



IN
THE
HEAT
OF
THE
NIGHT

CRYSTAL JORDAN

Total Eclipse
OF THE
Heart

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Total Eclipse of the Heart

Crystal Jordan

Dedication

For R.G. Alexander, because she got me an awesome editor and because she deserved a heroine of her own. The hot werewolf nookie is just a bonus.

And for Bethany Morgan, editor extraordinaire. Thanks for putting your money where your mouth is and believing in my work enough to buy it. You rock!

Chapter One

I watched my husband leer at another woman's breasts. The woman—a werewolf named Candy—was stacked. Just the kind of girl I used to shag before I met my mate. Jerrod's rich laugh reached my ears and made me smile. It was a game to flirt with our customers at Eclipse. A game we played well.

Eclipse was *the* nightspot for things that went bump in the night. Things any smart human didn't want to bump into. Ever.

As a werewolf, I was one of those things. And so was my mate.

"Hi, Rachel!"

"Hey, Cole, Marty, Frank." I nodded to some of my regular patrons as I passed, putting an extra swing in my hips because I knew they'd stare at my ass as I walked by. They should at least get a good show, right? All three of them were fairies...and by fairies, I didn't mean the kind that dug on other men. I meant the kind who had to tuck in their wings to get a shirt over their heads.

I took a deep breath, letting the familiarity of the bar wrap around me. The splashes of noise from people and music. Perfect. I'd worked my whole life to get this kind of stability and routine. It was something my mother had never provided while I was growing up—but my mate had, and I loved the man more than life itself for it. He made

damn sure I had everything I needed and then some. We'd made a crazy success of Eclipse in the four years since we'd opened our doors. He wanted to expand and open a second club, but change was something I always resisted. Things were so fantastic right now, why mess with a good thing? A wry grin pulled at my lips. It would probably take him another six months of showing me business plans and financial projections before I gave in and agreed. I shook my head and sighed.

Winding my way from the stockroom to the bar, I carried two cases of domestic beer behind the sleek black counter. My werewolf strength made it easy to bear the load, something that wouldn't have been possible for a human woman. I set the cases out of the way and dusted off my gray top and short leather skirt. Glancing up, I smiled at Cynthiana Trent. She and Candy often came to Eclipse—probably because it wasn't kosher for the leggy vampire to have a werewolf as her best friend, but my mate wouldn't let anyone hassle them. Eclipse was neutral territory and anyone who broke that rule got their ass handed to them by Jerrod as he showed them to the door. The werewolf pack leaders weren't all that pleased that we served vampires, but so far we hadn't given them any reason to meddle in our business.

Vampires and werewolves had hated each other for centuries. It wasn't until a few years ago that we'd all come out of the closet about what we were and let humans in on our hairy little secret. It was the escalation of fighting that made us public—and because of that, we'd outted all the other magical creatures with us. I'd never gotten involved in the conflict, but vampires were a weird lot. Anyone who lived forever just could not be normal. I was happy with the couple hundred years I'd get as a werewolf.

While I stepped up to the bar, an enormous vampire approached Cyn, and she offered him a fuck-off-and-die look. The man was gorgeous, all chocolate skin and pale green eyes. Still not as attractive as Jerrod, but then, no vampire could compare to a full-blooded werewolf. I knew it was a prejudiced thought, but he was my man. I could be biased if I wanted to.

"Hey, lover." I wound my arms around Jerrod from behind, kissing the mated bite mark on his bare left shoulder. My bite mark. He often tended bar without his shirt on, so

I was surprised into laughter when he turned in my embrace and I saw he was wearing a bow tie.

“Hey, yourself.”

“You look like a Chippendale dancer.” A giggle bubbled up in my throat.

He gripped my hips, pulling me closer so I could feel his erection. “Just wanted to give you something to unwrap for our anniversary. Since you have to work tonight.”

“Only for another hour, then Benny will take over for us.” A slow smile pulled at my lips as heat exploded through me. Just like that I was wet for him, wanting him. It was always that way between werewolf mates. Hotter, stronger, better than it could be with anyone else. God, I loved him. Needed him. Right now. I eyed the long bar, wondering for a moment if our customers would mind if we put on a little show for them. Five minutes, that was all I’d need. Two even.

His midnight blue gaze raked down my body, taking in the beaded nipples that stood out against the thin material of my top. He shook his head, a hot predatory gleam in his eyes. “You’ll have to wait, Rach.”

“Damn.” I squeezed my thighs together, willing the relentless ache to subside. It didn’t. Swallowing back a helpless whimper, I arched my hips against him to rub myself on his thick cock.

His big hands stilled my hips, fingers tightening when I tried to move. “You don’t want to play that game.”

“Don’t I?” I licked my lips, desire winding through me as his gaze followed the motion.

“No.” His fingers slipped up to clench in my long dark hair, pulling my head back. Dipping forward, he nudged my shirt aside to expose my collarbone. And the bite he’d marked me with five years ago. He closed his mouth over the mark, sucking hard.

My back bowed hard as a lightning flash of pleasure arced from the mark to my dampening pussy. I gasped, my fingers curling into claws on his shoulders. His tongue flicked over the mark again and again until my mouth opened in a silent scream as my pussy fisted on nothing. The fire inside me built until I couldn’t stand it, and I bit my lip

to keep from crying out. My eyes squeezed closed as I shook apart in his arms, orgasm exploding deep within me.

“Ahem.” Someone cleared his throat, interrupting us.

Jerrod’s hands cupped my elbows as he set me away from him. The fog of lust cleared from my brain, but slowly. My God, what had I just done? At *work*? The only thing that blocked me from the view of our customers was Jerrod’s broad chest. Heat flooded my cheeks, and I locked my knees to remain upright. Every werewolf in the place would have been able to smell me getting off.

While Jerrod turned to serve our interrupter, I bent behind the bar to pretend to straighten the strap on my high heel.

“You all right?” He glanced down at me while he mixed a Bloody Mary.

“Fine. You had to take it that far?”

He chuckled. “You wanted to play.”

I leaned in and bit him behind the knee, nipping him through his pinstriped trousers. He jerked in surprise. “Don’t think I’m done playing, lover.”

