findings in cancer research had done most of the hard work for him. A virus had been modified to chemically attach to cancer cells. It was an enzyme modification created in the virus to recognize cancer as a foreign body and then overwhelm the cells with mass production of the virus. The cancer cells were, in effect, strangled.

The test runs had proved promising. So far all human test subjects had seen improvement in their conditions. Damien had been correct in saying that science was in an age of great advancement. Certainly during the time of the prophecy, the kinds of things Rik was doing would be seen as magic, unexplainable to ancient thinking.

His lab had been a part of this particular cancer research and held the coding files used to change the original carrier virus. However, changing it to recognize the were infection and attack it? Well, that was science fiction at this stage.

"I can taste you on her nipples," Damien murmured seductively.

Rik's cock jerked in response. Work with Damien around sidetracked his brain. "Dude. Put some clothes on her and take her home. Even your incredible sucking talents haven't been able to rouse her yet."

"I cannot leave you. Your scent has altered and you are a beacon for other weres and vampires. You could be in danger."

"How does that work with your prophecy? I'm your savior yet I'll be killed off before the vaccine is found? I don't think so."

Damien frowned his disapproval but he didn't argue. Grabbing up Petra's sensible underwear, he began to dress her, placing kisses on her body or lingering licks before he covered her up again. "You will lock the door when I leave."

"You can lock it on the way out if you're so concerned about it."

Carefully Damien draped Petra over his shoulder, keeping one hand free. He strode over to Rik, grabbed his chin and kissed him hard. Heat sizzled between them and Rik was tempted to see where that kiss would lead.

The vampire stepped away.

Rik was already clacking at the keyboard and scribbling notes as the door clicked shut. He was alone. For just a moment he paused to take a breath. Everything had been moving too fast. Last night he'd been in unsatisfied arousal for a man, a vampire, who held himself apart. Damien had a way of silently dominating his environment. He didn't have to speak or move to have the attention of those around him. He just was.

And until last night, as drawn to him as Rik had been, he never once thought Damien wanted more from him than his friendship. Within a few hours, Rik had been bitten by a were, been told he was the answer to a prophecy, begun changing into another being and liberally fucked his best friend. He grinned at the last. All of it had been enjoyable with the exception of the werewolf bite.

The silence splintered as glass shattered and fell on the lab floor. Rik jerked his head up in time to see a huge werewolf leap through the opening. The inky black fur and yellow eyes pinned him but it was the half regrown ear which told Rik he was dealing with Lothar.

"Hummmmmnnnn," Lothar snarled, his voice barely understandable. The drawn-out *m* and *n* sent shivers of apprehension down Rik's spine. From his enunciation the sounds came out like a low growl.

"Lothar." His eyes darted to the door, looking for Damien. His gaze was met by two pairs of canine eyes.

The black beast swung his mighty head around. "Rinc, Jaecar." Both beasts bounded into the room. Dominant males, all of them, the other two still hung back, giving Lothar the head position of the formation. Rik didn't know a lot about wolves, other than that their teeth hurt piercing his skin, but it was clear Lothar was the dominant male. The alpha of the pack, perhaps.

Lothar scented the air. "I smmmmmell Dammmmmiennnn on you. Dammmmmmiennnn and femmmmale."

"Damien was here. He'll be back." Oddly Rik didn't feel threatened so much as an urgency to fight for respect. The hairs on the back of Rik's neck stood up and cold prickles ridged his spine.

"Not soon enough to save you if I decide you've outlived your usefulness." Lothar's words continued to draw out, rumbling through the room so that Rik felt the low decibels rattle his bones.

Rik didn't have a chance. He could cower and beg but ultimately Lothar was correct. One well-placed chomp and he was done for. Or he could square off in his still-human form and face Lothar as though *he* were a man.

Rik squared off. Putting down his clipboard, Rik faced Lothar, Rinc and Jaecar with his arms folded over his chest. His stance wide, he looked the Alpha in the eyes. "No, I don't suppose he would be. What do you want?"



The two henchmen recognized the threat Rik implied and growled, ready to pounce.

"You are changing fast. Damien thinks you are the The Keeper."

"That's what he said. I have my doubts. The way Damien tells it, their Keeper is also the ruler of the wolves."

"Blasphemy," Lothar roared. Springing forward, he flattened Rik on his back and snarled into his face. A string of drool dripped from his rear teeth, falling heavy and hot onto Rik's shirt. It soaked in, wetting his chest.

Rinc and Jaecar howled and snapped their teeth by his ear. The breath of three weres, putrid and moist, flared in him the natural instinct to flee. Rik tamped it down. Running would only induce a chase. Instead, Rik fought to keep his eye contact with Lothar and ignore the other two.

"It is their prophecy, Lothar. Not mine."

Lothar's snarl-wrinkled muzzle nudged his jaw to the side. Lothar caught his neck in his razor-sharp teeth. Jaecar and Rinc yipped and whined excitedly.

"What's their problem? Can't they talk like you?"

"Not without permission, human." He pressed his teeth to Rik's jugular then lapped his neck with the flat of his tongue when a trickle of blood leaked from the product of one overzealous tooth.

"Here's my thought on the subject." Rik willed his body to quit trembling, his blood to quit roaring in his ears and his pituitary gland to stop secreting adrenaline. "If the vampire prophecy has any credence then by involving the werewolves, shouldn't you guys have a prophecy of your own to compare it to?"

Releasing his neck, Lothar gave one last snarl before backing off Rik's body. Rik slowly sat up. He wasn't willing to chance the excitability of the other two who looked ready for a meal.

"There is a prophecy," Lothar conceded.

Rinc and Jaecar whined. They lay down on their bellies, tongues lolling like giant happy dogs. With three-inch fangs.

"A Father will be born of royal blood. He will forge an alliance with the vampires. He will usher the werewolves into a new beginning of peace and he will save the werewolves out of their death throes in the midst of plenty."

"Sounds a lot like the vampire prophecy but I thought weres and vamps lived a peaceful coexistence already," Rik said. He rose to a crouch and cautiously stood.

"It is uneasy and there are those among both races who would see it end. It is a tenuous balance," Lothar snarled. "I see why Damien thinks you are the one. There have been others before you the vampire council thought were The Keeper. Only you have the taste of were royalty and the evidence of pure turning."

"Pure turning?" Rik asked.

"A pure virus within your human form changes you with the speed of prophetic deliverance. It's in your ancestry and your destiny, triggered by the bite of a were and no longer dormant."

"Ah. Like pure coke hits harder than coke cut with something else. You say some are against the outcome of peace. Where do you stand?"

"I am the leader of my pack. Like any leader I want prosperity, which is best served with peace."

Rik breathed a sigh of relief. Lothar didn't necessarily want to rip his throat out then. "Lothar, I need something from you."

The enormous wolf bared his teeth. "You humans always want from us. You are as needy as the vampires."

Rik ignored the outburst. "I need a sample of your blood. I need it to compare to my own and to compare it to the vampire blood. You both have prophecies which require blood at its basis for peace. DNA coding, engineering, resourcing—it's what I do. Will you let me extract some?"

“Not as a wolf. Your sex is heavy in the air and Damien has left the aroma of blood from his feeding. I struggle to maintain communication with you on a human level. The moon is weaker in its influence but I fear if you pierce me, I will attack.”

“Tomorrow then? In human form?” Rik asked.

“Done.”

Lothar howled. Jaecar and Rinc leaped to their feet and all three loped out of the room. Rik grabbed his chest over his pounding heart. Now safe, his body shook with relief or delayed reaction to fear. He really couldn't categorize it except to say that cold shock washed over him as he sank to his knees, alone in the lab.

## Chapter Seven

Stepping from the car, Damien smelled werewolf. Three in fact. His fangs extended and he ran for the lab on silent feet, filtering into the shadows like he was one of them. In the hallway, he saw the damaged door and broken glass littering the floor. The were scent was old enough for Damien to know they had come and gone. He didn't smell blood but he smelled fear.

"Rik," Damien called as he entered.

Rik glanced up from his laptop, seemingly unimpressed with the havoc the weres had wrought on his lab. "You get her home all right?"

"What the hell happened here?" Damien swung his arm to encompass the devastation.

"The weres stopped by for hugs and kisses. Lothar missed me."

The vampire crossed the space, grabbed Rik by the coat lapels and hauled him up against his body for a soul-searching kiss. His tongue tangled with Rik's and Rik grabbed Damien's ass. Their cocks in contact through their pants, Rik rubbed their pelvises together then pushed Damien away. "Dude, I'm fine."

"I didn't ask," Damien said sullenly. His look took in the room and while Rik's outward demeanor had been calm, Damien had sensed his relief when he walked through the door. Rik may not admit to being shaken but his elevated pulse and the urgency of his kiss said otherwise.

Damien put his hands on his hips. "I'll have some people fix this for you before you come back tomorrow. In the meantime, I've made some calls to the council and your name is being placed on the research account. You'll have access to the funds before you leave here today."

"How is that even possible?"

"We have connections. And the weres have been asking questions which the council intercepted. It appears the were interest in you has added to your credibility."

"I need another centrifuge. One of Lothar's boys—Rinc or Jaecar, I can't tell the difference—busted mine up in his puppy-dog leaping. I only have the one left," Rik said. He typed in a new sequence then walked over to a whirring machine. He fiddled with the dials but didn't seem pleased with what he saw through the microscope.

Rik ran a hand over his face. He was tired. Lack of sleep and dealing with the were virus were taking a toll on him. Damien made the observations without comment.

"I'll have one delivered first thing tomorrow," Damien said, hoping to alleviate some of his stress. "Is there anything else you need?"

"Yes. Clones to keep working when I wipe out. The virus I'm using based on a cancer treatment isn't working to hold my changeling sample," Rik's weak smile suddenly died. His focus shifted inward, glazing his eyes with sudden concentration. "Cloning. Of course." With renewed energy, Rik got back on his computer.

His focus was astounding. Damien thought Rik could probably work himself to death if he tried. Damien sat down on a stool near him and pulled out his cell phone to begin making the necessary calls. While he was at it, he called in a favor from a leading scientist in the vampire community. No one understood vampire DNA like another vampire.

Dr. Gerard agreed to fly down to help The Keeper fulfill the prophecy.

"I need blood," Rik muttered to himself. He faced Damien. "I need some of your blood."

Damien silently rolled up his sleeve and presented his arm to Rik. "It will be tainted with strains of Petra's."

"Hadn't thought about that. Shit. I'll need hers to rule it out. What about Raith? Can we get him and his most recent host in here? Any willing vampires with their most recent hosts would be great. The more vampire donors I have, the easier it will be for me to isolate the vampire strain."

Rik picked up a fresh syringe and peeled back the protective wrapping. He dug around in another drawer and pulled out a capped needle—which he attached to the syringe—rubber tubing, a cotton ball, labels and three vials. He came back to Damien’s side with the armload.

“Dr. Gerard may have that information and she’ll be flying out of D.C. as soon as she can get free. She said she would send some her files ahead of her,” Damien replied. He decided Dr. Rik made for a sexy scientist. All business in his demeanor made Damien interested in challenging his fortitude. How long would it take to make him forget science for sex?

