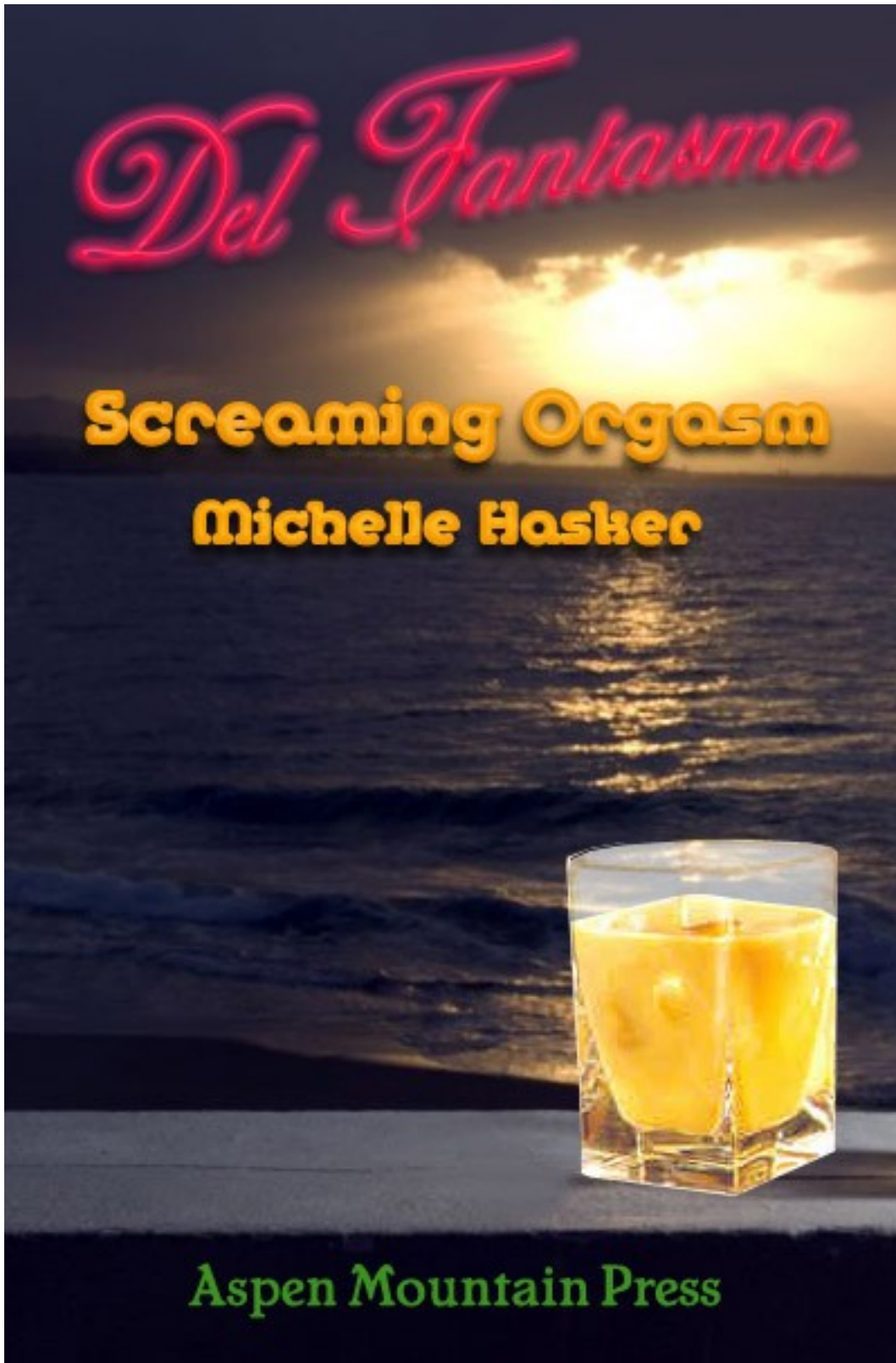


Michelle Hasker



**WARNING**

This e-Book contains sexually graphic scenes and adult language. Store your e-Books carefully where they cannot be accessed by underage readers.

Michelle Hasker

# Del Fantasma: Screaming Orgasm

Michelle Hasker

Aspen Mountain Press

# Del Fantasma: Screaming Orgasm

Del Fantasma: Screaming Orgasm  
Copyright © 2007 Michelle Hasker and Aspen Mountain Press

This e-Book is a work of fiction. While references may be made to actual places or events, the names, characters, incidents, and locations within are from the author's imagination and are not a resemblance to actual living or dead persons, businesses, or events. Any similarity is coincidental.

Aspen Mountain Press

PO Box 473543

Aurora CO 80047-3543

[www.AspenMountainPress.com](http://www.AspenMountainPress.com)

First published by Aspen Mountain Press, October 2007

[www.AspenMountainPress.com](http://www.AspenMountainPress.com)

This book is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution via any means is illegal and a violation of International Copyright Law, subject to criminal prosecution and upon conviction fines and / or imprisonment. The e-Book cannot be legally loaned or given to others. No part of this e-Book can be shared or reproduced without the express permission of the publisher.

ISBN: (10) 1-60168-066-X

ISBN: (13): 978-1-60168-066-2

Released in the United States of America

Editor: Nikita Gordyn

Cover artist: Nikita Gordyn

Michelle Hasker

## **Dedication**

Tina - thanks for being my inspiration. Jessica - thanks for the kick in the arse when I needed it.

## Chapter One

“Can I have a Screaming Orgasm, Cody?” Tara leaned against the mahogany counter and glanced around at the growing crowd.

“Sure thing, sweetheart. I get off about two, when do you want to get off?”

Tara choked on her own saliva. She’d set herself up for that one. Cody was a flirt, she knew that. She should be used to his flirtatious banter by now. She recovered quickly as he set the drink in front of her. “If I thought you’d take me up on the offer, handsome, I’d say every hour on the hour.”

“That’s what I love about you, Tara. Your comebacks. I’m going to miss you when you move on.”

“Yeah, well, you know. A rolling stone gathers no moss, or whatever.”

“Sweetheart, you’re no rolling stone.”

“Thanks.” Tara took a deep sip and enjoyed the way the vodka, Bailey’s and Kahlua hit the spot, numbing her, at least temporarily.

“I really do wish you’d let me set you up with someone. Trust me, Hon, a real screaming orgasm would do you wonders.”

“You know why I can’t.” Tara looked away and focused on the jukebox against the far wall. Those memories needed to stay buried. Remembering was too painful. There was nothing she could do about it now, but she could make sure she never hurt another person as she had hurt Chad.

Tara glanced back at Cody as he moved down the bar to serve his customers. He was a pleasure to watch. All hard, toned muscle, tanned skin and blue eyes that either

saw right through her, or made her want to melt into an orgasmic puddle at his feet.

When she had first come here, Cody had intimidated her, but now that she had gotten to know him very well, the incorrigible flirt had etched a spot in her heart forever. Too bad she really did need to get laid.

Even though Cody had his pick of women, love seemed to elude him like it did her. While he had no problems matching employees and friends, he had yet to find someone special for himself. Or her. Thank God—but it wasn't for lack of trying on his part. As much as Tara wanted to stay here at Del Fantasma with Cody looking out for her, she couldn't. Her job as a singer was temporary. Once she had enough funds she would move on. Again.

Perhaps she could convince Cody to follow through on his teasing offer to get her off. He knew what she was and could protect himself. But then what would happen to their friendship? He was the only person she'd ever met who wasn't frightened by her special ability. Not only wasn't he frightened, he seemed to embrace her uniqueness. She was no fool. Most of his customers were special and they all got the same treatment she did. Still, he made her feel human.

Many different types of people lived in Loma Vista. Vampires, Shapeshifters, and many others that were more than welcome here at Del Fantasma, but so far she'd not met anyone like herself.

"Don't let Cody get to you."

Tara turned to her left and looked up into eyes as dark as midnight. Vampire. She took an automatic step back as she took in his aristocratic features and full, kissable lips.

He frowned, his eyebrows drawing together as he studied her. "Sorry if I startled you."

"It's okay. I was just surprised I didn't sense you."

His eyebrows rose at her statement, and she couldn't help but wonder if he knew how expressive his face was. Or maybe she was just really good at reading people.

"Okay, sweetheart. Your turn to rock the house." Cody reached for her glass and

washed it as he looked back and forth between her and the vampire. "Long time no see, Chase."

Chase. Tara shivered as the vampire's gaze slid over her one last lingering time before he turned to Cody with a huge grin. "I should have known you wouldn't forget a fellow, mate."

As the house band switched to one of her numbers, she prayed the night would go by fast. The new vamp's interest in her made her uncomfortable. The vibes he gave off made her nervous and queasy. Good thing she had decided to move on.

The number the band picked was a slow love song, something she would have preferred to sing as a closing, and thinking about the new vampire wouldn't enable her to do the song justice. Cody was a much better man to focus her thoughts on. Or even Brandon. But she'd vowed to stop thinking of Brandon that way. The shifter wanted to get serious, and she didn't.

Finally she finished. Most of the patrons clapped as she made her way back to the bar.

"Great job, Tara." Cody smiled and handed her another drink. "This one is a Quick Fuck. I figured I owed you one since I didn't take you up on your offer."

"You don't know what you're missing."

"Oh, I think I do. But it's my loss." He laughed.

Tara laughed with him. The man was incorrigible. "Thanks. I really need one after that last song. That final note always takes a lot out of me." She took a healthy sip and glanced around the bar. Most of the patrons had left. Dawn was rapidly approaching, and many of the people in here wouldn't risk getting caught in the daylight.

"You okay, sweetheart?"

"I know I shouldn't drink while I'm singing, but sometimes I need it to dull everything."

"I understand. Let me know when you're done and I'll give you a Slow Screw."



Or perhaps a Slow Comfortable Screw up Against the Wall. I promise you'll love it."

"I bet you say that to all the ladies." She shook her head and laughed. Let him tease her, at least it gave her something to take her mind off the impending doom that weighed heavily upon her chest. Restless and eager to leave, Tara grabbed a tray and a rag and went to wipe down tables. The sooner everyone was gone, the sooner she could leave.

"You have a magnificent voice, Tara."

Even as she turned with a forced smile, she recognized the voice and wondered why this man was so interested in her. "Thanks. Chase, is it? One of Cody's friends?"

"Yes, and I'd like to be your friend, too."

A deep growl came from behind her as warm hands settled on her shoulders. "Hands off. She's mine."

Brandon. One of the regulars. A friend of Cody's, and a Were. If she had to guess, she'd say Werepanther, but since she'd never seen him change she wouldn't bet on it. But she would bet on him wanting to get in her pants. He'd dropped many hints over the past two months, some subtle and some not so much so. He was cute, but not her type. Who was she kidding? He was tall, dark and drop dead handsome...and the kind of guy who didn't do one-night stands.

It didn't matter what he did and didn't do. Chase gave off really bad vibes, and Brandon was a safe haven. One she planned to use tonight, even if it made her a tease—as long as it kept the vampire away from her.

Tara leaned back against him and felt him stiffen a second before he relaxed and pulled her closer.

"Sorry, I didn't know she was taken." Chase shrugged and turned back to the bar. She didn't like the way he kept them in his sight as Brandon led her over to an empty table.

"Are you okay, Tara? Did he hurt you?"

"No." Even as she denied it, she felt the vampire's gaze on her again, and wondered if Cody had told Chase what she was. No, he'd never betray her, not even to

a fellow vampire.

"Cody called and told me to get in here. He said there was going to be trouble and I'd better stake my claim on you before someone else did."

So Cody didn't trust Chase either. Was Brandon the one Cody kept trying to set her up with? He'd certainly pushed them together often enough in the past.

"Is that what you were doing?" She hadn't realized she'd raised her voice until a few heads turned their way. She lowered her voice and leaned close, ignoring the shiver that raced up her spine when Brandon covered her hands with his. This was another reason she avoided him like the plague. Desire. He sent her blood racing in a way that even Cody didn't.

"All the regulars know you're off limits, but the new guy doesn't."

"The new guy is a friend of Cody's. And you don't have to worry about me going out with him. Other than the fact he's a vampire, he's not my type."

"Do you even have a type?" When she opened her mouth, he waved his hand and cut her off before she could speak. "I'm sorry. I'm still angry because I came in and saw him trying to get you alone. I want to know if I need to go over there and kick his ass. What did he do to make you so nervous that you would turn to me for protection? You usually avoid me at all costs."

"I don't need protection." She tugged her hands free and put them on her lap. *Goddess, he's potent. My hands are tingling and all he did was touch them.*

"That's debatable. And right now you're stuck with me whether you like it or not."

"No, I'm not. I can get up and walk away from you right now."

"And then your friend will go right back to pursuing you."

Tara glanced over at Chase. Even though he made a show of talking to Cody and the others at the bar, she sensed his attention was directly on her. Why? What did he want? Her throat tightened and panic clenched her heart in a tight fist. *Does he know what I am?*

She didn't want any more deaths on her hands. She couldn't handle any more

guilt. Tara turned back to Brandon hoping he didn't call her on her weakness. "Okay. You win. Please get me out of here without any fuss."

When a group of young Shapeshifters walked past, Brandon tugged Tara to her feet, wrapped his arm around her waist, and followed the group outside.

As soon as they were seated in his convertible, he started the engine and turned to her. "What does that vampire want with you?"

"I really don't know. I'm not sure that I want to know either." Her stomach rolled even though Brandon left the parking lot slowly.

"Are you okay, Tara?"

"I'm fine. Stop worrying about me and concentrate on the road."