A grin quirked his full lips, wicked promise flashing in his gaze before he turned away again. I shivered, thinking of all the things he might do to me.

This would be an anniversary to remember.

Chapter Two

My hand shook as I slid a frosty glass and a bottle of Corona onto a small round table. Unease wound through me, and I didn't know why. The feeling skittered up my back and made my skin crawl. I knew this feeling, but I couldn't place it. Some instinct within me was kicking into high gear and I was drawing a big fat blank as to what I was supposed to be getting. It was damned annoying, and inconvenient. I woke this morning to a lead ball in my stomach, and it had only gotten worse all day. I'd done everything I could to ignore it, to hide it from Jerrod, but it hadn't helped.

"Thanks, Rachel."

"No problem." I tucked my hair behind my ear and flicked another glance around the bar. The place was packed, but that was normal. Everything appeared...normal. So why couldn't I shake this feeling? I rolled my shoulders to try and ease the tension.

Fifteen more minutes and I'd be off for the night. I could drag Jerrod upstairs to our big apartment and let him screw my brains out. I'd wake tomorrow and everything would be fine. It had to be or I was going to go nuts. Rubbing my temple, I tried to massage away a headache that began to form.

"It hurts because you're fighting it."

The woman's voice had a whiskey kick to it, soft and rough at the same time. I spun to face her, *needing* to see the person attached to that voice. Werewolf definitely, I could smell the wolf on her. She had the smoothest cocoa skin I'd ever seen. Her black hair fell in a riot of curls around her face and emphasized her ebony eyes. They were fathomless, beautiful. They drew me in, and I stepped toward her. Our gazes locked, heated and my heart lurched. All the instincts I'd been suppressing today jumped up to bite me in the ass. Something snapped inside my chest, some deep pull of recognition.

Mate.

"No," I gasped the word, stumbling back and lifting my tray like it was a shield. Shock roared through me. My heart squeezed, and I couldn't breathe. Oh God. Oh. God.

"Yes." Possession flashed hot in her gaze. "I'm Lena." She stepped forward, reaching for me.

And I wanted her to touch me, stroke me. Lust twisted inside me, fire licking my veins. *No*. I turned and fled for the stockroom. Jerrod would *kill* me. How could this happen? Was it even possible? I'd heard of werewolves having two mates in one lifetime before, but after the first mate *died*, not *at the same time*. No one would believe this was possible, especially not other werewolves. But, there was no denying what I felt. It was just like the first time I'd met Jerrod, the instantaneous kick to the heart and loin. Everything inside me wanted her. To know her, to love her, to *possess* her.

"Oh God," I breathed. My stomach pitched, and my palms grew slick. Clamping a hand over my mouth, I fought back the need to vomit. What was I going to do? I couldn't lose Jerrod. Infidelity was unheard of among my kind. Matings were for life, forever. Jerrod was my mate, my everything. A soul mate fashioned just for me.

So was Lena.

Stomping down on the inner voice, I leaned against the wall and bent to stick my head between my knees. The tray slipped from my fingers and dropped to the floor. My heart hammered against my ribs as all the blood rushed to my head. I just needed to *breathe*, to think clearly.

Being bisexual, I never thought I'd have just one person forever, but life was full of surprises. And Jerrod was the best thing that had ever happened to me. I couldn't fuck this up. Fisting my fingers in my hair, I pressed on my skull in an attempt to ease the shrieking pain. The need to mate was there, ripping into me with the fierce jaws of the wolf within.

I sucked in a deep breath and pulled Lena's scent to me. Somehow, I already knew it. It was imbedded in my psyche already, just like Jerrod's. Just her smell was enough to make me want, make me wet. The muscles in my thighs locked, shaking with the need to go to her. Tears pressed against my lids. *Jerrod*. Where was he? I needed his steady strength. But Lena was out there, between me and my mate.

The door to the stockroom swung open and then closed with a solid *thunk*.

It was her. Lena. I didn't need to look up to know. My instincts cried out in recognition, rioting within me. My nipples tightened, my pussy dampening with the hot need to claim and be claimed. *No*. Please, no. I dug my nails into my scalp, welcoming the pain. Anything to distract me from the pulsing want clawing at my flesh.

"Why do you run?"

My mind scrabbled for any excuse to make her leave. "You can't be in here. Staff only."

The heat from her body enveloped me as she stepped closer. I snapped upright, pressing my back against the wall. There was no escape. I couldn't get away. I didn't want to. My breath panted out, logic and instinct warring inside me. I closed my eyes, trying to shut out the inevitable.

"Rachel." Her breath fanned against my ear.

I moaned. The sound of my name in that husky voice made my body ache with lust. "How do you know my name?"

"That's what the men you served called you, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"*Yesssss*." She flicked her tongue against my neck.

I shuddered, molten heat rolling through me. I was so wet I couldn't stand it. My legs felt too weak to hold me up. I tilted my head back, swallowing hard. My breath bellowed out.

Her hand lifted to cover my breast, tweaking the tight nipple. A soft cry ripped from my throat. I arched into her caress, lust clouding my mind. Nothing mattered right now but the mating ritual, taking what was mine. I needed it—her. Now.

Jerrod's face flashed through my mind. I couldn't *do* this. I couldn't hurt him that way. I couldn't.

I stepped sideways, but she shoved me against the wall. Her hand dropped to my leg, slipping under my short skirt.

"Stop." I arched my torso, fighting her. Fighting myself.

"No." She rubbed her palm over my panties. The heel of her hand hit my swollen clit. I sobbed, my hips twisting. It only increased the friction. She thrust her fingers under the scrap of lace, plunging them into my pussy.

"*Please.*" But I didn't know what I was begging for anymore. For her to stop. For her to never stop. My hips jerked, and I ground my pussy against her plunging fingers. I felt a drop of my wetness trail down my leg. My thighs shook, and I gasped as her hand worked me, pushing me closer and closer to orgasm.

A satisfied smile curved her lips, triumph shining in her midnight eyes. "You're mine. You'll always be mine."

"Yes. *No.* Stop. Please, stop." She had to stop. I didn't have the strength to make her. My body shook with need, feral heat exploding in my belly. The wolf inside me howled, wanting to seize my mate.

"Why?"