“She might or she might only have the information for the D.C. area vampires. If you stay in your geographical groups, your viral strains may have evolved with slight differences,” Rik explained.

Both paused their discussion as Rik bound Damien’s biceps with rubber tubing and carefully drew back the plunger. Deep red-black blood filled the vial which Rik replaced twice more before untying the tubing and extracting the needle. He handed Damien a cotton ball and began affixing labels with the date and Damien’s name on them.

“Will you need samples of the other vampire councils?”

“Can you do that?” Excitement lit Rik’s eyes. He put the vials in a miniature test tube holder.

Damien enjoyed the look his words had given Rik for a moment before answering. That smile made his chest fill with something tender, breakable. “Yes.”

Rik whooped. His delight was infectious. Damien felt a wide grin split his lips and he laughed with shared joy. Rik wrapped him in a bear hug, clapping his back in his enthusiasm. He nuzzled Damien’s neck and caught it in a playful stranglehold with his teeth.

Damien laughed louder and stroked a hand over his blond head, wrapping the other arm around his waist to keep him close. Rik’s reaction was pure in its werewolf

spontaneity. He couldn't gnash his teeth at Rik over what came naturally as he struggled with his change.

He could feel Rik's energy grow, rippling off his body in waves which stroked over the hairs on Damien's arm, intensifying the male pheromones and adding strength to his already muscular physique. It was heady. It soaked into Damien's chest and heated his sternum.

The air around them charged. Rik's clapping turned to caresses and his low rumble vibrated through Damien's body too low to be heard but moving substance and sense until it was undeniable in its effect.

Rik continued to hold Damien's neck between open teeth. Four sharp points poked Damien's flesh without breaking the skin. Rik's tongue drew indolently on the space between. Damien shivered. It was an experience he hadn't had in his extended lifetime, a werewolf tasting him like his neck was a sex organ. And the way he did it made it painfully sexual.

The snort of a wolf scenting fluttered Damien's hair. It was Rik discovering him with new senses. Damien's heart hammered at the pleasure Rik took in doing it. Damien felt the satisfied silent rumble of Rik's chest against his. Like the music in the club, the dark notes filled him, saturated his being until he was nothing more than a receptacle for sensation.

Damien hadn't considered his desirability before. Had accepted it as a part of him when women and men made themselves available for sex. He didn't think in terms of physical beauty. But in Rik's arms there could be no doubt that Rik found him intensely sexual, a counterpart of exquisite beauty. It humbled him. It caressed him over the very erect length of his cock. It cupped his balls in loving hands and molded his thighs with nothing more than the rumbling approval from his were-mate.

Eroticism swallowed him. His balls throbbed for release and his cock strained against the confines of his slacks. Rik shrugged out of his lab coat and undid Damien's pants, letting both fall to the floor. With strength born of a horny were, he curled his

forearm around Damien's naked thigh and lifted it high to Rik's side, opening him and making him vulnerable.

The rumbling continued, stroking him, calming Damien when he would otherwise fight for sexual dominance. Still captured by Rik's teeth, he remained complacent, ready, speechless with need for Rik's cock to possess him.

He heard the rasping slide of Rik's jeans, felt the heat of his groin freed from the heavy fabric intensify. Damien's fangs had never fully retreated after finding Rik safe. Now his gums stung with pleasure and his lips curled back to allow them their growth. His eyes, hot behind his lids, saw the frantically racing capillaries in Rik's neck—proof of his own arousal.

Rik's teeth pierced him in four places. Damien hissed with pleasure. Invaded, permeated, helpless to stop either himself from accepting or Rik from taking, a thrill pulsed up his cock and slicked a bead of lubricant on his throbbing head. His cock was so full of blood he could feel his skin strain to contain the extent of his desire for the man who called to him on a primitive level.

The head of Rik's penis pressed Damien's anus. Damien relaxed the muscles to accept him. He was going in dry and even in Rik's state of semi-human understanding he seemed to sense it would be painful for Damien and kept himself in rigid check.

The bass oscillations of Rik's desire carried a sharper edge and he was panting, heating Damien's neck and cooling the moisture at once. "I'm ready," he told Rik through the constriction on his throat. Still Rik hesitated. Damien reached down and cupped his balls. They were already tight. "Rik, if you don't fuck me now, I'll rip these off."

Rik shoved forward, sheathing himself to the hilt. Damien emitted a high vampire shriek. It was the sound of many voices in a wind competing for dominance. It found in its variations both pain and pleasure, satisfaction and demonic anger. Rik seemed to recognize the singular event as a claiming as much as his being claimed and after a brief



pause began to pound Damien with the same maniacal coupling as he'd heard in Damien's erotic distress.

Through his shirt, sweat glazed Rik's shoulders and what Damien could see of his back. He grabbed the were-human's ass and dug in his fingers, using his vampire strength to make each thrust strike harder, swifter. Rik's body was a machine. He fucked him until Damien's eyes rolled back in his head. Rik released his choke hold to howl over and over while his body cranked against Damien's.

Orgasm didn't lazily tease him. It streaked along his senses until it blacked everything else from his mind. In one exploding stream, Damien came, endlessly ejaculating between their heated bodies. His shriek battled with Rik's howl, rolling over each other in a frenzy of sexual noise. He felt Rik's cock thicken the second before it, too, erupted. Damien shuddered at the evidence of his mate's desire for him which burned pleasantly in his ass.

Rik's back arched on his final thrust. He buried his cock as deeply as he could, his face to the ceiling and eyes closed with a look of exquisite torture contorting his features. Damien grabbed Rik's shirtfront and dragged him in. He sank his fangs and drank in the sexual hormones underscoring Rik's unique flavor. Finally, he pushed away. Rik's cock slipped from his body.

Someone clapped from the doorway. "Well done, you have proven once and for all that he is neither The Keeper, nor worthy of leadership," Lothar's voice rumbled behind them.

Rik grabbed his pants and pivoted as he tucked himself away. He stood in front of Damien to block Lothar from seeing the vampire undressed. Damien was *his*.

He recognized Raith who stood with two others. Raith had his fangs distended in a snarl. Lothar, and it could only be the alpha pack member with his short black hair which curled insolently around his head and the dark whiskey-colored eyes, stepped in

front of Raith and another vampire. In an understood gesture of defiance, Lothar presented his back to Raith, who snarled louder.

“Put your fangs away. I gave at the office,” Lothar spat.

Raith prepared to spring.

“Hold, Raith,” Damien commanded. The glowing red eyes moved between Damien and Lothar’s back with regret.

“I’m glad you came back,” Rik said, showing no concern for having been caught fucking a male vampire.

“I said I would.” Lothar moved forward. Lothar’s graceful walk was similar to the silent, liquid motions of the vampires he’d met, but different in the effect his arrogant swagger brought to the same lethal stride. “I understand a male going through the change would fuck the first thing that moves but performing a mating with an alpha vampire and he allowing it? That’s a first.”

“What I accept is none of your concern,” Damien said. He buttoned the closure on his slacks and tightened the belt about his hips.

Lothar gestured to Rik. “*He* doesn’t know that he just mated with you. *You* cannot be unaware as you claimed him in return. I doubt your people will accept a gay Keeper. My people wouldn’t. There’s no need for you to draw my blood now, little were. The prophecy is of no consequence to my kind where you are concerned.”

The were pivoted to leave the room. Rik came upon him at a rush and grabbed him. He sank a needle in his forearm. Lothar back-armed Rik, sending him sprawling. Raith reacted first and Damien joined him, shoving the were against the wall. The other vampire planted his hands on Lothar’s chest and pushed as hard as he could to keep Lothar still.

“Get the vial, Rik. We’ll hold him,” Damien commanded.

Rik scrambled to his feet, wincing at the iron blow he’d taken to the chest. Breath wheezed from him but he found three more vials while Lothar swore and fought.

"Hurry," Raith yelled.

"What the hell? I thought you guys were strong," Rik said, stumbling back to them. He collected two vials before the were moved, the third was trickier. "Shit. Next time warn me and I'll get an elephant tranq on him."

"If you have it, use it," Damien shouted over Lothar's angry roar.

"Special order, lover."

"Save it for later. This isn't a good time for pet names," Raith snarled. He sank his fangs into Lothar's neck, ripping the flesh so that a trickle of blood spilled to the floor instead of ingesting it.

The werewolf weakened, his legs collapsing beneath him. "My apologies, Lothar," Raith said.

The third vampire answered Rik. "It's like lions and cheetahs. A lion, like a were, can go the distance when chasing its prey. They are strong and muscular for the pursuit. Vampires are made for speed and the quick strike, like a cheetah. Though we are strong and fast, we cannot fight alone against a were for long periods."

Rik nodded his understanding. "Did you kill him?" he asked Raith, sniffing the air.

"No. He's weak but he'll heal quickly. As your ribs will. Did you get the blood you needed?" Damien asked.

"Got it." Rik held up the vials. He retreated to label them and set them in the test tube holder beside Damien's blood. "I'm going to need samples from you two and your recent donors, if you don't mind." He spoke without looking up. The three vampires stood awkwardly at his back. Rik could feel the tension in the air their lovemaking had wrought when discovered. "And say something. You'd think you never saw two guys getting off before."

"That wasn't getting off. That was mating. You mated one of the council's highest-ranking vampires," Raith accused. "The Keeper is meant to wed."

Rik turned to face them. His eyes met Damien's for the first time since their joining. What was he thinking about? Would he think it a mistake? Rik didn't contemplate dropping his guard to let Damien see his thoughts. The others might be privy to his mind in the bargain. It wasn't something he cared to share. His feelings for Damien were growing stronger by the hour, it seemed. Up until their interruption, he had assumed they could continue as they had. Faced with the bigotry of the were and the cautious discomfort of the vampires, he wasn't sure how Damien would feel if Rik confessed that he wanted no mate but Damien.

He wasn't sure he could confess it to himself either. He'd been with women his entire life. Did that mean he was gay? Bisexual? What did that make him?

Rik had nothing to say to Raith's statement. He'd defended them before Lothar's charge. Now it was to Damien he looked for the explanation. He curled his hands over the edge of the countertop behind him. Lifting his brows in a silent offer, he waited for Damien to say something.

Raith was the first to break the silence by offering his arm. Rik filled three vials and then motioned for the other vampire to come over. That vampire looked fearful either Damien or Raith would set him in his place. They didn't and Rik drew from him as well.

"What's your name?" Rik asked, filling out the label.

"Tarun," he said quietly, his gaze darting between the older vampires.

Though the three vampires were all the same visual age, his demeanor, his scent, carried less potency. Rik could not mistake him for a leader. Tarun was a lesser.

"What do I tell the council?" Raith asked Damien. He returned to Damien's side.

"Tell them I am The Keeper's mate. He has chosen me and I have accepted the honor," Damien told him. "Remind them that the prophecy does not specify gender in The Keeper's chosen."

Rik's head came up to look into the vampire's eyes, to discern his true feelings. Damien looked back at him with the same acceptance he had seen since the day they

met. He saw yearning, hope and the flicker of love lit by passion. Rik smiled. He opened his mind to show Damien a hard and fast blowjob in his immediate future. Predictably, Damien's eyes began to glow and his answering grin flashed sharply.

Raith snorted. "Subtle, isn't he?"