"You say he's a friend of Cody's, but if that's the case, why did he call me to come to your aid?"

"I don't know, Brandon. Can we just get somewhere safe and then discuss this?" Brandon had a bad effect on her. One that made her forget to maintain her shields. Hell, being near him made her want to drop a lot more than her pathetic shields.

He grumbled, but remained silent for the rest of the drive. Tara tried to ignore the way his muscles moved when he shifted gears and the way his scent filled the car, and her, with desire. The man was solid muscle, utterly divine, and way off limits.

"I'm taking you to my place. We'll call Cody from there and see what's going on."

Tara nodded. When he looked at her with quirked eyebrows, she wondered if he'd expected her to argue. Of course he did. Under normal circumstances she would have. But not tonight. Tonight she needed him.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon stared at the raven-haired beauty next to him while he sat at a red light. For months he'd been trying to get her to respond to him; months that he'd tried to get her to notice him as a potential mate and lover. And then tonight Cody called him with

a friendly warning, and by the time he got to the bar Tara had clung to him like he was a life preserver in torrential waters.

*Nothing wrong my ass.* He snorted.

“Green light.”

“Thanks.” He returned his eyes to the road, but couldn’t stop breathing in her intoxicating scent. Her blue eyes had flickered with desire earlier, and he’d had the barest taste of her honeyed scent before she’d remembered herself and closed up tighter than Fort Knox. If only she would give him a chance so he could make her forget about whatever man had hurt her so badly.

They pulled up outside his house. Concentrating on keeping his emotions in check, he asked, “This is just in case he followed us, okay? I’ll take you home when we’re sure it’s safe.”

At his words, she tensed, and the scent of her fear teased his senses. It both made him want to protect her and ravish her. The delicious scent made his inner beast struggle for release.

“Sweetheart?”

“I’m fine, Brandon. Just please, I need to unwind and sitting here speculating isn’t helping.”

“Okay then, inside for a glass of wine and a good movie. That way you don’t have to feel obligated to confide in me. What do you say?”

“Thanks.” Tara smiled.

Brandon quickly climbed out of the car and walked around to open her door. The woman had a million watt smile. When she turned that smile on others, he’d seen them melt. Now that he’d experienced it first hand, he didn’t blame the men he’d once thought of as simpering idiots.

He didn’t smell the vampire, but that didn’t mean anything. He could be downwind, or too far to scent. Not wanting to take a chance with Tara, he ushered her inside, locked the door, and enabled the security system guaranteed to keep everyone out, including paranormals.

When he turned to face her, she was looking out of the decorative windows on either side of the front door.

"I think you should tell me what's going on."

"I would if I could. I really don't know what's going on. All I know is that Chase seems to want me. Badly."

"That much is obvious. I want you badly too, sweetheart, but I don't scare you."

Tara grinned up at him, revealing a sexual desire she probably didn't want him to know about. She tapped her finger against his forehead. "But I know exactly what's in that mind of yours. You don't frighten me, Brandon."

Didn't frighten her? Hell, he frightened himself with his need of her. Before he realized he'd done it, he held her wrist in his grasp. Tara stared into his eyes for a minute before she gasped and jumped back, jerking her hand free.

"What? What did you see?" His heart leapt at the thought of her seeing the carnal thoughts that had run through his mind when she'd teased him. He hoped the rumors of her mind reading abilities were false.

"You give me too much credit. You shouldn't believe all the rumors you hear. It doesn't take a mind reader to know you want to get in my pants. It also doesn't take a genius to see that after a few drinks you become more obvious."

His cheeks reddened slightly. "That's not true. At least not totally, I want more than to get into your pants."

"I know that, too. And it isn't happening. I'm moving on. Didn't Cody tell you?"

"Cody keeps quiet about you. Every once in a while he has a pet project. You've been the latest. And you've lasted quite a while, too."

"Trust me. There's been nothing between me and Cody."

"Not for lack of trying on your part." This time it was her that blushed. But it was disappointing for him. He didn't want her attracted to Cody, he wanted her attracted to him.

"Do I get a tour of your house or are we going to stand here so you can speculate on if there really is something between me and Cody?"

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Brandon blushed as he stuttered the words. Damn. This woman could tie his tongue faster than even his mother.

“So I do get a tour?”

“Yes. This is obviously the foyer.”

“Obviously.”

As she looked around the room, Brandon realized she wanted a distraction. Chase had thrown her off balance and she hadn’t regained it yet. Perhaps she hoped the tour would distract him and give her time to re-center herself.

“Okay, then this is the hallway, and there’s the living room.” Brandon peeked into the room and flipped on the light switch. Before she could enter the room he moved across the hall. “This would be my formal sitting room, but as you can see I use it for an office and library.”

“So this is the whirlwind tour?” Tara laughed. “Can you get me a drink, Brandon? And if you don’t mind, I’ll just wander around myself.”

“Oh. Okay.” He turned away, hesitated and looked back. “I did it again, didn’t I?”

“What?”

“I seem to have a knack of making an ass of myself around you.”

“You try too hard, Brandon. Just fetch me a drink and let me have five minutes to clear my head, okay?”

“Okay.”

As he walked down the hall to the kitchen he wondered if she had used the word ‘fetch’ on purpose. As a Werecat it was instinctual to hate anything to do with dogs. If she knew he was a cat... But then, Tara kept to herself and hadn’t even confided her own ability to anyone. Anyone except Cody, that is, and he wasn’t telling.

“What do you want?” he yelled back up the hall, but didn’t get an answer.

“Hmm. She’s a singer and usually drinks water. But she wants to relax, so would she want something stronger? Then again, she’d does drink alcohol. I’ve seen her indulge a few times. Would alcohol make her relax or make things worse? What about milk?”

Five minutes later, he jumped when a hand landed on his shoulder. Damn. He'd been so absorbed in beverages that he hadn't heard or sensed her approach. He was slipping with age.

"Is there something wrong with the refrigerator?"

"Um, no. Why?" He stood up and closed the door.

"Because you've been talking to it for the last five minutes."

"I have?"

"Yes." Tara laughed and glanced around the kitchen. "You have a really beautiful house."

"Thanks. My sister and mother helped me decorate. Well, except for the bedroom. That is the one room I can claim as my own."

"Oh really?" her eyes widened and she tapped a finger on her chin. "Can I see this bedroom of yours? So I can see how it compares to the rest of the house, of course."

"Of course," he echoed. How sad was it that he wished she wanted him to take her to his bedroom for more than curiosity about his taste?

"I'll take some wine if you have any."

The sudden change in topic made his mind spin. *Oh yeah, her drink, moron.* "Sure. What kind do you want? I have a small selection in the basement."

"It doesn't matter. Surprise me."

Brandon studied Tara for a minute, but he couldn't figure out what she was thinking or how she was feeling. The woman kept herself wrapped tighter than a mummy. He tried to figure her out on the way to the basement and gave up. At random, he grabbed a bottle of wine and hurried back upstairs. She was humming to herself as she examined his plants.

"I just grabbed one, I hope that's okay."

"Sure. I just need to loosen up a little, relax from all the stress."

"I give a real mean massage. Or so I've been told."

Tara met his gaze and studied his face for a minute. "I think I'll pass. You and I both know you want more. It wouldn't stop with a massage. I'm just passing through,

and you..." She cleared her throat. "You, Brandon, play for keeps. Maybe when you were younger you played the field, but I haven't seen you with a woman since we met."

So, he was too obvious. He sighed and turned away to open the wine. It was too late to change the past now. Too late to undo the damage he'd caused with his pursuit of her. Obviously she thought he just wanted to get in her pants no matter the cost.

"You don't get it, Brandon."

He looked up quickly. "What?"

"I do like you, but you ask for too much. Friends, that I could have handled, but you want more than that. And I don't think you'd settle for lovers, either. You, my pussycat, have something more on your mind."

"I'll settle for whatever you're willing to give me." The words were out before he could stop them. He wanted to take them back, but swallowed his pride. Was he, or was he not an Alpha? "I want you, Tara."

"I know." She sighed and turned around to caress the leaves of his spider plant.

Gods, how he wished those hands would caress him. Reaching up for two wine glasses, he tried to block all thoughts of having her naked and writhing beneath him, and concentrated on pouring the drinks.

"What if I said that I was willing to have you anyway I can get you?" He handed her a glass.

"No, Brandon." Tara sighed as she accepted the glass. "You and I both know you aren't the type for a one night stand."

He stared into her blue eyes. Eyes that had seen too much.

"You said you're moving on, anyway."

Tara tilted her head and looked into his eyes. "I always thought you were an Alpha male. Why is it that with me you aren't?"

"I don't want to frighten you away." The confession left him vulnerable, but he knew Tara wouldn't tease him or hurt him. Well, only by rejecting him again.

"Perhaps if you acted true to yourself, and stopped trying to please me..."

Brandon studied her and tried to decide what she meant. Many things could be



inferred from that unfinished statement. She was right, though. It was difficult to pretend he was something he wasn't. It was even harder to be polite and friendly when all he really wanted to do was kiss her into submission.

"Are you sure you want to see my bedroom?" Brandon took a healthy swig from his glass. Hell, he needed something stronger than wine. He put his glass down and pulled out a bottle of whiskey. He poured a shot and downed it before pouring another.

"Brandon." Tara put her hand over the shot glass before he could pick it up again. "Stop."

He shook his head and grabbed the glass, drinking the whiskey down quickly. "Okay, let's go then." Brandon walked past her and down the hall. He didn't look to see if she was following. If she had the courage to walk into his bedroom and think nothing would happen, she was a lot more naïve than he thought.

## Chapter Two

Tara followed Brandon up the stairs. Her nerves were stretched taut from the sexual tension between the two of them. She really did understand why he continued his pursuit of her. She read far too much from him, and needed to learn to block him better. Even if she didn't want to.

As she followed him up the stairs, she thought again how beautiful his house was. It was obvious, even before he'd admitted it, that a female hand had assisted with the décor. But if his bedroom was the only spot he'd made his own, she wanted to see it. To see the real Brandon. The one he tried so hard to hide from her. The big strong Alpha cat.

Brandon's tight, firm ass teased her as he climbed the stairs. Everything about him turned her on. From his thick black hair to his brilliant green eyes to the muscles that rippled when he moved, and the way he stalked her like she was prey.

A shiver ran through her body as his emotions mixed with her own, making her wonder if maybe this wasn't a mistake. Her shields weren't working. Perhaps if she stayed in the doorway, as far from him as possible, she'd be okay.

Brandon led her down a dark hallway, past several doors before he finally stopped. He flipped on the light and stepped to the side. Tara tried not to touch him as she entered his bedroom.

The room was bold, decorated in mostly black. Shiny black surfaces gleamed under the soft lighting. A red and black striped comforter covered his bed. There were

matching pillows, shams, and accent pillows. A nightstand on either side of the bed held short lamps with red shades. His alarm clock sat on the left nightstand. If she ever did sleep with him, at least they wouldn't fight over which side of the bed they got.

A beautiful nightscape hung over the bed, and several smaller ones decorated the other walls.

"Beautiful artwork." She walked over to the bed and kneeled on it, staring at the star filled night sky. There was no signature on the painting. Not even an unreadable one. "Who's the artist?"

"You're looking at him."

"Are you serious?" Tara turned and looked at him. Yes, he was. She could sense his pride and honesty. He was one of the only men she'd ever met who'd never lied to her.

"Yes. You don't think I'm capable of something like that?"

"No! I mean I don't think that. I just never expected that you had a side of you like this." Tara blushed as she climbed off his bed and walked over to the far wall to look at another painting.

"It's not one I want people to see." He walked over and stood so close behind her that she could feel the heat emanating from his body.

"You don't want anyone to know how sensitive you are?" she asked as she turned her head and looked out of the corner of her eye at him.

He was blushing. The big strong Alpha cat was blushing. Tara grinned and turned to face him.

"What's so funny, Tara?"

"You are. You put on the big act of not being too Alpha, because you think I don't like Alphas."

"You've turned down every single Alpha who's asked you out. At least when I've been at the bar to witness it."

Tara shook her head. "Honey, they were so obvious, I can't believe you didn't see through them. They wanted one thing from me."

"I know that, but you have been much nicer to the Betas."

"Their egos are more fragile. You know that." Tara smiled and turned back to the painting.

His scent wrapped around her, making her light-headed and weak in the knees. If he didn't back off soon, she'd do something stupid. Like kiss him to see if he tasted and felt as good as she imagined.

This had been a huge mistake. Tara turned and headed for the hallway as fast as she could.

"Tara?"

She didn't slow down until she reached the hallway. Then she braced herself as she turned to look at him. "What?"

"Are you hungry? I have some leftover lasagna I can heat up."

"Mmm. I love lasagna. It always seems to taste better reheated, doesn't it?"

"Good, then I'll go heat it up." Brandon turned off the light and bumped into her. She stumbled, but before she could fall or right herself, he grabbed onto her shoulders and steadied her.

Tara gasped at the heat and desire that flowed from his hands into her. Unguarded and off balance, her shields slipped enough that she felt his emotions and absorbed them. Shit. Between the alcohol, her fear and desire, and almost falling, she'd done the last thing she'd ever wanted to do to Brandon. Feed on his emotions and energy.

She jerked back, against the wall and away from him. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed him shaking his hands. They would feel numb right now.

"I'm sorry." Tara turned and stumbled down the hall.

"Wait! What the hell did you do to me?"

"I didn't *mean* to do anything."

"It's like you sucked my very energy. Where I'd been really excited, now I just feel drained. You're a psychic vampire."