Why? For a moment, I didn't know. I wanted what she wanted. Everything inside me screamed for it. I threw my head back, smacking hard against the wall. Stars exploded behind my eyelids. The pain brought a small return of sanity.

"I can't do this. I'm already mate—"

The door snapped open, and Jerrod walked in. He froze, his eyes widening at the sight of his mate with another woman. Oh. Shit. My heart lurched, and ice water rushed through my veins. Cold sweat broke out on my forehead. I clenched my fingers, trying to still their sudden shaking.

No. Oh, no.

“Jerrod,” I gasped. “I-it’s not what it looks like.”

“Isn’t it?” Rage darkened his gaze. His big body hummed with tension as he stalked forward. One hand wrapped around Lena’s biceps, wrenching her away from me. My body screamed in protest, and I arched toward her.

He pulled Lena around to face him. “That is *my* mate.”

“And mine.” Her chin jutted in stubborn defiance.

“Liar.” He snarled, his nose nearly touching hers. Then his jaw went slack, and he jerked back as though he’d been burned. “No.”

Lena stiffened, and I could feel her shock. “Mate.”

Her eyes flicked to me, then back to Jerrod. She swallowed, shifting in her tall black boots.

Jerrod shook his head, pressing the heel of his hand to his forehead. His breath hissed out. “How is this possible?”

Lena licked her lips. “I don’t—I don’t know. I just know what I feel.”

“You can’t—”

She lifted her hand to cup his cheek. “My mate.”

For the first time in five years, I saw Jerrod speechless. He went rigid, uncertainty flashing in his eyes. He glanced at me. “Rachel?”

The words jerked out. Please let this be the right thing to say. Fear shook me to my very core, twisting tight in my belly. “I feel it too. With you. With her. Mate.”

He pulled back, stepping away from Lena...and me. Pain ripped through me, stabbing deep into my heart. This was it. I would lose him. A sob lodged in my throat, clogging my airway.

“Ladies first.” A smile flashed across his handsome face. He settled against the door, arms folding across his wide chest.

I blinked, torn between hope and utter shock. It was going to be all right. Relief flooded me. Could it really be that easy? My eyes squeezed closed. I wouldn’t lose Jerrod. A rough shudder rippled through me. I needed him so much. Loved him. Craved him. Our gazes met, and understanding shone in his eyes. He knew what this meant to me. Of course he did. He knew me as no other ever could. Except Lena.

Lena’s smoky laugh floated in the long room. “You want to watch...Jerrod?”

“Yes.” He glanced between us, a wolfish grin on his lips.

I licked my lips. “Jerrod, are you—”

“Don’t worry, Rach. I’m next.” His indigo eyes heated, caressing me.

Lena turned to me, pressing me back against the wall. This time I didn’t resist. I cupped her hips in my palms, pulling her to me. We both moaned as our bodies met for the first time. I bent forward to catch her mouth with mine. She slid her hands in my hair, and I shuddered as she stroked through the length. Goose bumps erupted on my arms. I tilted my head, moving my lips slowly over hers and savoring this first moment between us. She opened her mouth to suckle my bottom lip. She nipped my lip, a sweet sting. I moaned, desire raging hot and wild through me. She called to me, this woman. I needed her.

Sliding my hands around, I gripped her ass. Wedging my knee between her thighs, I pressed her sex to my leg. She wore no underpants under her short, pleated skirt. I could feel the wetness of her hot pussy as she rode my thigh, her hips arching against me. Over her shoulder, I met Jerrod’s gaze. I shivered at the fire burning there. He loved this, I could tell. He lightly stroked his cock through his slacks as he watched us.

“Rachel.” Her breath panted against my lips, and I smiled because I could do this to her.

Her head tilted back as her hips moved on my leg. I flexed the muscles, pushing deeper to work over her swollen clit. Lifting a hand to her full breast, I pinched the beaded nipple through her black top. She gasped.

Now. Mark her. Make her mine. Forever.

Instinct roared through me, untamed, uncontrolled. Feral wolf. Leaning forward, I bit her exposed throat. She jolted against me, screaming. The sweet nectar of her blood flooded my tongue. I felt her pussy jerk spasmodically as she came apart in my arms. I sucked at her throat, licking the bite as it healed. She shuddered and moaned, her hips snapping forward in short, slamming thrusts.

Through it all, I felt Jerrod's eyes upon us. It was hotter because he watched. The smell of his desire reached my nose. Wetness flooded my pussy, and I moaned deep in my throat. My hips twisted in unrelenting want. For my mates. Both of them. Harsh emotion banded my chest at the thought. Yes. Possession, need...and love warred for dominance. My eyes squeezed closed.

Lena's arms wrapped around me, her face burying into my shoulder. I stroked her ebony curls, holding her close. I remembered what it was like to mate the first time, the overwhelming flood of emotion, connection. She trembled against me, her breath puffing across the skin of my neck.

"Lena."

Her tongue flicked out to lick me. "Yes, mate?"

"Finish it." Yes. I wanted to be claimed.

She pulled back, slipping her hand up to cup my cheek. "Not so fast."

"Now."

"As you wish." Bending forward, she sucked my nipple into her mouth. She pressed the tip to the top of her mouth, biting down. The cloth of my shirt rubbed against the sensitive flesh.

Heat rushed through me, and I arched toward her hot, wet mouth. She moved to my other breast, nipping the crest. My hands clenched in her soft hair as I tried to pull her closer. Desperation whipped through me. The need for her, the need to mate, the need for fast, hard orgasm.

"Lena, please. I want...more."

Her fingers pressed between my legs and I relaxed my thighs to allow her access. She thrust two fingers into me. A hard, harsh push.

“Yes.”

I twined my fingers with her free hand, clenching tight. Hot shivers streaked through me, the rising tide of orgasm jerking me forward. I rocked against her fingers, loving the feel of her within me.

She lifted my hand to her mouth, kissing the center of my palm. I trembled. Our gazes locked, and her eyes burned to a translucent blue. She was close to feral, the wolf breaking loose. Opening her mouth on my wrist, she bit down hard. Claiming me. I screamed, my body jolting under the sensation, and I flashed over into sudden orgasm.

“Lena.”