Tarun grimaced. "How can you allow this atrocity? How can you claim this blasphemous union before the council?"

"Silence!" Damien thundered. "It is not for you to say. You are young with barely a hundred years. You know nothing."

"And yet it is what the council will ask, however, with more tact," Raith returned.

"The Keeper is not gay," Tarun insisted.

"Do you require labels, young Tarun?" Damien asked, silkily. "Can a man or woman not choose their mate how they wish? Do they require that fate bring them a gender of which you approve? You have lived few years, little one. You will come to realize that love will find whom it may and we are ignorant if we overlook the gift out of bias."

"Well said, Damien. The council is wise. They will be surprised but they will accept it. Lothar and the weres don't live the same number of years we do. They are apt to be more narrow minded. Do not expect them to capitulate to a king who has chosen a male mate. You will have your share of trials, my friend," Raith said. He clapped Damien's biceps, then snapped his fingers at Tarun and motioned him to assist in dragging Lothar from the room.

"Don't forget. I need your recent hosts to rule out inconsistencies in your blood," Rik called after them.

## Chapter Eight

It was all too much too fast for Rik, which was why he spent the next twenty-four hours in lockdown. He stayed away from the apartment during the day, choosing to lose himself in science instead of thinking about his relationship with Damien.

They were mated, for God's sake. What the hell had he been thinking? And why the hell had Damien accepted? Was their relationship just a commitment to keep each other as fuck-buddies or something deeper? Oh, he knew what they'd said in front of the others but that had been in the afterglow. What the weres and Tarun had said, though, that was real, that was serious. Besides, how did you trade in a lifetime of loving women without having felt mismatched about a heterosexual lifestyle?

Rik hadn't. He'd loved all the women, still appreciated them in every size, but Rik had a hard-on for a vampire unlike anything he'd ever had for the softer, human gender. Damien's darkness called to him like a lover's crooked finger.

The new centrifuge hummed to a stop and beeped. Rik shook his head, trying to get back into his work.

"You must be tired. I told you Dr. Gerard would help you," Damien said from the doorway.

"Yeah, well, she isn't here, is she?" Rik muttered. He *was* tired. He hadn't noticed Damien's arrival. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Long enough to know that you're working yourself to exhaustion."

Damien strolled into the room. His loping gait drew Rik's eye. Damn, that man was sexy. Rik could almost feel the clouding of his judgment with each step.

"You didn't open the package?" Damien asked.

Rik looked up at the box. It had been taunting him for the past four hours since its delivery. He wanted to open it and examine Dr. Gerard's evidence but he also wanted to find the answers for himself. However, he had invested only days into the study where Dr. Gerard had many lifetimes to explore the genetic markers.

Instead, Rik sighed and ran a hand through the hair at his temple. "No."

"You're being stubborn." Damien's smile was slow and seductive. His gaze leisurely examined Rik from head to toe and damn if it didn't make Rik's cock stand to attention. Damien noticed and chuckled. "We could take care of that."

"No."

"Stubborn," Damien whispered from across the room, yet Rik felt it like a caress in his ear and just as instantly, Damien was behind him, his arms around Rik's waist tugging up Rik's shirt.

"Cut it out. I finally got the samples separated and genetically marked. That was the easy part."

"The easy part is opening the box. The easy part is pushing me away."

Damien's fangs claimed Rik's neck. Rik shuddered in pain and ecstasy, remaining utterly still for his lover. Damien unsnapped and unzipped Rik's pants. Reaching inside, he grasped Rik and pumped with rough, firm jerks until Rik had to grab the edge of the lab table. Cum erupted from his cock and Damien murmured satisfactorily over his conquest.

"You want me to go, I'll go," Damien said. "If the weres come back, open your mind to me and I'll be here. Dr. Gerard is arriving sometime before daybreak." Damien left Rik with his pants open and his cock hanging out in a semi-erect, moistened state.

"Shit," Rik swore to the empty room. "All that man ever thinks about is sex. You'd think for once he'd consider how I need my space." Rik rolled his eyes at himself. *Great. I sound like a wife*, he thought.

Rik closed his pants. He pulled the final DNA sample from the centrifuge. This one was special. The idea of cloning had come to him in a flash of insight. However, it wasn't the idea of cloning a were or a vamp or even human DNA but of something darker than that. He didn't have his finger on it yet but he was close.

The key had been the cancer research. While it hadn't worked the way he intended, it opened the paradigm and let him consider other options for delivery of the antidote.

His pulse kicked into high gear. More than anything he wanted to figure out the puzzle. It was in the science and in the prophecy, and if he could just figure out the one missing piece, he might have a solution. Rik looked again at the brown UPS box Dr. Gerard had sent. Did it hold the answers? And if he could find the missing piece, would merely knowing how to fit the pieces together solve the overall problem?

He was changing, shifting, turning, whatever you wanted to call it. It was the same with everything he touched. His sexuality. His relationship. His physical form. His physical abilities and limitations. His world perception. His understanding of fate and prophecy and destiny. His career path. Hell, even his circle of acquaintances. It was just too much.

Rik might not be able to stabilize all of it but he'd do his damndest to slow it down, figure it out step by step. Starting with Damien. Having crossed the line from friendship to relationship didn't mean he had to depend on him for everything. Sex, security, friendship, future, even his fucking sleep pattern had been screwed up because of his association with Damien. He couldn't hate the vampire but he didn't have to admit he was in love with him. Fuck. Apparently he couldn't hide the truth from himself either. Fine. He'd keep it a secret for himself alone.

He fumbled a vial, barely catching it before it rolled off the lab table. "Start with the small things, Rik," he told himself aloud. "Fix the physical change first. That's the most pressing matter. Then worry about the rest. Focus."



Taking a deep breath, Rik tried to clear his mind. He was losing himself. He could feel it like peeling the layers of an onion. One piece at a time, Rik was losing himself. The powerlessness of it burned in him the desire to act, fix, before it was too late.

The box.

He put down the vial. Carefully laying out the DNA spreadsheets by genus, Rik then approached the box. It was nearing morning. He didn't have to look out the window to know it. He felt it in his bones like the wolf winding up an evening hunt. Fatigue tore at him.

Finally, he pulled off the tape and folded back the box flaps. There were files upon files of research by region. Rik carefully removed the folders and began to sort them. The labels were vague, referencing only areas like "Tri-State Council" and "Midwest Council".

Within the folders, each subject had been labeled with a single letter. Upper and lower case could be mates, he wasn't sure. But after the pages of blood work all showing a viral strain, he could only determine that these reports were the culmination of years of research by Dr. Gerard. The subsequent pages showed conclusions based on information not provided in the box but referencing earlier tests. The conclusions were the same in every case. The vampirism virus was dying. Some councils appeared to be stronger than others but only marginally.

"You see the problem," a feminine voice said behind him.

Rik whirled. Caught up in the reports, he'd missed the woman's entrance. He really ought to get some more sleep.

"I'm Dr. Gerard," she said holding out her hand. "Do you mind if we close the blinds?"

She was already halfway across the room. With her auburn hair tied up at the back of her head, Rik had no more impression of her than the consummate professional complete with glasses and highly magnified blue eyes behind her lenses. Though her

dress and manner were businesslike, her hips rocked gracefully and sexual invitation perfumed her.

"Go ahead."

"It's not that we die in sunlight like popular belief would have it," she explained. "It's just not very comfortable." Having closed the blinds, she smiled at Rik and walked back to his side. "It would be like placing a human in the Death Valley without sunscreen and water. You must be Dr. Usher."

"I am."

"Damien didn't tell me you were so handsome."

Rik felt himself relax. Though his recent affinity for Damien hadn't called his masculinity into question, it soothed him to hear the attractive doctor find him appealing. "Thank you."

"I came at the right time, it seems. You've been busy working yourself to death. Didn't Damien tell you that rest is essential during a change?" she asked.

"He may have said something about that."

"But you chose to ignore him," she stated. "How wonderfully male of you." Her words were softened with a smile.

"How about we discuss what you came here for, Dr. Gerard. As Raith recently pointed out, werewolves don't live as long as vampires. I only have so much time."

"Ah, Raith. Yes, he has such tact about him. I'm surprised he didn't put that assessment in dog years for you." Her eyes twinkled with humor. "Give him time. He's bound to bring it up eventually."

Rik couldn't help but laugh.

Dr. Gerard picked up the stack of folders. "Have you had a chance to look over these?"

"Enough to get the gist. The vampirism virus is dying."

"Yes."

"Do you think I'm The Keeper?" he asked.

"Damien does. He doesn't trust lightly. For the sake of my kind, I hope so. He said you had an idea which sounded promising. Care to elaborate?"

"My work is in DNA and cloning. Damien and Lothar both shared with me their prophecies. If I'm The Keeper then I'm meant to help both species and the only thing which comes to mind is my work in this lab.

"With your information showing the decline of the virus, we need to establish what is causing the decline and revitalize vampirism in some way."

"I've been working on that solution for almost one hundred years," she said.

"But modern science has only leaped forward recently, so while you got a head start and have empirical evidence, it's time to ramp up the work with our combined knowledge."

"I have an entire team who reached the same conclusion you have. Forgive me for doubting you but what makes you think you have the answer which has eluded us for so long?" Dr. Gerard's tone wasn't biting but he heard the tinge of disappointment. Probably she had come expecting him to have a conclusion for her examination.

"You and your team have been looking strictly at vampirism and the causes of its demise, correct?" Rik asked.

She agreed with a nod and motioned to the files. "As you saw."

"My quest for an answer is personal."

"What do you mean?"

"The prophecy says The Keeper will be a leader to both the vampires and the werewolves. I've been bitten and am changing into a werewolf at an alarming rate. I am driven to find a remedy before that occurs. I've also chosen, and have been accepted by, a vampire mate," Rik began.

The news seemed to surprise her but she didn't offer comment.

"Knowing that the werewolves are flourishing where the vampires aren't, I can use the DNA samples I've taken to see where the werewolf and vampire strains differ. Just from a cursory look, it's quite a bit of difference. But if you look at the strength of the strain where it repairs itself you can see a critical point. The werewolf DNA repairs living flesh whereas the vampire strain repairs dead flesh." He handed her his spreadsheets and pointed to the line he was referring to.

Excitement lit her eyes. "Please, continue."

"If we introduce this segment of sequencing into vampire blood we have the lethal interaction of the two. But if you introduce that strain with other carriers, like the sequence for controlling change at a full moon, or the ability to move around freely in daylight, you could hypothetically provide an avenue to introduce the original sequence without destroying a host."

"Hypothetically? You haven't tried it yet?" she asked.

"I've only started, Dr. Gerard."

"Have you worked through the computerized experimental calculations?" she asked, hopefully.

"No. I only came to this theory yesterday. I've been separating sequences and strands since then. The lab technology is excellent, better than any other I've heard of but it's still limited."

"I can send things to my lab wherever necessary," she offered.

"We may need to. I've worked through a lot of it but there are pieces missing." He shook his head.

"You need rest, Dr. Usher. Your mind and body are both under the stress of change. If you don't rest yourself, you will never gain a fresh perspective."

He nodded. "I know you're right but there isn't time."

He moved to his computer, flipped through a couple of screens to the right one and filled in the security profile providing maximum access. He hit print and a small white

card clinked out of the slot. Rik handed it to her. "This is your security badge. You have full access to these labs day or night."