Tara froze and looked up at him. She knew she had a deer in the headlights look,

but no one had ever recognized what she was, not even after an inadvertent feeding. Well, no one other than Cody.

She couldn't have answered him even if she wanted to. Frozen in place by shock, she could do no more than stare at him with fear.

"Why are you so scared of me?"

Tara shook her head and realized she could move again. She turned and raced for the stairs. She had no idea how far they were from her place, but she could easily find a taxi.

Before she reached the top of the stairs Brandon tackled her and pinned her on the floor. Eyes closed, she focused on her shielding and keeping it in place. For some reason her shields liked to spring leaks. Perhaps it was because she was a failure in every aspect of her life and at everything she'd tried, including loving someone.

A sob escaped from her as she trembled under Brandon. Why didn't he get off of her? Wasn't he afraid she'd suck all of his life force and leave him an empty shell or worse?

"Tara?" Brandon's voice was gentle and soothing.

She bit her lip as more tears fell. Damn it. She'd never expected to get caught. What would Brandon do with her now that he knew what she was? Psi-vamps were one of the most feared types of vampires, and for a reason. If a vampire drained you within an inch of your life, you still had a chance with blood transfusions. If a psi-vamp got a hold of your essence, forget about it.

Brandon lifted off of her enough to roll her over. She had to avert her eyes rather than look at him. She needed to focus on her shields or she'd drain him. Maybe permanently.

"Look at me, baby." Brandon cupped her chin and forced her face toward his.

She still kept her eyes averted. Tara knew she could lose herself in those green eyes. When she looked into them, she saw things that frightened her.

"Tara, baby, look at me."

"I can't," she sobbed.

“Why not? I’m not going to hurt you.”

“I know that.” She sucked in a strangled breath and tried to move her head away. “But I might hurt you. Again.”

“Hurt me? Baby, you helped me. If you hadn’t drawn off some of that sexual tension, I might have jumped your bones before we even reached the kitchen.”

“Don’t joke about this.”

“I’m not joking. I’m dead serious.”

Her eyes flew to his face. “Don’t say that.”

“Why not?”

“I could kill you.”

“But you won’t.” He looked so positive of his statement, and of her, it made her heart pick up speed. What if he was right? Then an image of Chad popped in her head and she winced.

“I’ve killed before.”

Brandon drew in a deep breath and stared at her. “I’ve killed before, too.”

“That doesn’t make me feel better.” Tara looked away again.

“Baby, self defense is not the same as being a cold blooded killer. I’m sure you’ve never hunted a man down and killed him.”

“I’m sure you were following orders. Aren’t you ex-military?”

“I was talking about you.” He tugged her face until she met his gaze again. “I know you aren’t a cold blooded killer. You care too much.”

Tara swallowed and closed her eyes. “It wasn’t self defense.”

“If this bothers you so much, we don’t have to talk about it.”

Not talk about it after he’d tackled her and practically pried the words out of her somehow? Before she could respond, he rose and reached for her hands.

If he wasn’t going to force her to explain, then she wouldn’t. It wasn’t as if she really wanted him to know the truth anyway.

“Okay, time for some lasagna.”

“Maybe it would be better if you took me home.”

Brandon paused and looked at her. After a minute he sighed. "First you'll eat with me, then I'll take you home. That should be long enough for Chase to assume you're spending the night here if he followed us. And if he somehow found out where you live, he'll probably assume you aren't coming home. Either way, wait a little longer."

Tara sighed, but gave in. She didn't really want to take the chance of running into Chase again. Her apartment didn't have this kind of security system either.

"Okay. But only since you're going to feed me." No need to mention she didn't want to go home. And definitely no reason to tell him Chase scared her more than anything or anyone else she'd ever encountered.

\* \* \* \*

It took every ounce of his will power to keep from demanding answers as he led her back downstairs. The more he learned about her, the more curious he became. That she was an energy or psychic vampire meant nothing to him. She was a good, generous woman who always helped out people in need. He'd seen her on more than one occasion go out of her way for someone she had just met. There was no way he could ever be afraid of her.

"If it's any consolation, I wouldn't have pegged you as a psychic vampire."

"Psi-vamp."

"Sorry. I didn't realize. But I guess it's the same thing as someone calling me a kitty when I'm not."

"You aren't a Werecat?" Tara looked at him wide eyed.

"I am, but I'm definitely not a kitty."

"What are you? Will you shift for me?"

The interest in her eyes gave him pause. Tara was in a fragile state. She was vulnerable and he'd be an ass to take advantage of her in this situation. Brandon had to fight the compulsion to shift. If he did, he'd have even less chance of keeping his

distance from her. "Maybe after dinner."

"Oh." Tara looked disappointed, but he couldn't let it bother him.

"It's harder to control my animal instincts when I'm in my...cat form." He didn't want to tell her what he was yet. He wanted to see her surprise.

"You do understand now why I won't become intimate with you?"

"You've said repeatedly that I'm not your type and that you'll be moving on soon. I think I know when I've beaten something into the ground. You've got remarkable restraint, if you even desire me at all." He was baiting her. He could smell her desire, but wanted to see if she'd deny or acknowledge it.

"It doesn't matter if I want you or not, Brandon. I could never hurt you. And I would do a lot more than hurt you if we had sex."

"Make love. It would never be just sex with you."

Tara sighed. He knew he'd wear her down eventually. Maybe once she saw that he wasn't going to give up on her. On them.

"Maybe we should just fuck and get it over with. Then you can move on to finding a nice woman."

It was his turn to sigh as he reached for her. Tara stiffened, then relaxed and allowed him to take her hand in his.

"I understand, baby. But, you should realize I'm not an ordinary human. I have some skills to protect myself. I wasn't even thinking because it was you. I never thought to keep my shields up around you."

"I doubt your shields would be strong enough."

"You doubt a lot of things about me, Tara. I wish, just once, you'd give me a chance."

"I am leaving, Brandon. You know this. You already think you're in love with me. You're pretending to be something you aren't because you think it will please me." He went to argue, but she shook her head. "I know this isn't the real you." She tapped his forehead with her finger.

She wanted the real Brandon? Or she was saying she didn't want him—the real



Brandon or the one he'd been around her?

"You think you know what I want and need, when you really know nothing. Nothing at all."

Brandon stared at her. Did she really think that? He'd honestly thought he'd done a good job of hiding his Alpha-ness in an attempt to attract her. Earlier she'd mentioned not wanting a Beta. Perhaps it was his desire to make her come to him that kept him from his goal. That, and his own stupid hard-headedness.

"Fine. You want to know what I'm thinking?" His hands itched at his sides. He rubbed them on his thighs while he waited for her to answer.

"Yeah, why don't you tell me the truth. What's really going inside your mind, Brandon? Talk to me."

"I'll tell you, all right, but I have no intention of talking." Before he could rethink this plan of action, Brandon reached out and wrapped one hand around the base of her neck. His other hand rested on her side as he leaned close and brushed his lips against hers. "I want you, Tara. I want you anyway I can get you. Hard and fast, slow and gentle. I want it all. With you."

He sighed as she leaned into him and pressed her lips to his. Confident his shields would hold against hers, he walked her back against the wall and kissed her. A no holds barred kiss. Brandon pushed all of his love and hunger into that kiss. Maybe tonight would be his one chance in a million to convince her of his love and sincerity.

A long time bachelor, he'd never expected to fall this hard, this fast. It really had been love at first sight. At least for him. She'd erected a wall so high he never thought he'd be able to breach it. There was no way he'd waste this one chance. She didn't want Beta? He'd show her exactly what he was made of. No more pretense.

Brandon purred as he pressed his body against hers. He rubbed against her, enjoying the way she felt so soft and warm. Welcoming.

Her hands gripped his biceps. She melted, pressing tightly against him. The scent of her arousal deepened his purr and hardened his dick even more. How that was possible, he didn't know, but he needed her so much he felt physical pain.

An ache to possess her filled him. Brandon buried his fingers in her hair and kissed her harder. When she responded by moaning and pressing tighter against him, he ground his hips, thrusting his lower body against hers. Tara whimpered and lifted one leg to wrap around him.

Thank God for her skirt. He slid his hand up her thigh, under her skirt. Instead of going straight for what he wanted, he pushed her skirt up, exposing more of her creamy flesh. She broke the kiss with a gasp and tilted her head back. Brandon concentrated on the long smooth column of her neck. He licked, nibbled and kissed her, enjoying the goosebumps he felt appear on her thigh.

“Brandon.” His name was a breathy sigh. One he was sure she didn’t even notice.

He paused and studied her. Tara leaned against the wall; her head back, exposing her neck, her face flushed. Her eyes were closed and an expression of pleasure filled every feature on her expressive face.

Hunger rose in him swift and hard. With a growl, he kissed her again, fiercely this time. Tara responded the way he’d hoped. She thrust her pelvis into him, rubbing her underwear against the bulge in his pants.

Brandon pulled back to catch his breath. “I love you.”

“I know.” Her eyes fluttered open and she stared at him with undisguised desire.

“I am going to make love to you.”

She gave him a satisfied smile. “I know.”

“I won’t take any more excuses. I will— You mean...”

Tara nodded.

“You aren’t going home tonight.” He slid his hand closer to her heat. Her desire filled his senses making him so horny he could barely see straight. When his fingers found the damp material of her underwear, he fisted them in it and ripped the garment right off of her.

Her eyes widened and he gave her a predatory grin as he rubbed his thumb over her slick mound. She was smooth and baby soft. The sweet moans issuing from her

throat as he caressed her made it difficult to keep control. If this was going to be his one chance to have her, he was going to make the most of it. He was going to make sure she couldn't leave his bed after, even if she wanted to.

Brandon dropped to his knees and gazed at her. Her bare mound glistened with her desire. He licked his lips as he stared at her, trying to memorize this moment, her scent, and the way she panted, waiting for him to do something.

"Brandon?" her breath hitched when he blew across her mons.

"What?"

"I—Oh," she ended on a low moan as he put his hands on either side of her and moved his thumbs up over her folds.

"What, Tara?" He repeated the action; sliding his thumbs back down, then up again.

"I thought you were— God!" She tensed, her body tightening and trembling when he pressed against her clit.

When he pressed harder, more of her juices trickled down her folds, wetting his thumbs. Unable to wait, he dipped his head close and licked the length of her slit. Her legs quivered and her breathing quickened. Eager for more of her, he repeated the action. Whether it was because he was a cat shifter, or if it was a guy thing, he loved eating out a woman. He loved the smell, the taste, and feel of them. He loved being able to make them scream and writhe from his mouth alone. He doubted Tara ever screamed for anyone. But she would tonight.

"Bran?"

"Hmm?" He kept his gaze on her sex as he drew a lazy circle around her clit.

"You win. Take me upstairs and fuck me, please."

"Oh, I'm going to take you upstairs and fuck you. But I'm not done with what I'm doing." Tara wriggled against him impatiently. "I'm enjoying myself, but if what I'm doing isn't satisfactory..."

"It's good. I just want to feel you in me."

"You're trying to rush me into bed, baby, and I'm not going to be rushed."

Brandon pressed his mouth against her and slipped his tongue between her folds.

“Who’s rushing?” she gasped. Her hands fisted in his hair.

“Exactly,” he agreed without taking his mouth off her. He tasted her reaction to the vibrations from the word as her fluid drenched his tongue. Eager to have more, he spread her with his fingers and slipped two digits in her warm sheath. Her muscles contracted around him and her legs trembled.

Brandon pulled his fingers out and grabbed onto Tara’s thighs. He boosted her up so that her legs hung over his shoulders and she still leaned against the wall.

“No, Brandon, I’m too heavy.”

“Heavy?” he snorted and ignored her protest, burying his fingers in her again. He rubbed them against her, crooking them and pressing against her inner walls. When she gasped and tensed, more of her essence coated his fingers. Brandon grinned, rubbing his fingers against her sweet spot over and over again.

“Brandon. Please. Stop.” Her voice wavered as she protested. He hesitated for a moment. Was her protest genuine or was it a half-hearted attempt to get him to do something else?

He sucked her clit between his lips and teased it with his tongue. She clamped even harder on his digits. Her moan encouraged him and sent urgency through his body. He wanted her, but her pleasure would come first, and repeatedly, before he took his.

“Brandon!” Her fingers tightened painfully in his hair.

“Come for me, Tara. Come for me.”

Brandon worked his fingers fast and hard. Tara rocked against him, riding his face as her moans increased in volume and intensity.

“Brandon, my God! Please, stop!”

*Like hell!* He redoubled his efforts until he realized Tara had begun to cry. *Shit!*  
*What did I do wrong?*

## Chapter Three

"Tara? Baby, what's wrong?"

"Let me down, damn it!" Her body shook with desire and need, but she'd be damned before she orgasmed. No way in hell would she do anything to hurt Brandon.

"Tara? You have to tell me what's wrong."

"Let me down." She bit her lip trying to hold back the sobs. *God! So close to coming. I almost blew it.*

"No. Not until you tell me what's wrong. We're not moving from this spot until you tell me how I fucked up. How I hurt you."

"I just...I changed my mind. I'm sorry. I don't want to have sex with you."

"The way your body is clenching around my fingers says you were enjoying what I was doing. Your juices are covering my fingers and my face. I mean, I'd like to think I can tell when a woman is faking it, Tara. You were not faking it."

"I—" Tara broke off as she stared down at him. How could she lie when proof of her desire was on his face. On his face! God, what a mess!

"You really don't like this?" He crooked his fingers in her.

"Stop, Brandon."

"Or this?" He leaned forward and licked her from bottom to top while he wriggled his fingers inside her.