She laved the bite mark again and again, drawing out the feelings and pushing me hard against the edge of sanity.

Tears burned my eyes, spilling over to slip down my cheeks. Sweet relief swirled through me. Yes. This was perfect. The pain and dread that rode me all day fell away into nothingness. A connection that could never be broken spun between us. It was so right, so good.

A sharp knock sounded on the door, making me jerk in surprise. Benny’s voice rang through, “Hey, boss.”

Jerrod stepped aside, cracking the door open. He exchanged soft words with the other man, and then closed it again.

He flicked a glance over his shoulder, a knowing grin tugging at his lips. “I—uh, think we need to take this upstairs.”

Chapter Three

“You moved to Los Angeles recently?” I asked the question as we walked up the steps to the apartment. I could feel both their gazes burning into my back.

When I reached the top landing, I turned to punch the access code into a keypad mounted beside the door. My hands shook so badly I had to concentrate on a task that was almost second nature. The locks clicked back.

This was it. Letting someone enter our wolf den was huge. I sucked in a deep breath, trying to settle my nerves. Everything had changed in a blink of an eye. And now that the storm had passed I was freaking out. *Two* mates. Oh my holy Jesus. Breathe. Just breathe. That was the key here.

“Yes. How did you know?” I heard the surprise in Lena’s voice.

Laughing, I glanced back at her. “No one lives in L.A. long without coming to Eclipse. And this is definitely your first time here.”

“Yeah. I-I was in Phoenix and just decided to move a few weeks ago. It was sudden.”

“Instinct?” Reaching around both of us, Jerrod pushed open the door to our apartment.

She sighed. “At the time I thought I was crazy, but now...it makes sense.”

“You were drawn to us.” We walked in, and I went straight for the kitchen. Wine. I needed something to settle me. Deep breathing wasn’t cutting it. I was about to hyperventilate. My heels clicked on the gleaming hardwood floor. Jerrod and I had spent a whole year restoring the upper story of the warehouse that housed Eclipse. It was all worth it, the place was gorgeous. And the commute couldn’t be beat.

Lena followed me and wandered about, touching this and that. She stroked a finger over the marble countertops. Curiosity shone in her gaze as she looked at everything. What did she see when she entered our den? I was afraid she wouldn’t approve. There was so much we didn’t know about each other. But we were mated.

I rounded the island, stooping to pluck up a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. *Get a grip, Rachel.* So many emotions crashed through me I wasn’t sure how to react. I wanted Lena here, but how would it affect Jerrod and me? And I felt selfish and ashamed for even thinking it.

Jerrod snagged the wine bottle from my trembling fingers over the kitchen island. His steady gaze met mine. “You’re worried.”

That was Jerrod. A man of few words who cut right to the chase. He was my rock. “Yes.”

“You think the werewolf pack leaders will have a problem with our mating?”

Um. No. The thought hadn’t even occurred to me yet. Shit. I bit my lip and tried not to have a mild mental meltdown. We weren’t exactly a werewolf pack leader favorite, and this could really fuck us up. “It is a concern.”

Jerrod shook his head. “One for another time.”

“No. It’s not a concern.” Lena walked up beside me, her arms crossing over her chest.

I sighed. “It’s not that simple.”

She shook her head firmly, eyebrows raising. “I just found you. Both of you. I won’t give that up so easily. Not because someone is too narrow-minded to see how right it is. Instinct pulled me to you. And I’m staying, damn it.”

Stubborn. A good word to describe my new mate. A good word to describe both of my mates. It was going to be fun to see the two of them butt heads. I grinned, forcing myself to think of something besides the possible scrutiny of werewolf pack leaders. Lena was a much more gratifying subject.

“So...what do you do?”

Her arms slid around my waist, pressing her body to mine. Her soft breasts pillowed against my side. I closed my eyes and swallowed, a lightning strike of pleasure flashing through me. My pussy heated, dampened in anticipation. I dragged in a deep breath, trying to quell the rising excitement, but I pulled in Jerrod’s scent. Hot, masculine. Mine. Both of them. Mine.

“I’m an electrician.”

“W-what?”

“I’m an electrician.” She laughed. “I could light up your world, baby.”

Jerrod snorted. “Does that line actually work on people?”

She pulled away from me to face him. A slow grin bloomed on her lips as she reached out to run a fingertip down his bare chest. “Did it work on you?”

His gaze heated as he looked down at her, but he said nothing. Stepping around the island, he snaked an arm around her waist, and he spun her back to the cold stainless steel refrigerator. She gasped, arching against him. I knew what that look in his eye meant, he was going to...yes. His lips moved over hers, slow and hot. He bracketed her jaw with his fingers.

Desire twisted through me. I expected to feel jealous, seeing my man with someone else, but I just...didn’t. It was like a missing piece had slid into place for me. A hole I didn’t even know was there had been filled. And watching them—God, it turned me on.

Palming her breasts, he flicked his fingers over her hard nipples. She moaned into his mouth. Heat exploded through me, and I leaned a hand against the island to stay upright. Kissing his way down her body, he knelt before her. He glanced at me, a small grin on his lips. Tipping his head with a wink, he invited me to join them.

Hooking her knee over his shoulder, he shoved her skirt up and out of the way. Her fingers fisted in his hair. Licking the smooth flesh of her thigh, he opened his mouth on the corded muscles. His gaze met mine, the irises turning a pale, icy blue. Then he bit down.

“Jerrod!” Lena screamed, her body arching as she came. I leaned forward to catch the sound in my mouth.

I thrust my tongue between her lips, joining our mouths. Her kiss was frenzied, desperate. Tangling my hand in her hair, I held her still while I stroked the fingers of my other hand over the mate bite on her neck. She quivered, whimpering against my lips.

Her fingers fumbled with the front of my shirt before slipping down to thrust between my legs. Now it was my turn to moan as she worked her fingertips over my swollen clit through my panties. I caressed her bite mark in time with her strokes. Her hips bucked as Jerrod licked between her thighs.

Oh God. My panties were soaked. Her fingers were touching me just right. She froze, shuddering as she came. Her back arched as I raked my nails across her mate mark. She went limp, collapsing into Jerrod’s arms. I sighed, squeezing my thighs together to try and suppress the unrequited lust that still burned there.