"If you won't rest at home, will you at least find a place in that back office to rest?" Dr. Gerard asked.

Rik looked at the door to his office adjoining the lab. He rarely worked in there. Most of his projects required the space of the main lab. However, there was a couch and rest did sound good, if he didn't have to leave the lab. If he stayed away from Damien, maybe he could sort out that mess too.

"Yeah, I can do that," Rik agreed. He smiled, tired. "Do you need anything?"

"No. I ate before I came," she said, distractedly looking over his information.

It startled a laugh from him. He hadn't considered she'd think he meant blood. At her quizzical look, he waved off an explanation. "The computer is open. If it locks up, the passwords are taped beneath the keyboard."

\* \* \* \* \*

Rik was avoiding him. Damien waited outside the laboratory building until daybreak, then he went home to rest. He just hoped that if Rik needed him, he'd swallow his pride and ask.

Dr. Gerard was another matter. Damien could read her with ease. What had started off as keen sexual attraction for Rik had changed to respect and concern. The sexual attraction, though less of a conscious spike for her, did not lie dormant. Damien had gone twelve years knowing many women and men found Rik attractive but now that Rik was his mate, he liked knowing it less. Rik was his.

Lothar watched Damien depart from the shadows of the trees near the parking lot. The mating of the male vampire and the male scientist sat uneasily on him. Much of the prophecy fit too closely with the vampire's belief. It had been assumed that The Keeper's mate would be female but Lothar admitted that it was an assumption with no

basis in the tradition of the pack. If Wolfrik Usher was The Keeper, it would not go easy on him mated to a male who was also a vampire. The pack would rebel.

The end of the werewolf prophecy came to him, sending a shiver of dread down his spine. *He will save the werewolves out of their death throes in the midst of plenty.* Could the death throes in the midst of plenty be caused by a division in the pack?

They had his blood now. He had permitted it despite the aggression he'd showed. It would not have done to be submissive in the face of three vampires. A smile curled his lips. Let them believe they had taken it by force. He could allow that for the purpose of testing the authenticity of the prophecy where it applied to Usher.

Alone in the early morning, Lothar stepped from the trees. He scented the air. The female vampire who had arrived was old. He would watch to see what information she and Usher uncovered. Until then, he had a business to run.

Lothar flipped open his cell and hit six on his speed dial. Six, one of the bottom peripheral members of his pack. "Streiter, go to Oni-Bio and keep an eye on Dr. Usher." He didn't wait for an answer. Streiter was a six below Omega. He'd do as he was told or risk his Alpha's wrath.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rik woke up with a start. Human DNA. That was the missing piece. It was so simple, so rudimentary as to be ridiculous. Scrambling off the cramped couch, he tore out of the back office and nearly tripped over his feet in his eagerness to reach the computer.

Dr. Gerard looked at him over the rim of her glasses. "In a rush?"

"Yeah. How long was I out?"

Calmly she flicked a glance to the industrial wall clock. "Ten hours. Damien stopped in. He left you that bag." She nodded to the end of the table. Dr. Gerard's nose wrinkled with disgust. "Smells like raw meat."

His attention fixed on the large paper bag. He scented the air. Saliva pooled in his mouth and the tips of his ears burned with excitement. The growl he gave only marginally surprised him.

"My, Dr. Usher, what big eyes you have and what big teeth." Dr. Gerard chuckled as she leaned over the microscope. "Makes a girl wonder what else you have which might compare."

Rik ignored her, solely focused on the food. He ripped through the bag, grabbing one of the thick bloody steaks in his hands and shoving it into his mouth. Ecstasy shivered over him. Closing his eyes to wallow in the scent and textures, the tangy sweet taste of raw meat, Rik yanked his head back and forth to tear off a hunk from the larger piece of steak. The guttural, happy growls which were the background of his gnashing were met with another feminine chuckle.

He turned his head and snarled.

Dr. Gerard held up her hands. "Don't mind me. I'll wait." She shuddered as she considered his bloody hands. "I prefer a living host."

Rik swallowed down the last of the three steaks. He licked his fingers clean before washing up. Reaching up to probe his fangs, he found they had retracted to normal. Interesting.

"That was probably the most disgusting thing I've seen in a long time," Dr. Gerard said. "Your change appears significantly advanced. We don't have much time."

"I have an idea. Human DNA."

"Human? Why?" she asked, incredulous. "Humans have no strength, no longevity, no special abilities. What could human DNA possibly add to improve upon vampirism or werewolf DNA?"

"Well, for one, humans contract viruses where neither vampires nor werewolves can. For another, human DNA is mapped in a way that has been used to distinguish cancerous markers for probability of development based on genetics. Using the markers and the viral capabilities of the human information, we can narrow down our search

parameters into a more logical format. Humans aren't frail, or have you forgotten after all these years? The human body can withstand all sorts of diseases. If disease were ever introduced to the vamps and weres I'd say your lot would be up shit creek."

"Our lot. You're one of the privileged few," she corrected.

"Human DNA makes the perfect carrier as a recessive to the other two more dominant strands of viral and genera markers it will carry. And human DNA being resilient will provide a flexibility in our equation that wasn't there before."

"I see what you're saying," Dr. Gerard said. She nodded thoughtfully. "Until the virus went toxic, humans were susceptible to it. Likewise humans are susceptible to the were blood. Since weres and vampires are toxic to each other, the human DNA is a buffer between the two. It's brilliant."

"Thanks." He grinned.

"There's no room for error. We must infect the human DNA simultaneously so one is not given dominance over the other. The human strain, infected with the dominance of one or the other, would make the sample toxic to the other strain again."

"Sure, that's one trial we can run. There's another option too. With human DNA mapped and vampire DNA mapped through your studies, we can attempt to remove the aggressive strain in vampirism so it won't react with the werewolf DNA." Rik reached for her files.

"We know where the aggressive strain is and it's critical to vampirism. Without it, the virus cannot overwhelm the host. It's here," she said pointing to a notebook of data. "You would be creating a new problem."

"Not necessarily. The were DNA would still be able to activate on the host. The virus would still be in play but not attacking the were DNA as it takes the host."

Dr. Gerard hissed. Her eyes glowed and deep furrows formed beneath her cheekbones. "My race will not be submissive to a putrid animal."



Rik snarled. The hairs on his nape stood up. "There is no choice. Time is limited and I don't have the werewolf DNA mapped out. There's no detailed information on it. As it is, we are facing the risk of failure."

"Working well together, I see," Damien said.

Both of them turned to snarl at him. Damien chuckled, seemingly unconcerned. "Be nice to the puppy, Amara, he doesn't have control over himself yet."

"Fuck you," Rik snarled.

Damien's eyebrow climbed at the arch. The puppy remark served to calm Dr. Gerard and she returned to normal.

"I forgot," she said. "Damien, you couldn't stay away?"

"No," he answered, looking heatedly at Rik.

It didn't help Rik's temporary transformation. The promise of sex he saw in Damien's eyes only made Rik's fangs extend fully and his cock twitch. "I need space," he told the vampire.

"I know. You also need protection. Lothar sent one of his dogs to watch you. Downwind from him, I found Lovatt."

"Who is Lovatt?" Amara asked.

Rik didn't know either, so he waited for Damien to answer. It was what he told himself he waited for. Truthfully, Rik's senses were completely distracted by the thick aroma of testosterone and arousal in his mate. If Dr. Gerard, Amara, weren't there, he'd have jumped his vampire by now.

As though he knew what Rik was thinking, Damien's expression turned to one of amusement. *You let your guard down, pup. I do know what you're thinking.*

*Fuck.*

*In good time,* Damien answered. "Lovatt is Lothar's Omega. He's the lowest-ranking member of the pack."

*Do you two mind? I'm trying to solve a crisis, not tromp through your sordid little affair,* Amara thought back. "Omegas can be tricky."

*Not affair, mating,* Damien corrected. "Especially when they are on a power trip."

Rik's low growl broke the silence. "Fuck the both of you. Get the fuck out of my head and quit with the dual conversations. That's fucked up."

"I like head." Damien shrugged, nonplussed.

"Mating?" Amara asked, stunned.

"Yeah, we've been through this already. The Keeper, as you seem to think I am, mated a vampire. And I did it while I was turning into a werewolf. Didn't have a damn clue that's what I did but that's how it went. We all up to speed now?" Rik asked.

"How is the council handling this development?" she asked.

"Officially, they haven't been told," Damien said. "I doubt it will be much of a concern, rather a reorganization of expectation."

"Lothar was pissed," Rik added.

"They don't understand a dual male leadership," Amara explained. "They practice same-sex relations when they want to but never discuss it as a legitimate bonding. It's ignorance. Will Lothar pose a problem?"

"No. He allowed us to draw blood from him. I expect he will keep his pack in line. I'll speak with Lothar if he steps out of line. For now, he's just watching the lab."

"You call what Lothar did, *allowed us to draw blood*? He nearly broke free of you and Raith," Rik argued.

"He could have changed from his human form. We wouldn't have been able to stop him," Damien said. "He may be wary but he isn't ruling out the possibility of the prophecy's fulfillment in you."

"Why don't we stop dwelling on that?" Amara interrupted. "While Dr. Usher was asleep, I finished the computerized mock-ups of the vampire virus and the traits found

in Lothar's blood. Dr. Usher's blood is in transition and not stable enough to run a comparison but after the change —"

"There can't be a full change," Damien countered. "He's my mate. I can't mate with a were. None of us can. The exchange of fluids on a regular basis could kill us."

"If we don't find a solution, Damien, there *will* be a change and we'll have to work with it," she said, patiently.

"Exchange of fluids," Rik murmured to himself. "With cloning we have to fertilize an egg with the desired DNA once we have it separated. Semen provides a concentrated source for what we need without the contamination of blood. There will be transference but not with the same aggressiveness."

"Vampires don't procreate," Amara said.

"But werewolves do," Damien countered.

"Exactly," agreed Rik.

"Are *you* going to ask Lothar to jack off into a cup? What do we give him for incentive, *Dog and Kennel* magazine?" Amara snorted at her own crack.

Rik tried not to smile but failed. "Cute, Amara. I say we use mine. It being in transition gives us a unique window of opportunity to manipulate the coding to do what we want."

"Leaving alone the mental picture you just gave me, are you intending to use your sperm to impregnate a host? We don't have time to reach a full term with this," Amara said. Her expression told him she doubted the validity of his thought process.

Rik shook his head. "I'm suggesting we start a zygote of the combined DNA, then inject it with a viral serum. Think of the new viral delivery system used on cancer patients. It would work like that to get it into an adult, living host," he explained.

"Who's the host?" Damien asked. "You can't test it on a were or a vamp without contaminating the results. You can't self-inject without knowing the outcome. Are you going to volunteer a host?"

"Dr. Usher? Dr. Usher, are you in here?"

The three turned to the door.

Petra poked her head in from the hall. "Oh, I'm sorry, Doctor, I didn't realize you had colleagues with you. I'll just come back later."

"Darling," Damien called to her. He issued the full force of his sexy smile on Rik's lab assistant, much to his annoyance.

Petra smiled back, blushing to her roots. "Hello, Damien."