She gave a strangled cry and pushed against his head. Panting and trembling, she glared down at him. "Let me go you, jackass!"

“No. You still haven’t given me a reason.”

“You stupid, stubborn—”

“You can insult me all you want, Tara. I’m not letting you go until you tell me all.” Brandon moved his fingers again. He sat there looking up at her as he brushed back and forth against her sweet spot.

“Brandon!” She gasped and tried to push on his head again. “Let me down, you fucker!”

“Such harsh language from you, Tara. I never would have thought to hear you use such language. Tell me what’s bothering you so I can fix it. What did I do wrong? Was it this?” He pulled his fingers out.

Tara whimpered, and fought not to thrust her hips toward him.

“I’m not stupid or a jackass, but I am stubborn, Tara. I know you were enjoying this and I want to know the real reason you want me to stop. The fact that you are growing more and more upset only reaffirms that it’s not my actions that bothered you, but something else.”

“Why can’t you let me go? Why?” Tears flowed faster, blocking her vision of Brandon.

“I love you, Tara.” He tugged her legs free and rose as he pulled her against him.

“That just proves you’re stupid.”

“Perhaps you could tell me what is really bothering you. Whatever it is, you seem afraid to admit it.”

“Just accept the fact that I changed my mind. I don’t want to have sex with you, Brandon.”

“Make love.”

“Whatever.”

Brandon narrowed his eyes. Before she could guess his intent, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her through the house and up the stairs. He kept going until he reached his bedroom. Once in there, he carried her over to the bed and dropped her on it.

“Now talk to me.” He reached for the buckle on his belt.

Tara gasped and backpedaled on the bed. “I already told you no. You wouldn’t rape me, would you?”

“Rape you?” He snorted. “I doubt it.”

Brandon unbuckled the belt, and pulled it free from his pants. He took it in both hands and snapped it. She flinched. She couldn’t help it.

“You aren’t...won’t...”

“At a loss for words, Tara? Cat got your tongue? Let me check. Nope, I don’t have it.”

“You bastard.” Tara choked on laughter as she swatted at him. Then her eyes landed on the belt and her stomach jumped. “What are you doing?”

“I think I’m going to tie you to my bed, baby. Just until you tell me the truth.”

There was no way she could let him tie her. She couldn’t be helpless under anyone. “I don’t want to kill you.” As soon as she said it, she regretted it, but she couldn’t take back the words.

“Your secret is so important you’d have to kill me after you told me?” His eyebrows rose as he looked at her strangely.

“Oh hell.” She growled and shook her head. “You stupid ass. Are you purposely dense, or were you born that way?”

“Okay, that’s it.” Brandon crawled on the bed and had her hands wrapped in his belt and attached to the wrought iron headboard faster than she could blink.

“You must do this a lot.” *Damn!* The breathlessness of her voice was going to give away her desire.

Tara wriggled her legs and tried to bring them up under her.

“No, no, no.” Brandon laughed as he grabbed her ankles and dragged her legs back down.

In a short time he had her legs spread wide, her feet tied to the bottom of the bed. Had he bought the bed frame with this purpose in mind?

“Now tell me why you’d have to kill me.”

Tara shook her head and looked away from him.

“Tara.” The bed dipped when he sat down and she slid toward him as far as the restraints would allow. “Make this easy on both of us. Tell me what I did wrong. Tell me why your body says yes, but your mind says no.”

“My body does not say yes.”

Brandon chuckled. He leaned over her and slid his hand between her legs. He thrust three fingers deep inside her. She cried out and arched, pressing into his hand. He pumped his fingers in and out. She bit her lip and tried to resist moving, but it was a losing battle. Her hips moved of their own accord as his fingers stretched her. How long had it been since she’d had sex? How long had it been since she’d orgasmed during sex? Ten years. When she’d killed Chad.

“Your body not only says yes, it says please fuck me hard and fast, Brandon. And do it now!” He added another finger, and now she wasn’t sure how many he had in her.

She bucked against the restraints. “You’re cheating!”

“It’s the truth. Your body admits it. Why is it so hard for you to?” He pulled his hand away, and she sagged in relief.

“I don’t want to kill you,” she said in between sobs.

“I can keep at you all night, Tara. Tell me, why do you keep saying that?”

She drew in a deep breath. He was telling the truth. Her damn body betrayed her. If she didn’t tell him why they couldn’t make love he’d never leave her alone.

“I wouldn’t mean to kill you, but I would if we have sex. It’s my damn powers. I’d suck you dry.”

She couldn’t even look him in the eye as she confessed the truth. It would devastate him. He wanted her so badly she could smell it. His emotions tasted so delicious. More so than most others when she’d forgotten to block.

“But your shields... I have shields, too. What’s the problem?”

Tara hissed. He *would* make this as difficult as possible, wouldn’t he? “I can’t control my shields when I orgasm, you idiot. And then I’ll drain you. Suck you dry and



leave you dead.”

He flinched as she met his gaze, pushing her anger toward him, hoping he could sense it and would back up.

“That’s the death you mentioned earlier, isn’t it?”

“How nice. You’re intelligent when I’d rather you were dense.”

“Stop it, Tara. Stop this front. Stop trying to drive me away with your anger. At least I know you do have feelings for me. If you hated me you wouldn’t care so damn much.”

“I don’t care for you. I just don’t want another death on my conscience.”

Brandon snorted. “You know, I could understand if I was a simple human. Then you could be worried about killing me. I’m not. I’m definitely stronger mentally and physically. I can handle you, Miss Psychic Vampire.”

“Brandon.”

“What you’re really afraid of, Tara, is that you won’t want to leave once you’ve made love to me. You feel something for me and are hiding it. You’re hiding behind this man you accidentally killed, hiding behind your fear and supposed lack of control. I bet you were young and inexperienced. Hell, did you even *know* what you were when it happened?”

“Yes, I knew. But I couldn’t control it. You saw what happened upstairs when you caught me off guard. I fed off you.”

“You need to stop making excuses, Tara. I want you. I love you. And the threat of your loss of control doesn’t scare me. I have shields. In case you hadn’t noticed, you didn’t feed from me yet. I think you have better control than you give yourself credit for. Besides, if you feed from emotions, then I want you to feed from me. If you were a vampire I’d offer my blood. You feed off energy instead of blood...so I offer my energy.”

Tara groaned. “I prefer to feed from a group rather than individuals. It’s easier to keep from taking too much. And I get more from a feeding than if I were to feed one on one.”

“So that’s why you sing at Del Fantasma. And no one knows what you are?”

“No one except Cody.” She tensed and looked at Brandon. “And maybe his weird friend Chase.”

Brandon sat next to her and stroked her leg in slow, leisurely movements. “He was definitely interested in you in more than a healthy, casual manner. But I know Cody. He’d never tell anyone your secret.”

“Are you going to untie me now, Bran? Please?” She batted her eyelashes at him for good measure.

“Nope. I’m not done with you, baby. I am going to make love to you, and you will orgasm for me at least three times before the sun rises.”

“Three times?” Her voice cracked as she asked the question and she could feel the heat of her blush. The man was a braggart and a lunatic. “Are you deaf, or just dumb?”

“I heard you, and I tell you I’m strong enough. You can feed from me and I’ll still be able to function. I’m stronger than you think, Tara.”

“You’re impossible.”

“Why don’t you just give in?” He slid his hand up her thigh and ran his finger over her mons. “I love you. You know you love me. I can handle you. You need this, I need this. We’re two consenting adults.”

“You’re horny and thinking with the wrong head.”

“I can gag you, Tara. Would you like that?” His eyes pinned her in place, daring her to argue.

“You’re whacked.”

His hand rose with a silk scarf in it. Where had he gotten that? She opened her mouth to ask, but when she saw how serious he was, she clamped her mouth shut. He grinned and touched her lightly with the scarf, dragging it up and down her thighs.

“Hmmm. I should have taken off your clothes before I restrained you.”

Tara shifted uneasily on the bed at his hungry look. She wanted him. Probably as much as he wanted her. She didn’t want to kill him, but she didn’t want to stop him

either. For so long she'd worried about everyone around her. If people knew what she was, they'd fear her. And rightly so. But damn it, why couldn't she have been born a normal person? Why the Hell did she have to be one of the worst things that could happen to mankind?

"Tara, baby. What shall we do with your clothes?"

"Untie me and I'll show you."

He reached for the ties, but then hesitated. She saw a flash of fear cross his face before he quickly masked it. It didn't take a genius to realize he was afraid she'd run from him. Again.

"It's a wrap around skirt. It comes off real easily."

His eyes lit on her skirt. He reached for it and quickly had it open and tugged out from under her. Then he looked up again at her top.

"It's a halter top. Sometimes it gets hot in the bar. It's nice not to have sleeves, but I don't want to wear something that would risk slipping down either."

He continued to stare at her shirt.

"Behind my neck there is a snap."

He reached behind her neck and found the snap. He started to slide the top down, stopped and slid it up instead. Slowly, he pushed it over her breasts until they sprang free. She never wore a bra, preferred not to, and tonight she was glad for it.

"Brandon?" She gasped when he brushed his thumbs against her nipples, making the already stiff points harden and ache more. He repeated the action and she moaned. The man certainly knew how to touch a woman just the right way.

"It's time for you to learn something, Tara. The faster you accept this, the faster we can move on to the fun stuff."

She swallowed and looked up at him. "What?"

"When it comes to this," he gestured to her and the bed, "I am in control. I am in control of you, your pleasure, everything. You don't come unless I tell you to. You will address me as Master, and you will submit to my every desire."

As he spoke he leaned closer and closer until with his last word his mouth was a

breath's width away from hers. Eyes focused on his lips, she whimpered and tugged at the restraints. Since she'd decided to make love to him and allow him to make her orgasm, her body had gone into overdrive. If he didn't take her soon, she'd explode. She wanted an orgasm. She wanted it so bad she could taste it.

"I call no one Master." Tara tried to lean forward to brush her lips against his.

"Then you don't get me. I can untie you and take you home." Brandon pulled away.

When he took two more steps away from the bed, she whimpered and yanked on her arms. "Okay, okay."

"Okay, okay?" One eyebrow quirked at her in an irresistible manner. This man would be the death of her. Or himself.

It went against everything in her to submit to him, but damn, if it didn't turn her on. The fact that she would be completely and utterly at his mercy. From the way he'd eaten her out earlier, and his sensual torment of her during his *questioning*, she knew he'd treat her right. Although there'd probably be a lot of torturing involved.

"Master." It came out breathless and stilted, but the smile on his face made up for the torment of having to say it.

"Thank you, Tara." He slid his hands over her slowly. "I'm going to untie you, but then you'll let me retie you, won't you, baby?"

She nodded, barely containing her excitement. "I never thought you'd be this way."

Brandon's eyes narrowed at her words. "Did I give you permission to talk, baby?"

Heart in her throat, Tara held her breath as she shook her head. When he slapped her thigh, she jumped and quickly spoke. "N...no, Master."

"I think since this is your first time, I'll make an exception and not punish you. But we do need to list some rules." As he spoke, he untied her. Brandon gently rubbed her wrists before tossed his belt to the floor.

Tara listened to him. When the urge to talk came over her, as it often did, she bit

her lip to keep her silence. In no time, he had her free, her clothes off and in a pile on his floor. It was hardly fair that she lay here completely exposed while he was still fully dressed. Although there was something sensual about it, too.

It was on the tip of her tongue to comment that she didn't know kitties were into bondage, but then remembered they liked to play with their prey before they ate it. She definitely wanted him to play with her before he ate her. Out.

She giggled, then bit her lip when his head swiveled her way. He held up several scarves.

"What's so funny, Tara?"

She shook her head.

"Answer me when I ask you a question!" The predator in him slipped partially free, and she saw the first hint of aggression since she'd known him. It sent a shiver of excitement up her spine.

"Nothing!" She answered quickly. Did she really have to call him master? It seemed so degrading to her. The Master/Slave relationship.

He slapped her hard on the thigh again. "You forgot to address me as Master." As pain flared, and her thigh stung, she bit her lip. When he growled, she trembled, but not in fear. God, she wanted him.

"Sorry, Master."

"That's better." He ran his hand through her hair and made soothing noises. "I know how much you don't like losing control, but it's for the best. And I won't call you slave. I know that would really upset you."

Her eyes flew to his, but she knew not to question him. Not unless she wanted another painful slap on her thighs. There was absolutely *nothing* sexy about that.

"I don't have any sick fetishes. Other than wanting to tie you up and fuck you within an inch of your life."

Tara gasped as heat spread through her body as fast as wildfire.

"Yes, little slut. I'm going to make love to you until you are begging me for mercy. And even then I won't stop. By the end of tonight you will know who your

master truly is. And a lot more. Now roll over. Get on your stomach and spread your arms and legs.”

Tara couldn't stop the initial fear that spread through her, but she did fight it. If his goal had been to hurt her, he'd have done it when she'd been restrained earlier. Obediently, she moved in an x position, arms and legs spread to the corners of the bed.

On her stomach, she couldn't see what he was doing, and it made her want to see him even more. Finally, he moved into view. He took her wrist, kissed her hand, then tied the scarf to it and then attached the scarf to a loop in the headboard. So he had bought these with bondage in mind.

“I've never restrained another woman to my bed.”

She looked up at him. She wanted to ask if he could read her mind, but didn't relish another smack for disobeying him.

“No, I can't read your mind, but what you're thinking is obvious. I'm flattered that you're jealous. I've never brought another woman home. And since I met you there hasn't been any other women period.”