Jerrod rose to his feet, licking his lips and grinning down at Lena. His arms encircled both of us, and a moment of sweet silence surrounded us. I relaxed, resting my cheek against his chest. My gaze met Lena’s and we shared a smile.

I glanced up and laughed.

His eyebrow arched. “What?”

Reaching up, I snagged his bowtie and untied it. “Happy anniversary, lover.”

Using the sides of the bowtie, I pulled him down for a long kiss. I could taste Lena on his lips and I moaned. God, the mingled flavor of them was sweet on my tongue. His soft hair prickled against my palm when I slid my hands into the short black strands.

Lena lifted one of my hands away from him and brought it to her lips. Her tongue licked the mated mark on my wrist. I moaned, arching hard against Jerrod. Liquid heat flooded my pussy. Wrapping my leg around his, my hips molded to his. His hands

cupped my backside, lifting me into his thrusts. The cloth of his slacks felt rough against my thighs. I threw my head back, my breath bellowing out of starved lungs.

“Please. Please. Please.” I don’t know which one of them I was begging, but I wanted...I needed...*please*.

My body twisted under the dual lashes of pleasure. I couldn’t take it. I couldn’t. My back bowed hard as I came. I squeezed my eyes shut and tears leaked down my cheeks.

Lena drew me away from him and over to the island, running her hands under my top to ease it over my head. I wasn’t wearing a bra, so my breasts were now bare. They beaded tight under her gaze. She jerked her top off and dropped it to the floor. Her breasts were gorgeous. I wanted to suck the dark tips into my mouth. I stepped forward, and she wrapped her arms around me, her hands stroking down my back. I moaned as our naked skin made contact. She reached behind me to unzip my skirt, and I did the same for her. Shifting her torso, she rubbed our breasts together, and building excitement flashed through me at the friction.

Using her werewolf strength, she pushed me away and lifted me onto the icy marble surface. My breath hissed out in surprise at the contrast against my overheating skin. Hooking a finger in Jerrod’s belt loop, she pulled him to us. Looking into his eyes, she rubbed his straining erection. He groaned as she freed his cock from his pants, pumping him between her fingers. Shoving his slacks down, he kicked them and his shoes aside to stand naked before me. God, he was a beautiful man.

Lena stepped back and pushed him toward me. “Fuck her.”

“What?” My eyebrows rose.

Grinning, she ran a finger over Jerrod’s shoulders as she stepped around him. “It’s my turn to watch.”

“You can’t see from back there.”

“The view from here is just fine, thanks.” She laughed as her palms came around to stroke his nipples.

He groaned, closing his big hands around my knees and spreading me wide. I leaned back on my hands for leverage as I lifted my hips. He thrust deep, and I moaned. God, he

was huge. The fit was so tight and the angle was perfect as he moved in me. He ground his hips into mine, and I watched Lena's hands stroke over his chest from behind. I clenched my inner muscles on his cock, milking him as he worked his shaft inside me. Pleasure burned in his gaze as he looked at me. I loved it, that we could do this to him, make it better for him. Every push of his cock shoved me closer to orgasm. We moved together faster and faster, harder and harder until I wanted to scream with it. I bit my lip to keep the sound back—only our harsh breathing could be heard. Hot pleasure washed through me, building in waves. Tingles shivered over my flesh. I was so close, so very close to the edge. One of his hands lifted to brush over the mate mark on my collarbone. It was enough. My thighs tensed as I came so hard that for a moment I saw starbursts.

He bent over me to suck my nipples deep in his mouth, drawing out my pleasure. I could see Lena behind him. Her eyes flashed pale blue. She leaned forward and sank her teeth into his right shoulder. Satisfaction thrummed through me at the sight. The circle was complete. Each mated to the other. Bound. Now he would have twin marks—one on each shoulder. Lena's and mine.

He shuddered as he pumped into me, slamming hard. Lena ground his nipples between her fingers, licking both his mate bites until he groaned long and loud. His hips jerked in a hard, frantic rhythm until he froze, his heat flooding me as he came. He braced his hands on either side of my hips, head bowed as he sucked in great gulping breaths. The muscles in his arms shook.

A satisfied smile tugged at his lips when he finally leveraged himself upright. "Well, girls, I think it's past your bedtime."

Lena chuckled. "Don't even think for a second I'm about to start calling you Big Daddy."

"Please. Don't give him any ideas. It's taken me five years of work to get him this nice." I rolled my eyes at her as I slid off the island.

She yawned. "Looks like I showed up at just the right time then."

Jerrod led us to the bedroom. We settled on the big bed, tangling together in a heap. Quiet filled the room as we held each other. It left me with time to think, and a stab of fear pierced me as Jerrod's words ricocheted through my mind.

Was he right? Would the werewolf pack leaders contest our unusual mating? We knew what we were to each other, but would others of our kind understand? Jerrod and I made our living on the business of werewolves. If we were officially Ostracized—I shuddered, closing my eyes. Oh God. We could lose everything we'd worked for. Eclipse would have to close, and that would be it.

No.

I refused to think that way. They had to accept. We would convince them...somehow. They couldn't deny our instincts, no more than we could. It wouldn't be easy, but time would only make our new bond stronger, deeper. Right?

"I'm so glad I found you." Lena's husky whisper reached my ears. I didn't know if she spoke to Jerrod or me. It didn't matter.

Jerrod licked the bite mark on my collarbone in a long, slow swipe, making me shiver. His hand stroked up and down my belly. "Me too. Stop worrying, Rach. This isn't something you can solve tonight. We'll make it through this."

"I'm glad we're together. All of us." I closed my eyes, knowing Jerrod was right. We couldn't fix this tonight, couldn't change how others would react to us. But we could strengthen our new bond as much as possible tonight. I grinned. Oh, yes. We could definitely do that. Starting right now.

Chapter Four

Pounding on the door woke me the next morning. I groaned and tried to roll over, but I was sandwiched between my mates, and I couldn't move. The pounding continued. "I'm *coming*."