"Is this someone we can trust?" Amara asked Rik, privately.

"Petra, did you enjoy your time with us?" Damien asked the assistant. Petra's smile widened. She nodded and walked into the room toward Damien.

"I did," she breathed.

"So did we. Would you like to try that again?" Damien asked her.

Rik glared at Damien's profile. He didn't have Damien figured out and it was made more complicated by his constant flirtation with women. Rik projected an image of irritation and another of Petra and Rik standing side by side.

*I'm not choosing her over you.*

It sure as hell felt like it.

*You said we needed an egg. I'm getting you an egg.*

"Could you do it without trying to seduce my lab assistant?" Rik muttered. "This is a lab, Damien. There are Petri dishes of donor eggs in freezer unit two."

"Do what?" Petra asked.

"I need a shower." Rik headed back to his office. The bathroom in there was small but sufficient and if he didn't have to watch Damien fuck a woman instead of him, all the better. Rik still had an erection from Damien's scent. He could work that off in the shower too, he decided.

It wouldn't be as satisfying but the intensity of his growing feelings for the vampire was disturbing. It was enough to curb the desire to ram his cock into Damien's mouth and fuck his face until Rik either collapsed or Damien bit the damn thing off.

## Chapter Nine

“Dr. Gerard, would you talk to Petra about needing test groups? I have to deal with Rik.” Damien didn’t wait for an answer.

Rik was pissed and the possibility of Rik, naked and slicked with water, got Damien hot. Imagine the intense fucking they could do with a pissed-off were-changeling in mating mode. He seeped pre-cum just thinking about it.

Damien fixed a grim smile on his face as he reached the office and shut the door silently behind him. The shower water was already raining down on the other side of the bathroom door. Damien resolutely peeled off his clothing piece by piece. He didn’t care that Amara and Petra could see him through the glass window which made up half the office door.

Damien pushed open the stall and shut himself inside with Rik. He had to know Damien was there but he didn’t turn around. Rik’s head hung under the spray of hot water. He didn’t move. Damien grabbed the soap and began to lather him up. He started carefully, coasting the soap over Rik’s shoulders and massaging the lather into his back.

Rik’s palms pressed the tile wall. His tanned fingers glistened with moisture. Barely shifting to accommodate Damien, Rik’s tendons nonetheless flexed over his thick wrists and sinewy arms. His muscles twitched with self-imposed restraint. Rik’s arm wasn’t bound any longer. The skin had knitted together cleanly, leaving no trace of the were bite given by Lothar.

Damien’s soapy hands slicked from Rik’s shoulders to his biceps to his wrists, circling them with his fingers before riding back up to Rik’s chest. Rik’s head hung lower, letting the spray hit the back of his neck and Damien’s chest.

With his hands stroking Rik's chest, Damien caught the rise and fall of his lover's ribs, the flinch when he touched the mending spot where Lothar had cracked ribs during the blood draw. Unhindered, Damien re-soaped and massaged Rik's hips, taking special care to tease the diagonal line of muscle veeing toward the groin. With one hand cupping Rik's testicles, Damien stroked the other low against his abdomen.

Rik groaned. "I came in here to get away from you." His breath was harsh, ragged. His body had tightened, flexing every muscle Damien caressed.

"Is that what you want?" Damien asked, saddened.

"Yes. No." Rik sighed. "Hell if I know. I want you so bad I ache but I'm confused. If I can control one thing in my life, it has to be this."

"You came to me and asked me to take you in my mouth. You asked me to fuck you. You offered to suck me off. It's been your choice all along, Rik."

"And next you'll say that I mated with you. Fuck it. I didn't know what I was doing." Rik's voice had taken on a panicked vibration which warned Damien that his lover was at a breaking point.

"You did mate me. Twice. I let you out of it at first because that's what I thought you wanted. But you proved it was no mistake by claiming me a second time. We both wanted it."

"Really? What do I want now, Damien? Can you tell me that? Because I have no fucking clue."

Damien dropped his hands. "Turn around, Rik. If you have something to say, face me and say it. I've been walking this earth for hundreds of years. Your human insecurities aren't new to me, my love for you is. I haven't been made to feel helpless by any lover in my life until you. I've never wanted to have my devotion returned as desperately as I wish for you to devote yourself to me.

"In the past, it has been me who has broken off with my paramours. So face me, damn it, and show me what it's like to have my heart broken, to know my love isn't

returned. Reject me, your mate whom you chose and teach me a thing or two about what it's like to be truly damned."

Damien grabbed Rik's shoulder and forced him to turn.

"Damn me, Rik. You've all but done it. Put the last stake in my heart and get it over with," he snarled darkly.

His jaw tightened as he waited for Rik's condemnation. Something tickled Damien's cheek. He ignored it. Not since he was human had Damien felt such a desperate longing for something he could not have. It burned in his chest, his eyes with the futility of wanting Rik and knowing he would want him for the rest of his fate-damned days on earth. He was mated and rejected by the only person who completed his soul, who gave him hope.

"Don't ask me for anything right now. I don't know my own mind beyond fucking you and I know you want more," Rik said, quietly. He reached up and stroked a thumb across Damien's cheek. "You're crying. God. You can't cry. Don't do that to me."

"Vampires don't cry." As he said it, Damien felt the tickle of another tear roll down his cheek. It was the thing of forgotten memories, crying. He couldn't remember the last time. Not even when he lived as a human child.

Rik slammed Damien's back against the shower stall. Their chests pressed firmly together and Rik's face hovered an inch from his own. "God, I want you, Damien. I want your cock. I want your fucking gorgeous mouth."

Rik took Damien in a kiss which breathed hot air into his vampire lungs and slicked his lips with shower water and want. Rik broke the kiss just as quickly. "I want every fucking inch of your body and I want to hear you yell when I make you come. But I can't handle all of this shit coming down on me at once.

"I can't see past my own cock when it comes to you and I have two completely different paranormal races depending on me to save them. I can't even save myself from changing. Throw in gay sex when I've never wanted that before, and clouded senses, and how the hell am I supposed to be of any use to anyone?" Rik raged.



"Forget all of that. Tell me what you actually know," Damien said. He took hope in Rik's confession.

"I know that this thing we have is confusing for me and it's the one thing I can put on the backburner while I figure out the rest of it. My relationship with you can wait. If I don't deal with this other thing, there's no point in having a relationship."

Damien nodded abruptly. He shoved Rik's shoulders to unpin himself and stepped out of the shower, slamming the glass door behind him. Snatching up his clothes in the next room, he ignored Rik when he was called back.

Rik had told him he needed space and Damien hadn't listened. So caught up in the newness of his feelings for the man, Damien had forgotten his place among the cursed. Rik was right. If he didn't figure out the equations to put a stop to his change, there was no reason in pursuing a relationship. If Rik didn't succeed, he'd take Damien's shriveled heart to the grave with him when he died as a full werewolf. And Damien would continue to walk the earth long afterward, reliving every mistake he'd made in letting Rik go.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time Rik finished and got back to the lab, Damien was gone. He didn't see Petra on the floor immediately but the fresh flush in Amara's cheeks explained the unconscious woman.

"Damien didn't look pleased when he left," she said. Amara steadily gazed through the microscope, one hand holding a Petri dish, the other a long pipette.

Rik chose to ignore the prying statement. "Have you already begun with the fertilization?" he asked, instead.

"Not quite. Here." Businesslike, she straightened and, with a quick flick of her fingers, flipped the switch on the monitor attached to the microscope. "You see the eggs, all viable, I've piped in some saline but I was waiting for you before we continue. After all," she said turning to consider his crotch, "we need your sperm."

"Yeah, I know." His glance drifted to the door of the lab.

"His leaving won't upset your ability to get off, will it?" she asked pointedly.

"I'll be fine," he bit out.

"I could always help." Amara grabbed his cock.

Instinctively, Rik thrust into her hold. "No thanks, I got it covered."

She handed him a cup. "Be quick, we haven't got much time." She turned resolutely back to the microscope and flipped off the projection light. "And wash the stench off your body. You smell like wet dog."

"I can't stop sweating," Rik muttered. His fresh shirt already clung to his chest. Between the sweating and the gnawing hunger, Rik was surprised he could keep his feet. As it was, the hunger was beginning to burn and feel more like persistent nausea.

"You're not just turning into an animal, you're already smelling like one," she said, wrinkling her nose.

It took Rik a few minutes of picturing Damien with his lips stretched around Rik's cock and vampire teeth piercing his hip but he came shouting Damien's name. His seed spilled noisily into the cup in hot, thick, spurts. Rik capped it and cleaned himself up before returning to the lab.

It was short work to load up another two microscopes with blood samples. One had were, the other vampire. Using a syringe, he extracted his sperm from the cup and tested it on the vampire slide. The reaction was sluggish but on a microscopic level, he could see the vampire blood and were-infused human sperm destroying each other's cell walls.

It didn't look like his changeling sperm would be a good carrier, as he suspected. Already infected by the were DNA, the human susceptibility to vampirism was reduced but the were DNA and vampire virus conflicted violently enough to destroy the carrier.

"It won't work with my sperm. I'm already too changed for it to work but it's given me an idea," he said.

"Which is?" she pressed.

"The carrier idea is a good one. The human strand is susceptible and the fertilization is definitely the way to go but not unaltered."

"I thawed a donor egg, already."

"You thawed it too soon. We'll have to destroy that one. You are leaping ahead of the process and it won't help us in the long run." Amara's anxious pursuit of their goal had taken on an intensity that unnerved him. Wasn't he the one supposed to be most restless for a cure?

The thought gave him pause. Three days ago all he wanted was Damien. Once Lothar had bitten him, he wanted nothing more than to retain his human form. When had he gone from curing himself of becoming a werewolf, to wishing he could combine it with vampirism to make a super-genus? He didn't remember actually voicing the thought, yet here he was. No longer fearful of being a werewolf, his main concern was living out his life with Damien and not killing themselves in the process because of their toxic incompatibility. Well, that and dying when his mate would live forever.

"What if you impregnate one egg with your sperm and another with the virus? With both in fluctuation, could we take a cell from each zygote and implant it into a donor egg?" she asked.

"I don't think so. From what happened with my sperm, it looks like it will still degenerate over time."

Amara sighed. "What else is there?"

Rik switched out the failed slide and placed a drop of vampire blood on a clean one. Looking at it under the microscope, it looked like regular blood. There were variations in the makeup and the shape of the platelets was different but basically it was altered blood.

"Square one," he said finally. "We go back to the sequencing and extract those things which make vampirism aggressive. I know you don't like it but it's what I've got."

You have the data on the markers. I have the equipment. Lying at your feet you have clean human DNA. Let's get to work."

\* \* \* \* \*

At the end of a grueling twelve hours, he thought they might finally have it. Might. They didn't have time to test it and see how it would progress. Part of it was faith that the prophecy of both the werewolf nation and the vampires could be believed. If it could, then he would not fail in creating the serum before he finished turning.

He was close. Rik could feel the change taking over. The hunger had grown to the point where the dazed and sleeping Petra, now moved to his office, smelled like lunch. Rik passed his sleeve over his damp brow.