Her resistance melted under his heated gaze. His honesty was something she couldn't doubt. Not when she could feel his emotions so strongly. *Damn it! Shields, you crazy woman!*

“When we're done here, I have a few techniques I'd like to teach you about your shielding, and some ways to absorb energy without harming another person. By the time I'm done with you, you'll no longer fear yourself or your powers.”

Tara closed her eyes. If what he said was true, then her life could be so different. She opened her eyes and looked into his as he kissed her other hand, then restrained it the same way as the first.

Brandon moved around to her feet and tied them quickly and efficiently. Fortunately he hadn't kissed her feet like he had her hands. She was not into foot play of any kind.

She turned her head to look back at him and saw his gaze focused on her ass. She gasped as he licked his lips and nudged her legs further apart. Spread like this, there

was nothing she could do except lie there and take whatever he had to give her.

Tara moaned and tried to close her legs as more moisture leaked from her. If he didn't do something soon, she'd literally be quivering mass of nerves and desire.

"Don't try to hide from me, Tara. I find you beautiful and desirable. I just want to look at you before I enjoy you."

Tara buried her face in the blankets and groaned. She didn't need to worry about killing him because he was going to kill her.

When she looked back, Brandon sniffed the air. Suddenly she realized that as a Shapeshifter he would have an extraordinary sense of smell. Probably even greater night vision than anyone except a vampire, since cats liked to sleep all day and hunt all night.

He closed his eyes with a smile and moaned. Did her scent do that to him? When he opened his eyes, it was a pure predator that looked down at her. His eyes were no longer the same green color they usually were, but instead were dark, almost black bottomless pits of hunger. He crawled on the bed and straddled her legs. Before she could ask what he was doing, he smacked her ass. Hard.

"Actually, you can make noises. I like it. I just don't want you talking."

"Then why did you slap me?" she asked in between gasping breaths.

"I like the way your skin looks with my hand print on it."

Tara tensed, her breath caught in her throat at his husky admission. How much did he plan to hurt her?

"If I go too far, I want you to say Alcatraz."

"Alcatraz?"

"I was watching a special on it before Cody called. They never had an escape, you know."

"What does that have to do with spanking my ass?"

Brandon grinned. "I didn't give you permission to speak."

Tara groaned and buried her face in the blankets again. She braced for a stinging slap, but instead felt his hand rub over her bare sex. Before she could ask what he was

doing, a harsh slap landed on her ass. She yelped in surprise, then moaned as he caressed the spot he'd slapped while rubbing his fingers over her mons.

"I love you, Tara."

"I know." He slapped her again and she cried out.

"I didn't give you permission to talk."

*Shit!*

"Guess you don't have the hang of this yet."

Tara clenched her mouth shut. She'd keep her mouth shut and show him. He slapped her again, in the same spot. Sometimes he'd vary the spots he hit her, but not often.

"When I'm done with you, you'll be so pleasantly sore that you won't be able to sit without thinking of me. And you'll be begging for more."

Biting her lip, she focused on keeping her troublesome mouth closed.

"You look so pretty spread out here for my pleasure. Mine, to do with whatever I want."

Tara moaned and pushed into the hand stroking her nether lips.

"I really love how responsive you are. For a woman who's been so uptight every time I've seen you, bound and naked, you, my sweet, are in your element. You were born to be loved Tara. And I'm going to see to it that you are loved, and loved well."

She moaned and lifted into the hand caressing her ass. Brandon grew quiet as he soothed the burning areas. The relief was short lived, though. As soon as she relaxed under him, he slipped two fingers in her sheath. Tara moaned, and pressed into his hand as much as the restraints allowed. Which wasn't much.

"That's it, baby. Ride my fingers." He moved his fingers, thrusting them hard and fast. "Mmm. You are so damn wet. Do you like it when I talk dirty?"

Tara gasped as he crooked his fingers and rubbed against her g-spot. For a man who didn't want her to come until he told her to, he was doing his best to force her over the edge.

"Answer me, my little slut."



She gasped again, louder this time and tensed.

“That’s right.” He slapped her again. “You’re my little slut. Not for anyone else but me. For me you will cater to my every sexual whim. You will be my little slut and you’re going to love it.”

If he let her come right now she’d let him call her slave. Dear God, she wasn’t going to be able to hold it back. Not after finally releasing the tight rein she always held over her body.

He slapped her again and again, hard stinging slaps that heated her ass and sent sparks shooting to her core. She was dripping with desire. Why had she refused to be with this man before?

“Answer me, slut. You like it when I talk dirty, don’t you? You want me to tell you how I’m going to plunge my cock in your cunt and fuck you until you see stars. You want to hear every little detail about how I’m going to suck on your clit while you ride my fingers and come all over my hands and face, don’t you?”

“Yesss.” Tara stuttered. All her focus was on not coming. She’d read enough erotic romances. If she came before he said, then he’d punish her. Wait. Let him punish her. The spanking had already moved beyond pain and into pleasure. He had to know that from the way she tried to meet the slaps. That was probably why he’d stopped spanking her.

“Such a beautiful little slut. Do you know how many nights I’ve spent in this bed pleasuring myself while picturing you? Imagining what it would feel like to sink into your velvety sheath. What it would feel like to have you deep throat me? To suck me dry.”

Tara fisted her hands in the scarves. He wanted her to come. He wanted to punish her. Shouldn’t she just let him? It was what they both wanted.

Brandon pushed her legs further apart. He pulled his hands out of her and smeared her juices around. He spread them around her lips, then up to her rosette. He rubbed his finger over the spot, pressing on it, but not doing more than that.

Goosebumps covered her skin. Tara moaned, arching under him. Suddenly he

pulled away. A chill swept over her when she realized he wasn't on the bed anymore. Instincts said he hadn't left the room, but her paranoid self was afraid she'd disappointed him. Had he wanted her to come even though he'd told her not too?

Then he was back on the bed, kneeling between her thighs. He rubbed something cold against her mons.

"You are as restrained as I thought you'd be. I knew you could follow my instructions." Was that an edge of disappointment in his voice? "Let's see if you can keep it up, though."

Tara moaned. He planned to increase the torture. She'd never last. She was thoroughly primed and ready. *What is he waiting for?*

She felt the vibrations before she heard the buzzing. He had a mini vibrator. Her fists tightened around the scarves. It looked like he was determined to make her come so he could punish her. Why fight it?

"Remember, Tara. You can't come until I tell you to."

*Screw that. I'm coming. Just let me come. Then I can hold off on another one until you say so.*

The vibrator brushed against her clit. Tara bit into the blankets and tensed as the sensation brought her to the edge of orgasm. He rubbed it over her taut bundle of nerves.

"Dear God!" She gasped and rubbed against the vibrator. A hard slap on her ass made her buck and cry out.

"I didn't give you permission to talk, did I, little slut? My slut. You'll never refuse to spread these gorgeous legs for me again, will you?" He slid his hand up and down her stinging ass. He slapped her again. "I asked you a question, slut. Are you going to hesitate to spread these legs for me again?"

"No." Her voice quivered, but she didn't care how weak and vulnerable she sounded. She trusted Brandon completely. He loved her more than anyone else ever had. When she didn't even know herself, he did. And he knew what she needed. If she couldn't trust herself, at least she could trust him. He wouldn't let her hurt him.

“Good girl.” He slipped his fingers in her sheath again.

Tara gasped as her muscles contracted tight on his fingers.

“That’s it, baby. Work my fingers, ride ‘em like you’re going to ride my hard, thick cock in a few minutes. Ride—”

Tara didn’t even try to fight the orgasm. She let it crash over her and take her under. When she screamed his name, cutting him off, he crooked his fingers again, massaging her with those sinful fingers. Her orgasm went on and on, her body shuddering, her muscles spasming around his fingers, her cream coating his hand and the bed.

Even when his hand stilled and he shut off the vibrator, Brandon didn’t say anything as she rode out the final waves of her orgasm. When the last shudder ended, the silence grew loud and intimidating. Tempted as she was to speak, she remained silent. She’d disobeyed him, and now he’d punish her. She wriggled her ass waiting for the slap. The delicious sting that would quickly turn to pleasure and spread through her body with delicious wantonness.

“No. I won’t spank you. Your punishment will need to be more severe. I think you enjoy the spanking too much.”

Tara groaned into the bedding. Damn it! She’d wanted him to spank her. How sick was that? She who’d never submitted to a man before. A woman that would have kicked someone’s ass if they’d called her a slut, acted like Brandon’s own personal whore. And why? Because she loved him.

She loved him. How the hell had it happened? Over time? Over all the days when he wouldn’t take no for an answer? When he would bring her drinks and flowers and praise even after she tossed the flowers away. A sob caught in her throat as the realization of how mean she had been to him hit her. Even though she’d been trying to protect him, she’d still been a major bitch.

Not only had he kept his word, he’d never once changed his tune. He might have tied her up and spanked her, but she’d secretly wanted it. And she’d had an earth shattering orgasm that had gone on forever. All without her accidentally killing him.

“What’s your excuse, slut?”

Tears slipped down her cheeks. Her time for running was over. Why should she throw away the only good thing that had ever happened to her? Other paranormals lived and survived unscathed here in, and around, Vista Loma. She didn’t need to be any different.

“Tara?” His voice softened. “Look at me.”

She sniffled and shook her head, burying deeper in the sheets.

“Tara?” Brandon sighed. He leaned over her and pressed his cheek against her. “Baby, did I go too far? All you have to do is say the word and I’ll stop.”

She shook her head. How did she say that it was the realization that she loved him that made her cry harder than she ever had before? While he’d originally wanted her to submit, he’d gotten a lot more than he’d bargained for.

She didn’t realize Brandon had untied her until he rolled her on her side and tugged her into his arms.

“Talk to me, baby.”

Instead of answering, Tara shook her head and burrowed into his chest. His scent filled her nose and made her start crying all the harder. He smelled so good, and he was so good. He was too good. She didn’t deserve him. But she was weak and selfish. She didn’t want to give up on the only good thing to ever happen to her.

“I’m sorry.” He kissed her forehead and rubbed the back of her head. “I thought I knew what you needed. I was obviously mistaken. Can you forgive me, baby?”

His pain battered at her shields. Finally, she couldn’t take any more. “I don’t need to forgive you.” She looked up at him through her tears.

“But I’ve hurt you. I’m so sorry. I thought it was what you needed—to be fully free and enjoy an orgasm without worrying about repercussions. I did it for you. Really.”

“I know.” Tara leaned up and kissed him gently. When he would have deepened the kiss she pulled back. “There’s something I need to tell you.”

“You need to forgive me. I can’t stand knowing I hurt you, Tara.”

"You didn't hurt me." She cupped the side of his face and smiled through her tears. She sniffled, and smiled again as he brushed at her tears with his thumb.

"Then why are you crying?"

"Because I love you." She watched his eyes widen and the corners of his mouth lift.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"So I should have tied you up and spanked you two months ago?"

Tara laughed. "I don't think it would have worked then. I think you wore me down with the flowers and attention."

"God, baby, you scared me. I thought I hurt you." Brandon held her close, crushing her against his chest.

"Actually," she gasped and pushed against him, "you're hurting me now."

"Sorry!" he eased his grip and rubbed her back. "Sometimes I forget my own strength."

"Yeah, well, I might be a psychic vampire, but I'm not a vampire. I don't have superhuman strength. I can't fly. I just absorb emotions and energy. In fact, I doubt I have a longer than normal lifespan."

"That's okay. I love you as you are."

"But you're a shifter. Are you going to tell me you aren't going to outlive me?"

"We'll see. Cody might know the answer to your lifespan, and if things will work out for us."

"Perhaps. He does seem to know an awful lot for such a quiet, ordinary man."

"One whose pants you've been trying to get into for months."

Tara blushed. "It was only to distract myself from you."

Brandon snorted and shook his head. He rolled her on her back, pinning her underneath him. When he rubbed his head against her neck and chest, her heart melted. Then her mind started working overtime. Was this his way of claiming her? Would he mark her in other ways?

“You aren’t going to pee on me are you? Spray me to mark your territory?”

“I’m going to spray you all right. Mark you all up with my cum. When my scent is all over you, no one will ever doubt who you belong to.”

“Mark me with your cum, huh?” Her grin widened as he flushed.

“Well. You are going to let me take you, aren’t you?”

“You better believe it. I just don’t want you using me for a scratching post later.”

Brandon gave her an evil grin and lifted his hand. Her eyes widened as she watched his hand turn into a black paw. He unsheathed his claws and slid the back of his paw down her chest.

She shivered and swallowed as she looked up at him. “Black panther?”

He shook his head with a grin. “No, but you got the color right.”

“That much is obvious.” She blushed. “Um...Black jaguar?”

He nodded as he retracted his claws. His paw returned to a normal human hand.

“Well, we still haven’t made love, and I want you inside me, Brandon.” She slid her hands in his hair and cupped the sides of his face. “Buried deep inside me. I want you to come in me, Brandon. And on me and whatever else you need to do to make me yours.”

“I told you I’d make you orgasm three times before I took you.”

“I don’t care. I want you in me. Are you going to deny me after I’ve poured my heart out to you?”

“No.” He released her and climbed off the bed. He took his clothes off with such haste that she heard something rip. Brandon didn’t hesitate to see what he’d ruined. He finished removing his clothes and stood there looking down at her.

His eyes were doing their predator trick again. Shivers raced up her spine. Tara opened her arms and reached for him. She hoped she’d never get enough of him.

Brandon climbed on the bed and pulled her into his arms. She chuckled when she realized she’d been so mesmerized by his eyes that she hadn’t even looked at his body.

“What’s so funny? I’m trying to seduce you here, and you’re laughing.”