Fuck. Didn't people know not to wake a bartender before dusk? Jerrod had shifted into his wolf form sometime during the night, so a large timber wolf pressed up against one side of me. Lena lay on her belly, legs akimbo and half off the mattress. I shimmied the other way. Throwing my leg over Jerrod, I deliberately elbowed him in the side as I flopped out of bed. If I had to be awake, he damn well better be too. He snorted and rolled to his back, his paws dangling in the air. Jerking on a robe, I tightened the belt before I poked his muzzle. Hard. "Someone's at the door. Get. Up."

He sighed and stretched, a sound similar to a hundred knuckles popping in rapid succession filling the room as he shifted into his human form. I shivered at the noise—as many times as I'd heard it, it still grossed me out. He groaned and rubbed a palm down his face. "Shit."

"Tell me about it." Lena pushed herself up on her hands and knees. "Who the hell is banging on the door at dawn?"

Rolling to his feet, Jerrod took a breath, his gaze sharpening to a killing edge. “Alain.”

The head watchdog of the werewolf pack leaders. He had the air of a sleazy lawyer that sent chills down my spine every time he came into Eclipse for a drink. If he’d been sent by the pack leaders, then it was serious. Oh God. With a snap of their fingers, we could be Ostracized, *persona non grata*. In a word—screwed. No wolf in their right mind would come to Eclipse if we were thrown out of the pack, and no other magical creature was stupid enough to stick around someone the pack leaders might declare open war on at any moment. No matter how any of them felt about us personally, they had no interest in a family feud.

We could lose everything. Have to flee and hope to hell another pack would take us. -A million scenarios bounced through my head, each uglier and more devastating than the last.

“They’re here faster than I thought.” All the blood drained out of my face, and I swayed on my feet. A small part of me had hoped they’d never come.

Through it all, the steady pounding on the door continued. I hadn’t had much hope that Alain would give up and go away, but that ceaseless knock killed it. My heart hammered in slow, sick dread while my stomach turned somersaults. Nausea built in the back of my throat, and I stared at my two mates for a long moment while they both threw on some clothes. What would the pack leaders do to us?

Jerrod stalked out into the living room and jerked the door open. His voice held only the barest hint of courtesy when he spoke. “Alain.”

The tall, slim man stepped into our home like he owned it, and I barely held back a snarl. No matter how I felt about him, he was a man with power whom I couldn’t afford to piss off. Damn it.

“So, you’re the interloper.” His gaze raked over Lena and then transferred to me. Revulsion flooded me.

I watched the muscles of Jerrod’s body go rigid. He stepped between Alain and us. “What do you want, Alain?”

“I would hope you’re smart enough to figure that out, Jerrod. Alas, I see I overestimated your intelligence. Pity.” He straightened the cuffs on his French blue shirt. “Word of your unconventional new mating has reached the pack leaders. Malcon *requests* the two of you come before him for a ruling on this matter.”

Malcon, the pack Alpha. He was a new leader, and no one knew much about him—not even me. And that was saying something, because I was a bartender, and the only person to receive more confessions than a priest was someone in my line of business. Every piece of gossip always made it back to Eclipse, to me. All I knew was that our pack’s old Alpha, Malcon’s father, had died a few months ago. The pack still waited to see how Malcon’s leadership would differ from his father’s. He’d been a quiet heir, never a hint of scandal, never stepping so much as a toe out of line. And never giving any hint of his own leanings on how he’d rule the pack. That could be good for us. Or very bad. If he was as conservative as dear old dad—or more so—then we were pooch screwed.

“What about me? The *interloper*’s presence isn’t required?” Lena propped her hands on her hips, glaring at the slimy bastard.

“You’re no one to us. Yet. *If* the pack leaders should rule in your favor, you would still need to approach the Alpha to be accepted into the pack.” His condescending look said how unlikely that was.

A harsh growl tore from Jerrod’s throat. “Careful how you talk to my mate.”

“W-we’ll see if she’s actually your mate.” But all the color leeches out of the other man’s face, and he turned to flee without looking back.

“Coward,” Lena hissed, stomping over to slam the door behind him with enough force to rip it off its hinges. “Jackass fucktard.”

“Careful.” I didn’t know if I was talking about the door or about how loudly she spoke. Alain might have heard her, and no matter how big of a prick he was, he still had the ear of the Alpha. Jerrod could get away with more because he was already a member of the pack. Lena couldn’t afford to push her luck. Our luck.

She rounded on me, fire flickering in her gaze. “What do you care? We could just leave. We don’t have to stay where some *cowardly jackass fucktard* tries to tell us who

we're able to mate to. That's instinct. Everyone knows wolves can't control that. It's destiny."

"I care because this is our *life* you're talking about. We can't just leave—we have roots here." Roots I'd waited my whole life to put down. Too much change, too fast. It whirled around me, and I wanted to vomit. It was just like when I was growing up. Everything went just fine until one day *bam*, the other shoe dropped and all my stability went sucking out from under my feet like sand in a riptide.

Tossing her hair over her shoulder, she arched a brow. Her voice took on a haughty edge. "Well, we can't stay if they won't let me in the pack. That Alain guy made it sound like that will be a major problem with *your* Alpha. In Phoenix, we had a more open-minded Alpha."

Anger sparked through me at her words, at the whole situation. Terror followed in its wake to streak through me at the upheaval that had become my life in the blink of an eye. We stood to lose everything we'd ever worked for. Eclipse. Our home. My hands shook at the thought, and bitterness coated my tongue. She just walked into the middle of all of it and took over. I crossed my arms over my chest and narrowed my eyes at her. "That's easy for you to say. You can't just sweep in and change everything. And we wouldn't even *have* a problem with Alain or any of the pack leaders if—"

I slapped a hand over my lips to cut myself off before I finished that ugly, awful thought, but it was too late. Mates were a gift, something not every wolf got. And I had two and had just spoken as though I didn't want one of them—it was obvious Lena was here because of *me*, because I was bisexual—Jerrod's sexuality didn't call for anything except women. Oh, shit. What had I done? Jerrod's mouth had dropped open, and he stared at me as if I'd sprouted horns.

But Lena's reaction was worse. Her face went ashen and tears rose in her dark eyes. She swallowed and finished the sentence for me. "If I hadn't shown up to ruin your perfect life? Thanks, Rachel. Thanks so much. You think this is *easy* for me, coming in last? The third wheel? The pack leaders think I don't belong—and you *agree* with them? How the hell do you think I feel?"