He only had a single partial syringe of Lothar's blood remaining and two of the vampires. They'd used most of the vampire blood in breaking down the code to extract the aggression. Though he knew Amara hated giving werewolf DNA dominance, she had acquiesced in the light of logic and the realization that werewolves were just as aggressive, with more strength, which could only be a help in making the joined viral strains tenacious for the pursuit of survival. And ultimately, if this worked, it would make a stronger new breed of their kinds.

The testing for future strands would have to uncover the combined weaknesses and strengths to see what had survived the splice.

His theory about removing the aggressive nature of the virus had worked. While vampirism infected the host, it posed no threat to the werewolf DNA which didn't attack either the human-infected strand or the vampire virus, it incorporated all.

In a burst of insight, Rik had introduced the altered vampire virus to his sperm instead of a clean strand of human DNA. It had been a long shot but the nonaggressive strand had bonded easily with the sperm, latching on to it without attacking the integrity of the DNA samples.

In theory, the current state of flux between human and were would speed up the development of the fetus. As the sperm was already coded with were DNA and didn't have to incorporate were DNA into the human strain from scratch, it saved them a step. The rather top-heavy result to the individual sperm is what filled Amara's syringe.

"I'm ready to inject the carrier sperm into the donor egg," Amara said.

Rik watched the screen intently. The needle entered the view from the right, angling toward the captive egg. As the tip of the needle probed the egg, the rounded side gave, then pierced. Slowly, Amara plunged the syringe with her thumb as the human DNA carrying the joint genus slid into place.

The needle retracted and they waited. Rik held his breath. Sweat dampened his hair and sent a moist trail down his back. This was the moment of truth. The egg seemed to jump and vibrate, blurring its image slightly on the screen. Suddenly it split in half, creating two cells, then in half again, creating four. The rate of growth bubbled like seafoam before their eyes until the screen could no longer focus on the dividing egg.

Rik whooped and pumped his fist in the air. "We did it!"

Amara threw her head back and laughed.

"We fucking did it!" he shouted.

Rik grabbed her around the waist, swinging her into the air before planting a kiss on Amara's lips. When he meant to pull away, Amara's arms circled his neck and grabbed tight. With supernatural strength, she held him to her, claiming his mouth in a violent kiss. Her fangs grazed his tongue and he tasted blood. Rik barely resisted the urge to eat her lips and tongue. *A snack*, his wolf-instincts screamed. *Just a taste.*

He felt lightheaded. Not from lust for the vampire's kiss but from the tang of blood on his tongue. His stomach growled its reminder. He hadn't eaten in too long. He needed food. His vision blurred as a droplet of sweat fell into one eye.

Pulling back, she smiled. "Your blood is too strong for me, it seems. I cannot taste you again without doing harm to myself. But with this virus, we could rule together."

Rik dragged the back of his wrist over his mouth. Heightened by adrenaline, his own fangs had emerged and his senses were roused. Danger. It was indefinable in context but he sensed danger.

"We've won only a portion of the battle," he said. His were-roughened voice rumbled through the room.

"The other portion lies in wait on your office sofa," she answered.

"Petra? I won't infect her without her consent."

"Petra. Awake," Amara commanded loudly, not taking her eyes from Rik.

"What is this?" Rik asked, danger closing in on him. He scented the air. Nothing. Straining to hear, he could detect nothing more than the stirring of the woman from the next room.

"I come, mistress," Petra said groggily. Stumbling before them with a coy smile, she tipped her head to Amara in deference.

Amara cupped the back of the woman's neck and lifted Petra's hair. A small tattooed symbol hid at the edge of her hairline. He'd seen it the day he and Damien had both taken her but hadn't thought more of it. Seeing her bared neck now gave him conflicting drives of sex and hunger. The sound of her blood rushing beneath the surface of her fine skin fixated him for several seconds. *A taste, a small nip.*

"She is a familiar. Mine, to be precise. She will take the first injection as your human subject."

The note of finality in Amara's tone sank in. This had been planned all along. Petra being in the right place as his assistant, earning his trust to work in the lab, the sex, it had all been part of a bigger plot. A plot which involved Dr. Amara Gerard. Her offer to rule together sounded more like a death knell in his mind than a reward.

Danger. The smells, the sounds, the insistence of the wolf in him confused his judgment. Hunger warred with lust. Lust fought nausea. Logic competed with instinct

and the burning in his chest which heated his skin and caused him to sweat was the same burn which accelerated his breathing to a near pant.

Rik mentally shook himself, looking to latch on to logic and conversation. Amara was up to something. Ruthlessly, he pushed the wolf back. It whimpered behind the dominance of humanity but not for long. The change was upon him. Amara had a plan. He had to focus, pay attention.

She smiled knowingly as though sensing what he suspected.

Not wishing her to know for sure, he offered her a friendly smile. "What are we waiting for? Let's flash-freeze the sample and begin the injection round."

Amara took the sealed Petri dish to freezer three and slid it toward the back of the blast freezer. It would be ready in seconds. "We should use your changeling blood as the delivery serum."

Rik rolled up his sleeve and held out his arm. "Then draw."

For a moment, her eyes flashed red and her mouth parted as though she meant to bite him. Then as quickly as he saw it, the threat was gone. Calmly she collected the syringe from Petra who had moved about the lab with weak obedience.

Rik debated opening his mind to Damien but if he did, he knew Amara would catch the message too. His humanity was slipping. His judgment was becoming altered. He needed Damien's clearer mind to prevail but still he held off. Better to wait until he *had* to ask for help.

Amara wasn't gentle when she jabbed the needle in his arm. Rik restrained the howl clawing at his throat and the sudden urge to fling her across the room for causing him pain. Again, he searched for the human in himself and pushed the wolf back.

She seemed to take great pleasure in spilling as much of his blood from the wound as possible. With fangs extended, she watched as a rivulet trailed over his forearm and dripped thickly to the floor.

They collected three vials. Each one Amara handed off to Petra who put it in a test tube stand. When the last was labeled, Rik started to dab his arm with a paper towel only to find his skin had healed. It was one more sign that his change was nearing completion.

Hunger ripped at his gut. He wanted to feast. Without meaning to, he sent a message to Damien. Food.

Rik's hands shook as he removed the frozen zygote and took it to the slicer. Sweat dripped off his brow. He mopped at it, absently. Petra stood ready, taking the viral zygote shavings and bringing them to Amara.

Amara dropped several into a saline solution which she placed in the mixing tray. It held the tube upright while it vibrated wildly to homogenize the liquid and break the slices into the smallest possible particle. Then she extracted some of the solution and injected it into the first vial of Rik's blood. One last mix and the first dose was ready.



## **Chapter Ten**

Damien sat up. The wolfish growl of a grown animal on the hunt had been forceful enough to rattle through his mind, eclipsing all other thought. The demand for food had hit him so hard, it had made Damien's stomach rumble in sympathy and concern push through the irritation he felt at Rik for brushing him off.

So his pup was hungry, was he? Rik probably hadn't left the lab. Damien kicked off the sheets, unable to find sleep, anyway. He rose and dressed, grabbed his car keys and sunglasses. It was nearing nightfall and he would only have to weather the sunshine for a short while.

Arriving at the lab, with a bundle of fresh meat, Damien was surprised to see Lothar, Jaecar and Rinc waiting in the parking lot. Lothar nodded to him and Damien nodded back. But the exchange wasn't finished.

Lothar and his shadows loped toward him in their business suits. "Is that for me, vampire?"

Jaecar and Rinc laughed but Damien could see them beginning to drool.

"Why are you here, Lothar? I would think babysitting is beneath you," Damien responded.

A wry smile tipped Lothar's lips. "When the pup has royal blood in his veins and is my changeling who will join our kinds, babysitting is in order. There are too many who would see him harmed."

"And yet it has been surprisingly quiet," Damien countered.

"From your perspective perhaps but I have already silenced a few rogue outbreaks about your mate from my people. Vampires and werewolves have found many reasons to linger here these last few days. All are curious. None more than I."

"You are for the union?" Damien asked.

"Our people can only benefit from joining. Some don't agree. It will not be an easy adjustment. Go feed your mate. He will need his strength for the final stage."

Five cars slowly entered the parking lot behind Damien. They were silent and black with tinted windows. The ominous line of cars snaked toward the front entrance.

"The council is here," Damien said, more to himself than to Lothar.

"You should take care of Rik's appetite *now*. I suspect the time of reckoning about his identity has come. I will stall them," Lothar said in dark tones. He motioned to Jaecar and Rinc. Together they stepped back into the shadows.

Damien took off for the lab before the cars came to a stop. Whatever was about to happen did not bode well. The council did not convene outside the boardroom. As a member of the council himself, Damien should have been informed of the meeting. Which meant one thing. They were here to deal with him as much as they had convened to discuss Rik.

\* \* \* \* \*

Amara fisted the syringe. In a swift stabbing motion, she aimed at Petra's heart, embedding the needle deep into the woman's bared chest. Petra gasped. Tears streamed from her eyes and yet she kept her arms behind her back, offering herself to her mistress.

The plunger went down. Petra fell to her knees as Amara yanked back on the syringe, freeing it from her chest. The convulsions began immediately.

Petra screamed. Rik glanced around to make sure the door was shut. It was. The fire retardant walls and door would muffle the sound from any other lab techs working late who might stray to his wing. Rik watched the woman intently.

She curled into a fetal position. Beads of sweat popped up from her pores. Convulsions became deep muscle spasms, violently jerking and clenching every muscle on her body. Petra screamed again, her eyes and mouth wide. Fangs elongated from top

and bottom, canine except for the longer curved quality on her maxilla which resembled that of the vampires. Her eyes blazed silver, like molten lead or pools of mercury.

Petra's skin darkened. Her nose flattened, losing shape until she had little more than slits. Her central mouth stretched in the beginnings of a snout only to stop short of full formation, giving her a grid of strong, white, glistening teeth. She whined in high-pitched grunts and screeches, part in pain and part in fear.

"What the hell is that?" Damien roared, slamming the door behind him.

The scent of raw meat followed, catching not only Rik's attention but Petra's. She tried to crawl toward Damien on double-jointed arms and legs. She half slithered, half crawled but made little progress either way before collapsing in another round of tremors.

Rik snatched the bag from Damien and, in his own feral state, scarfed down the raw hamburger as he crouched to watch Petra transform.

While her skin didn't bubble or split, her muscles seemed to rearrange themselves before his eyes. Rik tried to concentrate as he licked his fingers and palms clean of blood. It was easier now that he'd fed. But Petra, in a state of exhaustion, had passed out and her body, completed in its transformation resembled nothing he'd ever seen before.

"What the hell did you do?" Damien asked again.

"I made a virus of conjoined races," Rik said on a werewolf-like rumble.

Petra's hair appeared more like a blonde mane which started on her head and trailed her naked spine. Her skin, tougher in appearance while remaining glowing and smooth, had darkened to brown leather. Her teeth, razor sharp, came together like a jagged saw blade with the exception of the four canine teeth which barely fit in her stretched maw. Her eyes were wide and spaced more to the side of her head, rather than the front, like a werewolf. And the telltale ridges seen on a feeding vampire made

angled blades of her cheekbones. Her ears were pointed but short and she had no chin to speak of.

In repose, her breathing rasped harshly in the still lab and her naked breasts shivered with each inhalation and exhalation, large round and erotically enticing in their sculpted protrusion.