Tara blushed. "Well...your eyes do this weird thing when you're...excited. And I was so caught up in your eyes I didn't even check out your..." her eyes drifted down, "package."

"Well, please, be my guest. Check out my *package* all you want."

"There's plenty of time for that." Tara slid her hands between them and reached down. As her hands wrapped around him, her eyes widened. She leaned back and looked down. She blinked and swallowed. Had she ever seen a cock as long and thick as his? He was so thick. Would he fit comfortably?

"What's the matter, baby? You look nervous. I know you're not a virgin."

"I don't want to make your ego swell, but dayum. What a big cock you have."

"The better to fuck you with, baby."

She chuckled, but couldn't shake off all the nervousness. "I mean it. You're huge, Brandon. Huge."

"Trust me. I'll fit."

She looked down and ran her eyes over his ridged abdomen. God she was such a sucker for a gorgeous man. And boy was Brandon some good eye candy. He pumped his cock into her hands. She looked up and saw his eyes closed and head tilted back. On his face was an expression of such bliss she knew then that even if he tore her, she'd let him make love to her.

"Make love to me, Brandon."

His eyes flew open and he looked down at her. "When did you stop thinking of it as a quick fuck?"

Tara blushed. "That was one of the first things you spanked out of me. I don't doubt your love. I don't doubt my love for you. Now please, Brandon. Fuck me!"

"I want to taste you first." He crawled over her and slid down the bed.

"You already did that. Downstairs up against the wall."

"But you didn't orgasm. I want to taste your cream. And I want you to ride my face and come on me, Tara. Can you do that, baby?"

*Is he serious?* "Yeah, like that'll be such a hardship. I think I can force myself to

spread my legs and think of England.”

“That’s my girl.” Brandon chuckled as he slid his hands up her thighs.

“But you promise to take me hard and fast afterwards, right?”

“Yes, dear.” He sighed dramatically and winked.

Tara laughed as she spread her legs. Brandon purred as he buried his face in her sex. Unlike earlier, he didn’t take his time. He dove right in, his tongue sliding up and down her folds, then around her clit before he sucked on it. Then he nibbled on the hard bud, and pressed his mouth against her. His tongue slipped inside her while he spread her open with his fingers.

Sensations flooded her so fast she couldn’t catch her breath. His manipulations of her clit brought her to the edge of an orgasm instantly, but then he’d switched his attention and began licking her again. His tongue was not like a normal human’s tongue. It was harsher and felt oh so good when used in this manner. Tara fisted her hands in his hair and pressed against his mouth.

“That’s right, baby, ride my face.”

Tara groaned. Brandon slipped several fingers in her core and worked them while he moved his mouth back to her clit. When he scraped his teeth against it, she bucked and arched into him, her orgasm drowning her in intensity. Instead of pulling away, he continued to manipulate her with his mouth and fingers.

“Brandon!” She panted as her thighs trembled around his head. Juices dripped down her body, mixing with his saliva and pooling on the bed under her. And still she continued to come. “Sweet Jesus! Brandon. God!”

“Mmm.” He purred against her, vibrating her clit.

Tara arched off the bed screaming as electricity danced along her veins. Brandon twisted his fingers, working them harder and faster.

“Mercy, Brandon, mercy.”

He looked up at her while he thrust his fingers in her. “Are you sure you want me to stop?”

“Stop?” She gasped and hesitated when she noticed he had four fingers in her.



The man was stretching her, preparing her for his cock. He wanted her lubricated and stretched so it wouldn't hurt. Tears filled her eyes again.

"Did I hurt you?" He asked as he pulled his hand out and leaned back.

"No." Tara bit her lip. Her throat tightened and her heart swelled. If someone had ever said she would love someone this much, she'd have laughed at them. But Brandon wasn't just someone. He was hers and she loved him more than anything else.

"What's wrong then?" He slid his hands up and down her thighs.

"It just hit me how much you love me."

He froze and looked at her funny. "You didn't believe me any of the times I've proclaimed my love for you? But I thought you understood my true feelings for you. You still doubted me—"

"No!" she interrupted. "It's not that. It's just that I know how horny you are, and yet you are making sure I'm as prepared as I can be for you."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Exactly. Because you love me and put my pleasure before yours."

He chuckled. "I thought we already had this conversation, baby."

"We did, but it just hit me again."

Brandon shook his head. "May I continue then?"

"Please!" Tara relaxed on the bed and looked down at him. He took the hand that had been buried in her and smeared her juices all over his cock. When he finished, he wiped his hand on his chest. "What did you do that for?"

Brandon looked at her for a minute.

"Wiping my cum on your chest."

"I'm going to scent you. Don't you think I want your scent on me?"

"Okay, this is just weird."

"It's just cum. It washes off."

"I know."

"You're nervous. Don't be nervous. In fact, I don't have to cum on you. But I want to."

"I thought you said you didn't have any fetishes."

"I don't."

Tara giggled. "Do you hear yourself?"

Brandon growled and rose over her. "I'm done discussing this with you, little slut. You're going to take my big fat cock inside you and you're going to love it."

"Yes, Master." She snickered. Until she saw the gleam in his eyes.

Tara drew in a deep breath and braced herself for penetration.

"Relax, baby. I'm not going to hurt you."

Tara nodded and looked up into his eyes. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

She thought she saw a hint of tears in Brandon's eyes as he leaned down and kissed her. As he kissed her, his cock nudged against her wet sex, sliding against her. She moaned and arched under him.

"That's it, sweetheart." Brandon kissed his way down her neck and over to her breast. He sucked one pert nipple into his mouth while he squeezed her other breast with his hand.

Tara dug her fingers into his shoulders and hissed as he bit her nipple, then latched it with his tongue. She didn't even notice what he was doing with his cock until she felt him slip inside her sheath. Instead of pain or resistance, she just felt full as he slid all the way in until his balls pressed against her.

"Mmm." Her muscles tightened around him, squeezing him. "Damn."

"You okay?" he whispered, his voice husky.

Tara looked up at him and saw the strain from holding still in his arms and face.

"God, yes." She relaxed and squeezed her muscles.

"Baby, if you keep doing that I'm going to lose control."

"Bran, mmm. You feel so good." She wrapped her legs around him.

"I can't—" He began to move, thrusting into her hard and fast.

Her body shifted with each thrust as he filled her to bursting and then some. Brandon's thick cock rubbed against her sweet spot with each movement.

“Tara!” He grabbed her legs and pushed them up so he could fill her even further.

Tingles raced through her body, chased by a rash of goose bumps that broke out all over. She dug her fingers into his shoulders as she flew headlong into another orgasm. Brandon gave a hoarse shout and shook as he came.

Before he finished, he pulled out, cum dripping onto her stomach. Tara groaned and looked up at him. “Somehow I thought you *marking* me was going to be more than that.”

“Oh it will be. When I take you from behind.”

Tara shivered and collapsed on the bed. She untangled her legs and rested on the bed in an exhausted heap. As she stared up at Brandon, she realized she hadn’t thought about shielding once in the last hour or however long they’d been at it.

Brandon curled up behind her and tugged her into his arms. She closed her eyes and slipped into sleep peacefully for the first time in years.

## Chapter Four

Tara stretched and rolled. A strong arm wrapped around her and pulled her back. Brandon kissed her shoulder and sighed as he snuggled up against her back. For a minute, she relaxed against him and remembered the various events from the night before.

If it hadn't been for Cody's weird friend, Chase, she would never have given Brandon the opening he'd been waiting for. The opening he used last night to bring her back here. The thoughts that had been in that vampire's mind... Tara shivered. She couldn't read thoughts, but she could read emotions. And he'd not been feeling innocently toward her. Lust and greed had hit her with a ferocity that had made her head spin. If Brandon hadn't shown up when he had and offered her his protection... Tara shivered.

"Mmm. Mornin', baby." Brandon's husky voice sent another shiver through her, but this one from desire.

"Morning." She reached up and rubbed her palm over his hand.

"How are you feeling?"

Tara thought about it, and realized she felt better than she had in years. And Brandon was still alive, so either her shield work had improved, or he was really good at making his own. Either way, she wasn't sore and wanted to experience more of him.

"Good, actually. How are you feeling?" Tara turned in his arms and looked up at him as she draped her arm over his side and kissed his chin.

“Good.” Brandon tugged her even closer and kissed the top of her head.

She would have thought he’d answer more affirmatively than that given how hard he had pursued her. “Only good?” She slid her hands up his chest and tilted her head to look up at him.

“Better than words can describe? Baby, you’re the best thing that has ever happened to me. Am I not showing enough appreciation?”

Tara grinned and shook her head. “Not nearly enough. Perhaps this was all a ruse to get me in your bed. And now you’ll send me on my way –” She broke off with a gasp when he nudged his cock against her entrance.

“You want appreciation? I’ll give you appreciation.” He pushed her onto her stomach and slid his hands down her back. “You want it soft and slow or hard and fast.”

When she looked back Brandon grinned at her as he massaged her ass. “Surprise me.” She sighed and nestled into the blankets. It would certainly be satisfying whichever way he took her.

It was a pleasant surprise when Brandon began by massaging her shoulders. “Do you have to go in to work tonight or can you just call out? You’re not the main entertainment tonight, right?”

“I’m never the main entertainment. I prefer to stay out of that limelight, thank you.”

“Then why do you sing?”

“Because I can. Because it pays.”

Brandon massaged lower until his hands worked on her ass. She shrieked when he bit one cheek.

“Sorry, they’re so delectable I couldn’t resist.”

Tara giggled. She was screwed. So damn screwed, and it didn’t even matter. She’d found the place she could call home, and that was all there was to it.

“You’re so different today.”

“Keep massaging me like that and I’ll be any way you like.”

“That’s what I mean. Where’s your smart-ass attitude?”

Tara turned her head to look at him. “You want me to be smart-assed? You want constant put downs and snide remarks?”

“No.” He forced a laugh. “It’s just that I’m afraid this is like the calm before the storm.”

Tara sighed, and pushed up on her hands and knees. Before she could turn over, Brandon grabbed her hips.

“Woah! Where are you going?”

She laughed and looked back at him. “Let me go.” She wriggled her hips.

“Not if you’re going to wiggle like that. I’m not human, Tara. You can’t wiggle your ass in my face and expect me not to take it.”

She gasped and froze in mid wiggle. “My ass?”

“Oh yeah.” He smiled and he ran his hands over her curves. “But not right now. I have something else in mind.

“You’re such a pervert.”

He laughed and slapped her ass. “I think you said I was a freak last night.”

“I said a lot of things last night. Are you going to hold me accountable for all of them?” She peered at him through her eyelashes.

Brandon growled and tugged her up against him so her bottom rested against his abdomen. His erection pressed into the crack of her ass. She gasped with the sudden realization that she’d take him anyway he wanted her. In the ass, even. The man was a god in bed. He could definitely pleasure her no matter what he tried.

“I think that’s enough foreplay.”

“That was foreplay?” She gasped when he slapped her ass.

“I can see your spanking had no effect on you.”

“I guess I need another one.” She winked at him. “Master.”

His erection moved against her. Suddenly he pushed her forward, then pulled her back, impaling her with his shaft. Tara moaned and arched, pressing back into him, welcoming every thick inch of him.

Brandon leaned over her, pressing his hard body into hers. He leaned on one arm and reached around to cup her breast with his free hand. Sparks rushed from her breast throughout her body. Calloused fingers pinched and tugged on her nipple while he kissed and sucked on her neck. It was too much. The way he thrust his hips, filling her completely. His pubic hairs brushing against her as he pressed in deeply, then rubbed against her.

Tara arched her back and pushed back into him. His fingers pinched harder and tugged faster. Shivers raced up her spine and she clamped around him.

He kissed a path up her neck to her ear. "I love you," he breathed deeply in her ear.

"Bran!" She sobbed out his name as her body clenched tight.

"That's it, baby. Come for me."

Tara fisted her hands in the bed and ground back against him. His hand left her breast and slid over her stomach, down to her clit. With a sharp pinch, her world shattered. Tara screamed and collapsed on the bed as tremors ran through her body.

Instead of ending, though, her climax continued as Brandon slowly pulled out, and slammed back in. Again and again he repeated the action. Fisting her hands in the sheets, Tara moaned and tried to meet him, but her legs wouldn't cooperate.

"Tara!" Brandon grunted her name against her neck. She shivered as he licked her. God, he had a wicked tongue. But then his teeth sank onto the area where her neck and shoulder met and pain erupted, shrieking through her skull.

"Bran! Ow! Shit!" She sobbed and wriggled her body to get out from under him, but he clamped down harder, his cock ramming into her faster and harder. The pain faded almost as fast as it came. The burning sensation heated her body and triggered another orgasm.

Suddenly, he pulled out and came on her, his hot cum, soaking her back. She shivered and moaned as he rubbed his hands in it, smearing his cum all over her.

"What are you doing?" She couldn't help but giggle.

"I like seeing you covered in my cum."

She knew he'd wanted to mark her, but by biting her? When Brandon collapsed on top of her, he kissed her and licked at her shoulder.

"I can't believe you bit me."

"I couldn't help it, baby. The urge came on so strong, I just did it without thinking."

How could she be too mad? She'd enjoyed it. Not the initial bite, but what had come after had been so blissful she still couldn't feel her legs.

"Are you mad at me?"

"Mmm." She closed her eyes and snuggled deeper into the sheets. She could sleep for a week. At least.

"Tara?"

Unable to muster enough strength to answer him, she sighed. Brandon wiped her back with something soft and soothing. She could live with him. Hell, she'd even let him eat crackers in bed.