I held out my hands, horrified that I'd done something to damage the fragile emotional bonds that formed between new mates. "That wasn't what I meant. I didn't—"

She spun on her heel and walked out the door without stopping to put on her shoes. She was just...gone. I staggered sideways, feeling gutted. I was such an idiot. Oh God.

"Well, this is going to be fun." Jerrod caught me and lead me to the loveseat in the corner.

I turned to fist my fingers in his T-shirt, desperate for him to believe me. Tears blurred my vision. "Jerrod, I'm so sorry. I would never think that about either of you. It just came out all wrong."

"I know, Rach. All the changes and upheaval freaked you out. I get that. But *she* doesn't." His warm gaze met mine, understanding and irritation flashing in their depths. It was a look I was used to. "She doesn't know either of us, how we think, how we operate."

"And it's harder for her because we do know that stuff about each other. I know. I *know*. I'm such an ass." I flopped down on the sofa, burying my face in my hands. Now I had even more problems to figure out, and these ones were my own damn fault. What a huge, cluster-fucked mess.

Chapter Five

As much as I wanted to go after Lena, Jerrod insisted we had to answer the summons of the werewolf pack leaders first. So we drove downtown to reach the skyscraper that housed the pack leader headquarters. It was also an international business, but for those of us in the pack, it was where the movers and shakers could be found. And faced the way we had to now.

Worry gnawed at me. Not just for this meeting, but because of what my words had done to my mate. Lena. I'd messed up badly, and I had no idea how I was going to fix it. I hadn't dealt with another woman in a relationship for the better part of a decade. If Jerrod or I said the wrong thing, we called each other on it and handled the issue. End of story. There was no walking away.

A bony human lead us to the long boardroom where the pack leaders convened. The room stretched endlessly before us, and the most powerful people in my world sat at a shiny oak table. I felt like we'd interrupted a conference in session rather than appeared for a requested meeting. I choked back a nervous laugh—like this could be called something as civil as a *meeting*. A flurry of moments centered around one man, and he read through a sheaf of papers without looking at us.

Alain smirked from where he stood behind our leader, our Alpha. The large man's dark hair was lightly peppered with grey. Jerrod and I bowed our heads before him in respect.

"You know why you've been called before us." Malcon's deep voice carried down the table.

Jerrod took a half step forward. "Yes, and I would dispute the validity of the claim against us."

The whole room drew a breath, and I concentrated on keeping my face expressionless. Well, my mate wasn't pulling his punches this morning. I hoped like hell that he was playing this situation right, but I trusted him to get us through this. The way I didn't yet trust Lena. And that was what our problem boiled down to. I had faith that Jerrod could confront our leaders and win, but I didn't know Lena well enough to have that same faith.

Everything had happened so fast, and that instantaneous connection of the soul hadn't meant my mind was keeping pace. We needed that chance...to develop the potential into something strong. A trust as unbreakable as the mate bond between us. I took a breath and let those realizations settle. Yes. That was right. Whether we stayed here in L.A. or needed to move somewhere else, the most important thing was our mating. Jerrod understood that, and so did Lena. It had just taken me a bit longer to catch up.

I knew I craved stability, something my mother had never provided after my father died. She'd flitted from one wolf to the next, always looking for that mated connection, but she never found it again. And I never knew who I was coming home to—a quiet, competent mother who made sure I had what I needed or her neglect while she focused on keeping the man in her bed happy. Jerrod had given me that stability, and Lena, through no fault of her own, might strip it away from me. But what she brought was something more precious. Something my mother craved more than anything. A mate. A connection. Belonging. I had been so stupid, so blind. So damn scared.

I would fix this somehow, but for the moment, I needed to help my other mate get us out of this mess. I forced myself to focus on the people in the silent boardroom.

Malcon finally glanced up, pinned us with his gaze. “You *dispute* the concerns of your pack leaders?”

My mate didn’t back down, his chin angled stubbornly. “I have the highest respect for my leaders, sir. *However*, this claim calls into question the instincts of my mates and me. How can that possibly be valid? No one can dictate what instincts we receive.”

“Your instincts seem fallible with your stance on werewolf-vampire relations at your place of business.” Alain’s slick voice cut across anything the other men might have said.

Jerrod glared coolly, a direct challenge in his gaze. “You’re confusing politics with instincts, Alain. The two have nothing to do with each other. Try to remember that. And it’s not my politics that are being called into question.” His gaze locked on Malcon. “Is it?”

The older man steepled his fingers together and pressed them to his lips. When he spoke, it was slowly, the words considered. “No. No, it’s not.”

“Sir, you can’t possibly—”

“Be silent, Alain. This is not your concern.” Malcon didn’t deign to turn and look at him. “And do not ever tell me what I can or can’t possibly do. Is that clear?”

The man’s eyes bugged out of their sockets, and he turned a very nasty shade of purple. He choked out, “Yes. Sir.”

I barely hid a grin, focusing on the middle button of Malcon’s dress shirt so Alain couldn’t see the mockery I knew would flash in my gaze. He was a greasy little prick, and this might be the first time he’d ever been put in his place. He’d danced to the leader’s tune his whole life, and it had gotten him where he was. The Alpha’s right hand. I wondered how long that would last now. More changes for everyone. Malcon didn’t seem much like his father. Interesting times lay ahead for our kind...at least in L.A.

“I swear, as does my mate Rachel, that Lena is our mate as well.” Jerrod ignored Alain to focus on the Alpha. “We have mated in the tradition of all werewolves. How can that be refuted?”

Malcon nodded before he focused on me. My spine straightened, and I forced my eyes to meet his. It felt unnatural, disrespectful, but I didn't let myself look away. I swallowed and lifted my chin.

A small grin quirked the side of his mouth. "What of you, Rachel? Do you stand behind your mate?"

"Beside them, sir. Both of them." I pushed my hair over my shoulder and tried not to fidget nervously.

He hummed in the back of his throat. "Alain tells me your other mate, Lena, left rather abruptly this morning."

"Not everything with a new mating goes smoothly, sir." I'd never made a truer statement in my entire life. A wry smile pulled at my lips.