The arms and legs appeared to be furrowed with musculature. Lean, long muscles dominated over the heavy musculature of a werewolf, yet there was no question of the power Petra possessed. Her claws on hands and feet had long, knifelike points.

Seconds after the last twitches of change left her, Petra's unconscious form began to shift back. Unlike the violence of her transformation before, her return to human state was quiet, peaceful, anticlimactic.

"It doesn't look vampire," Amara said in quiet awe.

"It doesn't look were, either," Damien said.

"Or human. It's all of them combined. Like a demon from hell," Rik said. "The demon virus, daemus." For the first time he questioned what he had done.

"Can she change back at will?" Amara asked.

"I don't know. When she wakes, we'll have to ask her," Rik said. "One thing I can tell you for sure, Petra, whatever she is now, is living tissue not necrotic."

"If it works on a vampire, we're saved," Amara said. She moved toward Petra whose human form had returned where she slumped by the lab table. Amara checked her pulse. "Her heartbeat is slow for a human."

"She seems to need blood. You drank from her hours ago and she went after Damien for the meat. Which reminds me." Rik stood and turned to Damien. "Thanks for dinner."

Damien looked away from the women. He seemed cautious, quiet. "Uh-huh."

"We need to talk, Damien."

Damien frowned. "That's never a good thing. It'll have to wait though. The council is outside. I think they're here to discuss us and your work. Lothar can only detain them for so long."

"Lothar's here too?"

"Yeah. He's in favor of an alliance between our nations."

"She's dead," Amara said, suddenly. "We'll have to remember not to feed too heavily on our test subjects next time. They will need blood after the change too."

Rik groaned with the distraction. "There will be no test subjects until we are sure. I told you not to inject her."

"*She* was willing."

"She was commanded," Rik argued.

Amara shrugged. She looked at the two remaining vials of the viral compound. "Who shall we infect next?"

"No one. Not until we work out the bugs," Rik insisted.

A flash of movement registered with Rik a moment too late. Amara raised her arm and stabbed Damien in the chest, sinking the plunger simultaneously.

"No!" Rik yelled, grabbing Damien to him as he fell. "It hasn't been tested. You could kill him!"

"Rik." Damien's eyes glowed brightly red for a moment and then went cold.

Rik leaped at Amara. He slammed into her, knocking her to the floor. The empty syringe rolled out of her hand.

"What have you done?" Rik yelled.

Amara's face morphed into ridges and hollows, vampire fangs extended out and her eyes glowed angrily red. Sinking her claws into his shirt, she grabbed him and threw him off her body. Rik had only a second to register that he'd been flung across the room, when his back slammed high on the wall before he slid to the floor.

A growl erupted from deep in his chest, vibrating the air and filling the space with menace.

Amara hissed. She crouched low with her clawlike nails curled before her. "Stay back, wolf," she warned.

"Yooooouuuuu killed mmmmy mmmmmmmate," Rik growled. Like Lothar, his voice rumbled over the hard consonants of human language.

"He's been honored to receive the virus," she whined.

Rik stalked her.

Amara retreated.

Several suited men and women entered the lab. Rik ignored them.

"Lothar," Rik bellowed in low decibels, counting on the were's keen hearing to penetrate the muffling properties of the lab.

"Dr. Gerard, have you completed the serum?" a nameless vampire asked, seeming not to care about their obvious animosity.

"Yes. It worked on the human and is being tested on Damien," she answered. Amara straightened, no longer showing fear for her imminent demise in the presence of other vampires. Her features softened, her teeth retracted most of the way but not completely. It was a telltale sign that she was still wary of Rik.

Amara skirted the lab table away from Rik to reach the others.

It pleased Rik to see Lothar and his pack-mates enter the lab as well. "Looks like we're all here. Witness her betrayal," Rik demanded, pointing to Damien lying on the floor.

"You tested it on a council member?" The question came out harsh and angry.

"I couldn't test it on Dr. Usher, he's a werewolf changeling." Amara grabbed up the last vial of the virus along with one of vampire DNA serum. She kept an eye on Lothar, holding the syringe before her like a crucifix.

Lothar snorted. "You threaten me, vamp?"

"Lower the vial, Dr. Gerard," a councilwoman commanded. "This meeting is convened in peace to see the fulfillment of the prophecy. You will not threaten our guests."

"He means to attack me," Amara said. She pointed an accusing finger at Rik.

Rik snarled.

"Stand down, pup," Lothar warned him. The Alpha took in the scene and leveled Amara with a grimace of his own. His lip hiked up to display his displeasure. "You attacked his mate. Did you think a were would allow you the liberty without a consequence?"

"He admits Damien is Dr. Usher's mate," Amara said excitedly. "Do you see the pestilence?"

"We have been informed and take no issue with the union. We should have been notified before vampire testing had begun." Another member of the council spoke from the rear of the group.

"It was unavoidable, sir," she whined. Her vampire traits were resurfacing physically in her skittish groveling before the council. Rik was disgusted by her spinelessness. "We had to determine the potency of the serum before the changeling is full-blood. We need his science, his humanity, the royalty of his were blood, before it is gone. After his change, he will not have the same urgency to work with the vampires for our benefit, nor the transition qualities we need in his DNA. No other changeling would suffice."

"He is royal blood?" roared another councilman.

"He is The Keeper! You should not have attacked his mate," Raith said.

Anger flared in her posture and her ridges smoothed as she grew confident enough in her argument to regain more of her human form. "With all due respect, councilman, The Keeper's work is finished here once we know if it turns a vampire. He will have served his purpose. *Then* we can test on him."

"Not true," Raith snarled. "The Keeper is set to rule both nations with his chosen mate."

"It is his changeling blood which made the experiment work on my familiar," Amara countered. "Not his destiny."

"Your dead familiar?" Lothar asked.

"She's dead for want of blood." Her gaze darted between the council and the pack.

"And Damien? How did he fall?" Raith asked.

"I am just as worthy as Dr. Usher. The changeling is no longer required." She tried to reason but the whine lingered as an undercurrent to her claim.

Rik's wolf struggled to get free and rip out Amara's throat. He held himself in check. Barely. He left the arguing to the others. Rik wanted to kill Amara for what she had done to Damien but he doubted either the council or the pack would allow it.

It was as Rik brushed the hair back from Damien's shoulder that he noticed the warmth of Damien's skin. It was flushed with color and turning darker as he watched.

Unlike the convulsions of the human test subject, Damien's change was almost undetectable in its sly reformation of color, then his features. Rik watched with hope, feeling a pulse kick to life in Damien's chest beneath his palm. The argument went on around Rik, undisturbed.

Amara continued her reasoning. "The prophecy says he will be the *Father* of both and will *lead* them to union through his magic. I assure you that Dr. Usher's sperm did father the virus and his discovery will encourage union. We will have no need for him. I will be your queen."

"What?" a councilwoman demanded.

"My work is as vital to the discovery as his and I am already a vampire," she said quickly. "His work is no more valuable than mine. I've been researching the cure to our imminent mortality for hundreds of years. There is one more vial of the virus and it is mine." Her words snapped with venom.



"He's changing," the councilwoman said, her voice hushed.

Rik could feel the attention of the room shift from Amara to Damien.

Damien's eyes opened, revealing pools of liquid silver. His fangs elongated and his mouth stretched into a stubbed muzzle with saw-like teeth, just as Petra's had. There were differences which favored the dominant traits of vampirism. Rik rationalized that Damien had been a vampire to begin with, he ought to retain the dominance of those traits. Petra had been a clean slate. What would it do to a werewolf?

"Council, I bring you a daemus, from the demon virus," Amara intoned proudly.

Damien snorted, snuffled like a wolf. Though his nose flattened, it did not reduce to slits and the ridges on his forehead and cheekbones remained pronounced. His lean lines of muscle took on hard edges and bulges, more common in the heavy musculature of a werewolf but maintained the sleek appearance of a stealthy vampire. The fangs, too, were more pronounced in the maxilla, yet longer and more curved than Petra's.

The traits were undeniably similar, yet Rik could see evidence that his former transitional persona was vampire.

"Damien?" he whispered.

"Rik," he hissed back.

The rumbling hiss of his voice filled Rik with primal fear to retreat. The other vampires must have experienced the same edge of dread as they each moved farther away.

"An abomination," one councilman declared.

Damien's human form slowly returned until he lay complacently blinking up at Rik.

"Not an abomination. Look at him. He's alive," Rik told them.

The room went silent as they listened to the sounds of breath, the musty scent of it entering and leaving his body, the weak pumping of blood in his veins. Damien needed

more blood, fast. With the little bit from his last meal, it wasn't enough to sustain the virus. Petra's body lay in testament to that truth.

Rik leaped to his feet and ran to refrigerator unit one which contained the blood bags. Pushing past Amara and the council members as he returned, Rik crouched over Damien. He pressed the first bag to Damien's lips.

Daemus fangs flashed out, nearly severing Rik's finger in the process as the virus took over Damien and demanded blood. One second his mouth had been the same sensuous curve of lips Rik craved and the next, a saw-toothed muzzle set in his human face. In the quest for blood, only that trait had returned to feed while the rest of Damien remained human in appearance.

He drank. Someone brought more bags until he had slaked his thirst with ten units. Having fed, his mouth regained its familiar shape. Life sizzled through Damien's silver-blue eyes, possessing a vibrancy Rik hadn't seen before.

"He's magnificent," Amara said. "He didn't have to transform completely."

"What happens to a were?" another councilwoman asked.

"We don't know yet," Rik answered.

"Success," Amara cried. The female vampire screeched a battle cry, piercing the air with a note so high and loud it momentarily stunned Rik and the other wolves. He shook his head against the ringing pain the cry had wrought upon his eardrums.

"What is the meaning of this?" a councilman demanded.

Rik heard the ruckus behind him. He turned, pressing close to Damien's now upright body. Instinct charged him to protect his mate as werewolves and vampires converged on the lab, breaking windows from the outside of the building to enter and spilling through the door. Night had come and where humans had clocked out for the day, the nocturnal world had awakened with the signal of a banshee.

The council members and Lothar's pack shifted into their alternate forms.

"Cease!" Raith ordered.

"They do not take orders from you now, councilman," Amara mocked.

Rik recognized Tarun as one of the vampires on the attack and several werewolves that scented of Lothar's pack. Neither the vampires nor the werewolves obeyed their leaders, choosing to follow the anarchy that Amara's defiance promised.

The low decibels of Lothar's growl instinctively prepared Rik for fight at his leader's command. From the fluctuating parabolic waves of sound, Rik detected at least three weres on the attack. His canines extended and his muscles charged for a fight. All hell had broken loose and with smug triumph, Amara leaped atop the lab table.

"Peace is overrated, you fools. Bow to your new queen or be killed," she called.

"You will not succeed, vamp," Lothar warned. He stood alone with only Jaecar and Rinc by his side. His Omega, Lovatt, joined the fray, moving to stand beside Amara. Without saying a word, the Omega's loyalty had transferred.

"Attack!" Her cry ripped through the din seconds before brother descended against brother in a quest for dominance.

Amara came for Rik. Damien snarled a high, whistling sound of legions behind him and came to his feet. Transformed from handsome lover to daemus, Damien was a terrifying sight which served to quicken the fear in Amara's eyes.