\* \* \* \*

Brandon sighed in disgust as he kneeled on the bed. Perhaps taking her from behind had been a bad idea. He'd been warned that his kind didn't mate well with humans. By biting her and claiming her, he'd left her no choice in the matter.

*What the fuck was I thinking?*

Tara looked so beautiful and serene in sleep. Her control over her powers had doubled the minute she'd stopped trying to keep a death grip on them. She admitted her love for him, and for the first time since he'd known her, she'd dropped her sarcastic edge. One she still used even on Cody. There was no doubt about it, she was his. Why the hell did he have to bite her?

*Because you're an animal and can't control yourself.*

When she woke, she'd want to prepare for work. There was no way she was going back to Del Fantasma alone. Not with that *friend* of Cody's hanging around.



*Friend my ass. I bet that's just Cody's way of being polite. He certainly hadn't wanted his friend to get a chance to make a move on Tara.*

One quick phone call and he'd find out everything he needed to know. With one last longing glance at Tara, he climbed out of bed, grabbed his cell phone from his pants pocket and walked out into the hall as he dialed Cody.

So he didn't wake Tara, Brandon went downstairs and into the kitchen to make breakfast. He glanced at the time on his phone. Three in the afternoon was a little late to call their meal breakfast, but he wanted to spoil Tara. He had a suspicion she was used to fending for herself, even as a child.

Fortunately Cody answered the phone. Brandon didn't know what he'd have done if he'd gotten voice mail.

"Hi, Cody. It's Brandon."

"I thought I'd be hearing from you today."

"Why is that?" Brandon wanted to know what Cody wasn't saying. "Is your friend still around?"

"Unfortunately, yes. And he's not a friend."

"Really, that's not what Tara and I were led to believe. What's his interest in her?" Brandon waited, but Cody didn't speak. "Please, Cody. You called me last night, which I will be forever grateful for –"

"Will you now?" Cody interrupted. "I had a feeling she'd be grateful for you last night. The one night she wouldn't be giving you the cold shoulder."

Brandon sighed. "Yeah she can be quite...exasperating at times."

"And you want to know if you need to be worried about Chase?"

"Yeah. What's he want with her?"

"I don't know and he's not likely to tell me. Chase is more like one of those friends you keep in touch with because you don't trust them. You know the old saying."

"Yeah. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

"Exactly."

“Okay, thanks for nothing then, I guess.” Brandon remembered their question about Tara’s life span. “Oh wait!”

“I’m still here.”

“Well.” Brandon ran his hand through his hair. “Oh hell, I’ll just say it. What are the chances that Tara would live a longer than normal lifespan?”

“How long?”

“Say...as long as mine.”

Cody chuckled. “You know more about Werocats than me, Brandon.”

“So you don’t know much about psychic vampires, either, do you?”

“She clued you in on that, huh?”

“Trust me, she didn’t mean to.”

“I’m sorry, Brandon. I don’t think I’ll be much help to you in that department. Let me know once things are worked out between the two of you, maybe by then I’ll know more. I didn’t expect to have this discussion with you for a few days at least.”

“No. She feels the same way I do. I don’t know why, but she’s not fighting it or me. At least not now.”

“You’re a lucky man, Brandon.”

“I know, Cody. I know.” Brandon sighed and looked toward the stairs. He didn’t hear anything, but that didn’t mean she hadn’t woken and jumped in the shower.

“She’s afraid of your man, Chase.”

“She should be. He’s not got one pleasant thought in that head of his.”

“I thought you couldn’t read him.”

“I can’t, but I know him very well. Too well. We were both soldiers overseas. He didn’t fare as well as me.”

“I’ve taken up enough of your time. I’m not happy about this, but I’m sure Tara will want to come in tonight. Can you bring in an extra bouncer or two?”

“Why don’t you come on in and we’ll make sure you get a good seat tonight. Nothing will happen to her in my club.”

“Thanks, Cody.”

"Take care of her, Brandon. She's one of a kind."

"You don't have to tell me that." Brandon couldn't get past the sick feeling that something bad was going to happen. Not even to feel jealous that Cody cared enough about Tara to warn him.

Brandon disconnected and put his phone on the counter. Cody's words replayed in his mind and he couldn't shake the feeling of impending doom as he made breakfast. Even when Tara joined him in the kitchen, he had to force a smile.

"Bran. Please don't try and fool me. At least not when it comes to your emotions. I know something is bothering you. I have a feeling it's the same thing bothering me, but I have to go in to work tonight."

"Cody could get someone to take your place. You know he could."

"Please, Bran. I need to go in to work tonight."

"No you don't. I make enough for the both of us to live on."

"It's not the money. I have a job and I can't just bag it."

"But what if you were sick?"

"Then I'd still have to go in tomorrow. Why put it off?"

"Because I don't like this Chase. I know he's up to something."

"We *all* know that, so we'll be prepared for him. Tonight, tomorrow night, the next night. It doesn't matter. He might even realize you and I are a happy couple and find someone else to think evil thoughts about."

His heart raced at her words. He knew she loved him, but to hear her talk this way reassured him like nothing else. "Are we?"

"Are we what?"

"A happy couple?"

Tara grinned. "I think so. I know I'll be even happier if you take a shower with me when we're done eating."

Brandon almost dropped the spatula in his haste to scoop eggs out of the pan. "You got it, baby."

"Good." Tara winked and took the spatula from him. "I'll finish this up. I think

you're burning our toast."

"Oh shit!" Brandon released the spatula. "I don't know how you can burn toast."

"If you didn't accidentally turn the dial up to a high setting, you might have it on bagel."

"Duh." He smacked his forehead. He'd had a bagel for a snack yesterday. "Okay. Let's eat then shower," he waggled his eyebrows, "and go see if your ardent admirer gets the hint he's not wanted."

"Thank you. We don't really know what he wants. He can ogle me all he wants, I'm still yours."

"There will be no ogling of you while I'm around. Or if I'm not around."

Tara laughed. "Breakfast first, then shower."

"I can tell you're going to be a slave driver."

She winked and carried both plates to the table. "You don't know the half of it."

## Chapter Five

Tara smoothed her skirt and looked around the front of the bar. Del Fantasma wouldn't be crowded yet. It wouldn't be until late that the place would fill with non-human patrons.

She rubbed the back of her neck and frowned. It was hard to believe Brandon bit her. But he had said he wanted to mark her. She'd assumed he'd meant a hickey. Perhaps she should bite him back. Tonight.

"Break a leg, baby."

Tara smiled at Brandon and walked to over to the microphone. Of course they would open with a love song. She looked over at Brandon and winked. By the time she finished the first song, Chase still hadn't appeared. Perhaps he'd just been passing through and thought she'd be up for an evening of fun.

The band launched into another song, this one more upbeat and jazzy. Tara tried to ignore the heated looks and desire radiating off of Brendan. He wanted her to call it a night early and go home with him, but she wasn't about to leave Cody and the others in a lurch. She'd been contracted to perform and she'd perform.

After the third song, she took a break, waved to the crowded room, and threaded her way through the throng to the bar. She arrived in time to hear Cody and Brandon.

"I told you she'd be safe here. There are too many people around for Chase to start something, even if he wanted to."

"What a nice topic of conversation." Tara crossed her arms and glared at

Brandon. "We discussed this already."

"Some things need to be re-discussed at opportune times with others. I wanted Cody's take on your decision to come in to work."

Tara rubbed the back of her neck. What could she say to make him feel better? Even without Chase here, Brandon was still tense. He was jealous, and she liked it. "Well, I'm here now and nothing is wrong."

Brandon grunted, but refused to give in. Then she noticed both bar stools next to him were occupied and resumed glaring at him. "I thought you were going to save me a seat."

"I did." He laughed and pulled her into his lap. "Right here. Best seat in the house."

"Kind of uncomfortable." She wriggled around, trying to maximize the rubbing of her ass against his erection. "Feels like I'm sitting on a rock."

"You're not helping matters, baby." His husky whisper sent a shiver up her spine.

"A Screaming Orgasm?" Cody asked with one eyebrow raised.

"Not tonight. I think water would be better, if you don't mind."

"Are you feeling okay?" Brandon wrapped his arms around her and leaned his head against her shoulder.

"Not really."

"You must really be sick to admit it that easily." Brandon put a hand on her forehead. "You feel a little feverish. Do you feel nauseous? Have a headache?"

She hesitated. She had assumed the headache and upset stomach were from nerves. Maybe she was sick.

"When did you start feeling ill?"

"Maybe an hour ago? But I was fine before that. It'll pass, its just nerves. I'll be okay."

"Cody, can you manage without Tara for the rest of the night?"

"No! I'm not going home. I have work to do."

“Sweetheart, I can see from all the way over here that you aren’t feeling well. Go on, take the night off. Perhaps another Screaming Orgasm from Brandon and you’ll feel right as rain again.” Cody pushed the glass of water toward her.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

He winked and resumed cleaning glasses. “It’s your call, but make it quick. I have a feeling the matter will be out of your hands soon.”

“Damn straight!” Brandon growled. “Working because she is stubborn is one thing, but to work when she’s sick is another.”

Cody’s knowledge of her *Screaming Orgasm* from Brandon gave her pause. He had hinted she needed the real thing, and he’d been right. Of course he’d been right to push her toward Brandon too. She really didn’t feel well.

She rubbed her neck again, wondering why she suddenly felt so light headed. The urge to throw up soon overwhelmed her. “I need to use the bathroom. I’ll be right back and then we can go. Okay?”

Brandon glanced around the bar before nodding. “Okay. I haven’t seen Chase tonight. Perhaps he’s found a new chick to stalk.”

“Hitting on me and being creepy doesn’t make him a stalker.”

“Go to the bathroom, baby. We can discuss this at home. In bed.”

Tara shook her head and immediately regretted it. “Be right back.” She put a hand up to her mouth and hurried through the crowd to the bathroom.

The room was empty. She walked over to the sink and washed her face with cold water. The cold helped ease some of the heat engulfing her, but the pain and itchiness of her neck hadn’t lessened. Had she gotten an infection from the bite?

Getting out of here and going home or to Brandon’s was the best thing for her right now. Tara turned, and swayed. She reached out and grabbed onto the countertop. Closing her eyes, she drew in deep breaths. Once she steadied herself, she opened her eyes and let go of the counter. She took a step forward and swayed again. This time someone was there to catch her. She turned her head to thank the person and choked on her own words when she recognized Chase.

She opened her mouth to say something, but everything got fuzzy. Emotions flooded from him so strong that she felt bombarded. Lust was the most prominent. He wanted her and he wanted her power.

Before she could cry out, his hand covered her mouth. When he pulled his hand away, she still couldn't cry out. What kind of powers did he have?

Chase dragged her over to the door with barely any effort. Damn the vampire. Why did he have to have superhuman strength and magic powers?

He shoved her through the door and half pulled, half dragged her out into the parking lot. They made it about ten feet when the door slammed open behind them.

"Get your hands off my woman!"

Brandon's voice sent a shiver of relief through her. He'd save her. The knowledge that she couldn't even save herself worried her, but Brandon was a Were. He should be able to defeat a vampire.

"I don't think so." Chase's fingers dug into her arms, making her cry out in pain.

"Let her go and I'll consider not tearing your throat out."

"Not a chance. You might have marked her, but she wasn't marked last night. Your claim will fade fast. Hell, it's already fading. You couldn't have done a very good job of claiming her." Chase grabbed her hair and tugged her head back. He posed his fangs over her neck. "See how she doesn't try to fight me? See how she isn't struggling to break free and run to you? Women like power. And I have more than you could ever dream of kitty cat."

Tara tried to cry out. She tried to shout to Brandon that she couldn't move or speak. Damn the vampire for having control over her like this. Damn her for being so weak.

"I know about vampires, Chase. I know how you can compel another person to do your bidding."

"Just chalk her up to the one who got away and go back to your milk."

"There are a lot of women out there who'd go with you willingly, why not just release Tara and find one that is more agreeable?"



She admired Brandon for trying to use logic, but wanted to smack him. The vampire had more than sex on his mind.

Chase laughed. "It's not her body I want."

"Then what—" Brandon clamped his mouth shut.

"Now you're starting to use your head. I want her powers. I'll have them with her cooperation or without."

"You want her for her powers? To use her for your own gain? It won't work, you know. She's no good to you dead, and she'll never be willing to let you use her."

"Like she has a choice in the matter." Chase laughed again.

Tara shuddered. If only she could get free. Brandon wouldn't attack Chase as long as he held her in front of him like a shield and the vampire knew it.

"She has a choice. Tara is strong. She would never allow you to use her. How long will you be able to keep her under control? How far can you be from her before she'll be able to get free? Do you think you can keep your power trained on her twenty-four seven?"

*Go Bran!* Tara wanted to shout for joy. Chase's hold was weakening. His anger must be distracting him, or he didn't realize how strong she really was. Using the powers she hated, Tara sucked some energy from him. She tried to do it slow, but he'd weakened her enough that she needed more than she wanted to take. She wasn't going to have another death on her conscience. If she could just get free, then he'd have no more leverage.

Chase's grip loosened. "What the hell?"

Tara bit her lip to keep from grinning.

"Tara?" Brandon took a step closer.

Chase snarled and tried to yank on Tara, but she didn't budge. He stared down at his hands, then up at her. "Damned bitch. Who the hell do you think you are using that shit on me?"

Tara yanked free of Chase and stumbled. As she fell to the ground, Brandon ran past her. One second he was an angry human, the next he was a sleek black jaguar. She

watched in awe as he leapt on Chase in a smooth movement. The vampire didn't realize what was happening until it was too late.

Tara felt hands on her shoulders and she looked up. A moment of panic hit and passed as she recognized Jeremy, one of Brandon's best friends. "I'm fine. Help him."

She turned to look at Brandon, but he stood, panting, in human form. Blood dripped from his shoulder and arm as he looked down at the decapitated vampire.

"You have to stake him if you want him to stay dead."

Tara looked up at Cody's voice.

"Go on, get out of here. Jeremy will take care of this, won't you?" Cody turned to Tara without waiting for an answer. "You need to take the next few nights off."

"But—"

"No. You need to take care of your mate. Besides, the change isn't pleasant. If you hadn't already started, Chase wouldn't have panicked and tried to grab you."

"What do you mean, the change?" Her throat tightened.

"You mean..." Brandon reached for Tara.

"Yeah. Be more careful when and how you bite someone next time."

"But we can't turn people into Werocats." Brandon held his injured arm close and wrapped the other around Tara.

"You can if they have a latent gene."

"How did you know?" Brandon looked at Tara, then at Cody.

"I didn't. But it's the only way she could start the change. I can smell it on her. So would you, if you'd stop thinking with your dick long enough to realize it. And Tara, you're always so busy trying not to drain people with your powers that you don't have focus or control."

"Are you saying that I'm going to be able to turn into a cat?"

"Yes. That's what I'm saying. Now get out of here in case the police show up. With all the racket Chase made, who knows if someone's called them." Cody turned back to Jeremy. "Go on, take care of things out here."

Brandon pulled Tara close. "Are you okay?"

“Me? You’re bleeding!” She stared at him. “You shouldn’t have gotten hurt. I thought you would know what you were doing. Why do you think I didn’t try to help?”

“What?” Brandon’s arm tightened.

“What? You’re a Werecat. Other than sucking emotions and energy, something I couldn’t do while Chase was doing whatever he was doing, I’m—”

Brandon shook his head and dragged her toward his car. “Let’s go. We can discuss this at home.”

*Home. I like the sound of that.* Tara sighed and wrapped her arm around his waist. “I wish I could give you energy instead of just taking it.”

“Baby, you can make me feel better once we get home.”

“You’re sick.” She shook her head. “Let’s go. You must be delirious.”

\* \* \* \*

“I can’t believe you got hurt.” Tara sighed and dabbed at his wound. “At least he didn’t bite you.”

“Wouldn’t have mattered. Not only is he dead, but my shifter genes wouldn’t have allowed me to turn vampire.”

“This is all so confusing.”

“All you need to know is that you’re safe. And you’re off work for the rest of the week.”

“I think I’m done working at Del Fantasma.” Tara pulled out some gauze and covered the scratches on his shoulder. Even though he was injured, she found it hard to keep from trying to seduce him into bed.

“I’m sure you’re safe. It was pure coincidence he figured out what you were. Or he read Cody’s mind and found out.”

Tara shook her head. “Cody wouldn’t have betrayed me, and I think his mind is an impenetrable fortress.”

“However he found it out doesn’t matter. He’s not going to bother you anymore. Word isn’t going to spread about what you are, either. Well, maybe about what you’re becoming.”

“Bran!” Heat flared through her body, both from desire and embarrassment.  
“We need to discuss that.”

“What’s to discuss, my sweet, sexy kitty?” He shifted on the chair and tugged her between his legs.

“Behave yourself.” Tara struggled to catch her breath as he slid his hands up the outside of her thighs.

“Why? I don’t need to use my shoulder to make love to you.” His eyes darkened with desire. “We can make do with less strenuous forms of pleasure, too.”

“Bran!” Tara didn’t know why she bothered to protest. “Fine. But I do all the work. You have to lay there so you don’t start bleeding again.”

“The scratches aren’t that bad.” He moved his shoulder and winced.

Tara snorted. “Yeah. I thought you were a big strong Alpha. You aren’t supposed to get hurt.”

He pulled her on to his lap. “Are you upset you’re changing?”

“I haven’t really had time to think about it.” Tara sighed and slid her arms around his neck avoiding his injury. “If Cody’s right, it was latent in me, so I suppose the chance to become one would have always been there.”

“I swear, if I had known, I wouldn’t have bitten you unless you wanted to change.”

Tara sighed and cupped his face. She stared into his eyes. “I’m not mad. You didn’t know any better than anyone else. How could we know? I didn’t show any signs of it. Trust me, I’d have noticed by now.”

Brandon kissed her tenderly. Not only was his tenderness a surprise, the fact that the rather tame kiss curled her toes and made her breathless with anticipation, was too. The man had skills. And thank God for it, too. She had a lot of years to make up for.

“We still need to work on your shields, and test how well you can control your

powers. And then how to control the change." Brandon kissed her chin. "But first I want to take you upstairs and make love to you."

"That would be nice." Tara gave a dreamy sigh, but then started when Brandon grinned and she realized she'd said it out loud.

"I love you." He kissed her nose.

"I know." She grinned up at him.

Brandon slid his hands up to her waist. "Let's go upstairs."

Tara stood up and turned to go upstairs. "As long as you take it easy."

"You're forgetting who the master is." He swatted her ass. "I give the orders around here."

"Not tonight you don't. Tonight you let me do all the work."

He gave a loud dramatic sigh. "I could get used to his."

"So could I."

Brandon grabbed her hips and tugged her against him. "Marry me, Tara?"

She blinked down at him. "Are you proposing?"

"Yes. Will you marry me?"

"Isn't that awfully quick?"

"I've known you for months. I turned you into a shifter."

Tara narrowed her eyes. He still hadn't given her a good reason.

"I love you?"

"Hmmm." She crossed her arms and glared at him. "I'll have to think about it."

"Would it help convince you if I promised to make sure you have an orgasm every night for the rest of your life?"

Tara laughed. "I don't do bribes, you silly man."

"Then what can I do to convince you?"

"Just love me."

"That I can do." He tugged her close and kissed her deeply. When he released her, she leaned back on her heels and stared at him.

"Okay."

“Okay what?”

“Okay, I’ll marry you.”

Brandon laughed, then grabbed her close and lifted her in his arms. “Oh, God!”  
He growled and released her to cradle his arm.

“Looks like you need a keeper even more than I do.”

Brandon growled and narrowed his eyes.

“It’s a good thing I’m going to marry you, Brandon. It looks like you need me more than I need you.”

“Maybe I do.” He grinned. “Only I mate for life, Tara. You’re the only woman I’ll ever have. Are you prepared to spend the rest of your life with me?”

“Most definitely.”

Brandon swept her in his arms and kissed her.

Yeah, she could get used to this.

The End

We hope you enjoyed your visit to Del Fantasma where matches are made when drinks are mixed. Cody Warren keeps an eye open, pairing up lovers at his paranormal bar.

In Sharon Maria Bidwell's *A Slow Fuzzy Screw* two lonely people meet at Cody's bar. But is it just a roll in the hay or a chance at real happiness for them?

**Excerpt:**

"I'd like a slow screw, please."

Rumour said that Cody Warren, bartender at Del Fantasma, had seen it all. The man was also known for his matchmaking skills. Shayne's immediate desires focused on a one-night stand or weekend fling rather than anything long-term, but he still wanted to make use of such talent. The idea of flirting with Cody Warren was well intended, designed to leave the man with no doubts as to what he wanted, so the slight flicker of surprise in the man's eyes startled Shayne. He wanted to open his evening with a remark that would make the man laugh. He wanted Cody in the right frame of mind to help him find a companion for the night. Shayne didn't expect the surprise. Surely, the man heard better lines often enough.

Shayne stifled a groan. The man probably heard too many asinine remarks and such a blatant comment fell into the abyss of silence. That silence might only exist here at the corner of the bar between him and Cody, but Shayne could almost hear crickets rubbing their legs together. He'd foolishly tried to be clever with the one man with whom he wanted to make a good impression.

The buzz said that something happened to Cody Warren during his time in Afghanistan, and that he knew more than a thing or two about the supernatural world. The stories proclaimed him a vampire. Having an interest in the paranormal, even though commonsense and everyday logic told Shayne he was wasting his time, he'd hung out in a few chat rooms and forums. He'd caught an interesting comment by one guy who confirmed in a private message that Del Fantasma was 'the' place to hang out. Amused but interested, Shayne researched and read so many good reports he decided

that even if the place was full of superhero-worshiping geeks, a trip here was worth the effort.

In truth, his interest was probably more of a case that if he didn't experience the atmosphere for himself, he'd always wonder. What he felt was a bit like wanting to have sex with a man for the first time, it made his coming here all the more desirous. Shayne didn't know if he could believe half the things he'd heard about the bar? No doubt the truth was that the guy was just shell-shocked or something and imagined these things, but he'd come here anyway. The look in the man's eyes while he polished a glass from the other side of the bar almost made Shayne change his mind, but he'd traveled a long way and paid in advance for a motel room for a couple of nights.

At the very least, he wanted to get laid. He wasn't about to let a mere bartender put him off. Reports that were more credible said that Cody Warren wasn't just a bartender or a vampire; he owned Del Fantasma, but why would the owner of such a place tend the bar?

Shayne couldn't be certain if there was any truth to the rumours, but he'd planned this trip for months. The U. S. of A. was a big place and he lived more than half the country away from Point Loma, California. His interest in the area stemmed from his love of all things paranormal and nothing was going to chase him off until he'd spent one fun-filled night in the bar.

~\*~\*~\*

Or perhaps some *Texas Tea* is more to your liking. Maura Anderson gives us a taste of the unusual when a woman comes to the Point Loma lighthouse to keep a promise to a ghost who saved her life.

**Excerpt:**

Neither the situation nor Cody seemed dangerous, at least not to her. The ghosts usually warned her of threats. It was one of the useful side effects of her affinity with them. Too bad their presence also scared off every sane person she spent any time with until she no longer even tried to get close to anyone. Being alone by choice was easier



than the inevitable rejection when the ghosts decided to frighten them away from her.

The sounds of clanking and voices from the doorway Cody had disappeared through drew Lara's attention back to the here and now. The decor wasn't really what she'd expected <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>from the name of the bar, she'd almost expected a Dias De Los Muertos theme of bright colors, skulls and maybe some skeletons but, instead, it tended toward a modern mission style with a lot of wood and earth-toned Southwestern touches. A warm and cozy bar for such an unusual name.

From the corner of her eye, she caught a hint of movement and whipped her head around to follow it. She caught just the briefest glimpse of what looked like a dog before it disappeared down the hallway marked "Private". A dog in a food establishment?

Poised halfway out of her chair, she tried to see if she could spot the animal again. Cody suddenly chuckled directly behind her and she leapt sideways. Trying to not fall on her face, Lara teetered, arms flailing in a desperate attempt to regain her balance.

A hard yank from Cody and she was in her chair again, sprawled with legs spread and heart pounding so hard she thought she would pass out. "You scared me." Her voice sounded breathless and trembling, adrenaline already doing a number on her system.

He had the nerve to laugh at her and she forgot her fear, forgot that he wasn't just a human, even forgot that he was nearly a foot taller and much heavier than she was. Her lifelong hatred of being laughed at made her temper flare. Too exhausted to moderate her impulsive reactions, when he set her mug of tea on the table and his arm was within reach, she lashed out and slugged it. Hard.

The force of the impact screamed up her arm. The man must be made of stone. He merely laughed harder while she cradled her now throbbing hand to her chest and glared. A small part of her was appalled at her loss of control over her temper and own actions but she successfully ignored it.

"You sure you don't want to act as her tour guide, Code?"

The husky baritone voice, sultry, overlaid with a sexy drawl, preceded the man who sauntered from the hall.

Oh. My. God. Attractive as Cody was, this man was stunning. Shorter than her host, he was just as muscular but more compact. Her fingers longed to explore the texture of the glossy black hair he wore cut military-short. His face was tanned and clean-shaven with a tantalizing square jaw and high cheekbones she'd bet spoke of more than a touch of Native American mixed with his obvious Latino ancestry.

Every movement was silent and graceful, nearly soundless, even in his jeans and cowboy boots. The sinuous sway of his hips as he walked reminded her of the calculating, smooth motions of a wild animal, a predator.

And his eyes, his eyes were a bright gold she'd never seen before, framed by thick black lashes that only served to make them more piercing. They were an almost inhuman color, one that would be more at home in the face of an animal.

"Texas, this is Lara Saunders. Lara, this is my friend Matthew Martinez. He's the Park Ranger I told you about."

Lara continued to gape at the newcomer, oblivious to the hand he held out to her until he forcibly picked up her own from the table to shake it.

Even his touch felt wild and untamed. And it carried the unmistakable touch of the spirit world as well.

~\*~\*~\*~

Be sure to stop by [www.AspenMountainPress.com](http://www.AspenMountainPress.com) and sign up for our newsletter so you can stay informed of more upcoming Del Fantasma stories.



### Screaming Orgasm

#### Ingredients:

1 oz Vodka

1 1/2 oz Bailey's irish cream

1/2 oz Kahlua

#### Mixing instructions:

Pour first vodka, then Bailey's, then Kahlua into a cocktail glass over crushed ice. Stir. Caution: use only high quality vodka. Cheap vodka can cause the Bailey's to curdle. Test your brand of vodka by mixing 1 Tsp each of vodka and Bailey's first.



### Quick Fuck

#### Ingredients:

1 part Kahlua

1 part Midori liqueur (melon flavour)

1 part Bailey's Irish Cream

#### Serving suggestions:

Pour into a shot glass 1/3 Kahlua first, then a 1/3 Midori, lastly a 1/3 Bailey's Irish Cream.

#### Notes:

There are many variations on this recipe and is up to personal preference.