It was enough for Rik to swipe at her as he made a run for the vials of blood on the table. He rolled, barely missing the lethal dance of two werewolves while collecting the dropped syringe Amara had left.

She retreated from Damien, calling others to her aid. Fear rocketed through Rik for the life of his mate. Damien was surrounded and cornered against the wall. Rik filled the syringe as he ran, then raising his arm above his head, he stabbed Amara in the back, injecting her with the vial of Lothar's full werewolf blood.

Before his eyes she shriveled into a screaming heap at Damien's feet. Damien swiped his knifelike claws at a near wolf, disemboweling him instantly. Unfazed, Damien had only to turn his head to lock teeth on Tarun's neck. It ripped easily from

the vampire's body. With a single jerk of his head, Damien decapitated him and Tarun's fight was over.

Amara began to steam, crumbling in ash and flesh. The combatants stopped, now uncertain who their leader was and how to overcome the loss. Rik went to Damien, the vampire who was no more a vampire, and prayed his lover was still beneath the fierce exterior of leathered skin and razored teeth.

"Watch out," Damien warned.

Rik pivoted to take on his attacker.

Lovatt snatched the final syringe of viral daemus and injected himself. "We will fight again another day. Then you will know that I am your god," he roared.

Lovatt collapsed on the floor. His battle-scarred crew of vampires and werewolves lifted him and retreated from the lab in scampering haste.

In the aftermath, only six of the twelve council members remained along with Lothar, Rinc and Jaecar. Damien drooped against Rik in exhaustion. Carnage filled the lab with blood, intestines, crushed skulls and ripped-off arms and legs. The living panted for breath, having been bathed in the blood of battle.

"What is to be done now, Keeper?" Raith asked.

Lothar looked to Rik, the same question in his eyes.

"We make more serum and change those of us that remain," Rik said. "We are in the throes of battle, only we are three races, not two." With an authority he sensed the others bestowed on him, Rik straightened. Still man more than beast, he was their leader.

"Master," Raith said, stepping forward. "I have a large house in the hills. It is secured. I would be honored to offer it as a safehouse."

Rik nodded. "You and you." He pointed to two council members. "Stay with me, Rinc and Jaecar. I have supplies to collect. Council, do I have still have access to your funds?"

"Of course." The lead councilman bowed his head.

"We will rebuild the lab at the safehouse. Raith, take my mate and keep him safe until I come."

"Yes, master. Councilman Lefu knows where to go. He will stay here to direct you, if you wish it," Raith told him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Damien's head swam. The last thing he remembered was the show of deference given his mate after the battle. In all his years, he'd never seen weres and vamps join together for any purpose. Werens fighting werens and vampires fighting vampires was unnatural but Amara had managed to turn the natural order against itself. It was the start of the second prophecy on the tail of the first.

He rolled to his side, sliding easily in the black silk sheets. The dawning of a prophecy had brought with it an indeterminate hell. Where did it leave them? The vampires and werewolves had lived in cautious coexistence. The prophecy had altered centuries of animosity and shaken it together into a chaotic subsistence which had no foreseeable end.

The door to the luxurious bedchamber opened, revealing his mate. Had the prophecy changed them as well? Had their anger toward each other before the territorial skirmish cemented a pattern for their relationship, or was there still hope they could continue what they had started.

"You're awake," Rik said.

"I am," Damien answered, cautiously. Rik's mind was sealed to him. What was he thinking?

"Are you hungry? I'm having someone bring up food for you."

He walked toward the bed without haste. Damien looked for a sign of Rik's thoughts in his movements, his expression, anything to tell him what had transpired and what would transpire for their union. Not the union of their people, if Damien

could still claim a people, but his personal union with Rik. The only one that mattered to him anymore.

“Someone?” Damien asked. Never fearful before, he didn’t know why he balked on asking the real questions. *Do you still want me? Will you still take me? Can you ever love me, as I am?*

Rik reached his side. “Some of the familiars have recommitted their bonds of service and are here with us.”

Damien looked up at Rik from where he lay. Rik looked well, healthy, no longer ill or confused. His mate, who had begun this quest a man, emanated the power of someone who had seen many lifetimes. Confidence like his was not common among nightwalkers. Confidence like his was not seen at all in mortal man. It was royalty with a mantle of power and it drew Damien with a passion which excited him.

Rik’s breath, the scent of his sex, the steady thump of his heart, the heat from his body combined to seduce Damien. God, he wanted him. There was dominance in him, ease of motion, liquid sex appeal and Damien was far from immune.

“How many of us are there?” Damien asked.

“Six vampires, four werewolves and a daemus,” Rik answered softly.

“No changelings?” he asked.

“Not anymore. I’ve turned but not before I collected more changeling samples to freeze. It won’t last forever yet there are tests to run before I use it to change over,” Rik said.

“And the others?”

“A mixed band of renegades. Lovatt is believed to be alive, a daemus among his contingent of werewolves and vampires. Lawless.”

“And the virus? Is there still hope in reproducing it?” Damien asked.

“Yes. We can still save the vampire race.”

The daemus in him reacted to the heat from Rik's body, reveled in it, longed for it. Unbidden, his muscles shifted into the more economical lines of his alter ego. The aroma of arousal and something indefinable perfumed the air.

"Fuck. What is that scent?" Rik asked, looking dazed. "Is that you? Can you see yourself right now?"

Damien sat up and looked across the room to the mirror. The change in his body spoke of sex and power, provocation and he seemed to glow with health. Though his eyes had gone silver, they were warm and inviting.

"A sexual side effect?" Damien wondered aloud.

"You don't need scent to entice me. You never did."

"You rejected me once before," he said, thinking of the shower.

"I'm an idiot. At the time, I was a confused idiot," Rik said. He gave a self-deprecating laugh. "I can't imagine my life without you, Damien. Don't walk out on me again."

Damien reached out and grabbed Rik's arm, flinging him easily to the bed. Damien crawled over his mate, straddling his hips and discovering with a great deal of pleasure that Damien had been disrobed when brought to the chamber.

"Don't imagine it then," Damien growled, his voice changing in his excitement to the deep rumble Rik had heard in the lab. "Don't fucking tell me to get lost next time either."

"You gonna sit up there or ride me, daemus?"

Damien felt his pulse catch. It was a unique experience for him after all these years without one. The living, breathing werewolf, whose cock swelled beneath his ass, was another experience he knew he'd prize for a lifetime. He grinned at Rik.

"Shit, Damien, retract your fucking teeth. I can handle the vamp extensions but that bear-trap you call a mouth could kill a guy."

"You need to take the injection, mate. I'd hate to fuck you to death because I can't control myself."

"Yeah, I'll get right on that tomorrow."

Damien's expression turned serious. "This is just the beginning of the battle, isn't it?"

"Hell, if you don't want to fight, don't disagree with me so much," Rik teased.

"I told you, wolf. I'll never be your bitch."

Rik sobered. "The battle with the renegades is just beginning. Will you stand by my side? I don't want this destiny if you aren't in it."

Damien leaned down to kiss him. His lips were warm and soft and he kept his teeth well away from Rik. Black hair cascaded around their faces and shut out the rest of the room. It was just them. Just Rik, his mate, his wolf. It would always be Rik, he knew it to the core of his soul.

His lover's murmurs beneath him fired his blood and he grabbed Rik's wrists, holding them above his head. Damien slid down Rik's body. Using his thighs to part his lover's legs, he didn't give Rik any time to prepare. He shoved in hard and fast.

Rik threw back his head on a howl, his eyes tight and the cords in his neck fully extended. With Rik's mouth open, Damien watched the canines fully extend. Rik's eyes popped open, glowing green and fierce.

"Fuck, that hurts like hell!"

Damien laughed. "It's good, isn't it?"

"Hell, yeah but hurry up because when you're done, I'm gonna make you beg like a bitch."

"Wrong genus," Damien said. He grunted as he pulled out and slammed back in. Rik's head ground into the pillow. The force of Damien's thrust knocked their pelvises together, smacked their balls and vibrated up the length of his body. Did Rik feel it too?

"Yesssss," Rik hissed. "I feel it too."



Damien paused, stunned.

"Jeez, if you stop now, I'm gonna have blue balls." He wrapped his legs around Damien's waist and pulled him tight to his body.

Experimentally Damien thought of something else, being sure he made no attempt to send the image.

"Kittens with thongs? What the fuck?"

"Just checking," Damien answered. "I had heard that mated werewolves could read each other. Looks like we're officially joined."

"Not nearly joined enough," Rik panted. He arched his back and toppled Damien.

Rik wasn't strong enough to best Damien now. Damien easily rolled him back over though his cock sprang free. Just as well, he wanted Rik's ass in the air. He flipped his lover to his stomach and by wrapping his arm around Rik's waist, hauled his ass into the air. Knocking Rik's knees apart, Damien plunged back into his tight hole.

"Is it good for you, babe?" Damien mocked playfully, giving his ass a swat.

"Fuck...you," Rik panted. He gripped the silk bed sheets in an obvious effort to maintain his balance.

Damien had no intention of letting him succeed. Using every ounce of his new daemus strength, Damien rammed Rik's hole. He fought past the tight resistance of the sphincter to the point where Rik's body hugged the length of his cock selfishly, pulled out and rammed again.

Sweat began to drip off him and still he thrust the length of his thick cock into Rik. Rik had lost his balance long ago, depending on Damien to hold him upright as he got tirelessly fucked.

Rik began to moan. Damien wrapped his fist around Rik's straining cock and pulled. Their minds joined as their bodies climbed higher together. Their experiences became shared, making each other more and more aroused until finally they exploded together in continuous spurts of release.

Rik's arms were shaking. His legs wobbled. Damien pulled him against his chest and rolled to the side. Leisurely, he ran his free hand over Rik's chest, his cock, his balls, then back up to his jaw. He pulled Rik's head to the side and licked the column of his neck.

"My mate," Damien rumbled pleasantly.

"Fuck starting the tests tomorrow. I'm taking the damn shot tonight. My werewolf ass can't handle another possession like that."

Damien licked Rik's shoulder, the back of his neck and his ear.

"What the fuck is with the licking?"

"I don't know. You taste good."

"Must be a daemus thing. Hey, cut that out! You're going to give my ear a yeast infection. And your breath stinks."

"It would smell better if you let me suck you off next time," Damien teased.

"With that mug? You aren't coming near my cock with all those sharp fangs in your mouth."

"So you are agreeing to be my bitch for a while?" Damien asked, swiping his tongue along Rik's shoulder.

Already hard from Damien's playing, Rik rolled Damien. The sweat from their bodies and Rik's lubed cock from his recent orgasm aided him as he pushed his way inside Damien. "Not a chance. This time, mate, we make love."

As Rik began to stroke sure and strong inside him, Damien forgot to argue and reveled instead in his lover's unspoken words of commitment. Claimed. At last.

## **About the Author**

Mia makes her home in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she divides her time between a job and playing chauffeur to her children. Mia enjoys long walks in Como Park, daisies, dancing in the snow...(Delete prior sentence, meant for personal ad)...

Mr. Perfect may apply in person for a thorough evaluation and trial. All others will be towed.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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