An answering grin formed at the side of his mouth, and I noticed for the first time that he was a handsome man. "So I've seen, but I've never experienced it myself."

"I'm certain you will, sir."

At that, he let loose a short bark of laughter. "Any pointers for my future bride?"

I considered the question more closely than maybe I would have normally. My own recent mating wasn't going all that well. And my actions affected not only Lena and my relationship, but Jerrod and Lena's, and Jerrod's and mine. A delicate balance, and I better learn to walk that tightrope fast. For all our sakes. "The only advice I have, sir, is: Hold on tight no matter how scary it is. Mating is as much a test as it is a joy."

"I'll keep that in mind should I ever find her." His grin slid away as he sobered abruptly. He faced my mate. "As for your politics, Jerrod." He tilted his head. "I would say you're very fortunate that this didn't happen two months ago. I'm a bit more...open...to peaceful relations between our people and the vampires than my father was."

Jerrod nodded. "Yes, sir."

A murmur broke out down the table, and Malcon silenced it with a single glance. So, he was using us as a way to make a political statement on his rule. Okay, then. As long as it worked out well for us, I was totally on board. The Alpha took a breath. "Times are

changing. Vampires and werewolves are no longer a secret to humans. We must make strides to find a lasting peace between our people, or we'll die. How long do you think humans would let us conduct open war before they interfered? We might be stronger, older, but they still outnumber us. I'll have no interference. I'll have no more war.

"Anyone in the pack who disagrees may leave with my blessing. Anyone who remains and tries to gainsay me...will regret it before they die." He focused on my mate again. "Times are changing. One of those changes may be that a man might have two mates at once. I am not one to question the instincts of a wolf. They are not ruled over by law—mine or any other Alpha's. Especially when that wolf's instincts have always been commendable in *all* areas."

"Thank you." Jerrod's chin dipped in a respectful nod.

The Alpha returned the gesture. "Bring your mate before me tomorrow. I'll speak with her and see if she would make a good member to our pack."

"Yes, sir. And she will, sir."

"That's all for today."

Jerrod opened his mouth to speak, and I latched my hand over his forearm and leaned toward him. "Let's get while the getting is good."

"Hell, yeah." He glanced down at me, nodded, wrapped his fingers around mine and drew me out of the room.

When we exited the building, the cool of the late fall afternoon wrapped around me, and I realized sweat had stuck my shirt to my back. My breath rushed out with relief, and I stopped to brace my hands on my knees. "Holy shit."

Jerrod's hand rested warm and comforting between my shoulder blades. "Well. Malcon seems nice enough."

I laughed, angling a glance up at him. "You're insane, you know that, right?"

"It's part of my charm." His fingers cupped my elbow and drew me upright. "Come on. We dodged one bullet, but we have another problem to deal with."

A sigh eased past my lips. "I have another problem to deal with. You didn't do anything wrong."

“Yeah, well. We’re in this together, Rach.” He shrugged. “Not everyone is going to agree with our new Alpha, and we can’t force them to...so let’s deal with what we *can* fix.”

Chapter Six

It took Jerrod the rest of the day to track Lena's scent to an apartment building in North Hollywood. Which was a good thing because I sucked at tracking. But once I got inside the building, her scent drew me like a Lorelei to her apartment. I took a deep breath, and I could smell her in there. This was definitely the place. Lifting my shaking hand, I made myself knock firmly. I'd messed this up. I would have to mend it.

"Go away." She probably hadn't spoken above a normal volume, but my werewolf hearing picked up her words.

Leaning my forehead against the smooth wood, I gripped each side of the doorjamb in my hands. "I'm not going away, Lena. Please open up."

Silence greeted me. Tears welled in my eyes. I'd hurt her. I knew it. So tough and stubborn on the outside, but vulnerable to me...and Jerrod. And I'd betrayed that with my fear and anger. "Please, my mate. Don't deny me."

The door snapped open, and I swayed as its support fell away from me. My hands tightened on the jamb. Rage sparked in Lena's dark eyes. "Deny you? The way you denied me?"

All the words I'd mean to say, all the apologies I'd practiced in my head slid away. I scrambled for something—*anything*—to say. "We spoke to the pack. You need to go

before the Alpha tomorrow, but from what he said, I'm pretty sure they're going to accept you as a member."

"And that makes everything okay?" She swung the door to shut it in my face. "Goodbye, Rachel."

I caught the door in my hand, each of us applying a bit of our superhuman strength. It stayed half-open, neither of us strong enough to overpower the other. "No, it doesn't make it all right. I just wanted you to know."

She glanced over my shoulder into the hallway. "Where's Jerrod?"

"Downstairs." A weak smile curved my lips. "He's giving me ten minutes to get my foot out of my mouth before he comes up."

"Why bother?" Bleakness entered her eyes, and she relaxed her grip on the doorknob. "I know where his loyalties lie."

My hand snapped around her wrist. She tensed, a shudder running through her. "With us. His loyalty is to both of us. Could you really ask him to choose? He's mated to us both."

She shook her head until her ebony curls whipped around her shoulders. "I know who he would choose."

"I don't."

"What?" Shock flashed across her face. Good, I had her attention. Now if I could just make her listen to me, forgive me for being a royal bitch.

I shook her arm lightly. "Why do you think it would be so easy for him? He needs us both."

"But the two of you—"

"Were incomplete without you. As much as I love Jerrod—and I do more than anything—he can't fulfill all my needs. I want men and women. It's always been that way for me. Always. But when Jerrod came along, I thought that was it. Game over. Fate had decided I was going to be straight for the rest of my life, and things were so good between us that I accepted that—Jerrod, too. We didn't have any secrets, so he knew

what I gave up to mate with him.” A wicked grin teased the corners of my mouth. “He did everything in his considerable power to make it worth my while.

“Then...then you showed up, and it terrified me to think that fate was going to give me everything I ever wanted, but it might come at the price of everything I’d ever worked for. I was scared that we’d lose our home, and I didn’t stop to think that you weren’t as attached to it as we were. I also didn’t stop to think that a home isn’t the most important thing. Yeah, it would suck to have to leave everything, but losing my mates would be worse than losing any material thing. I was cruel, and I was wrong.” I swallowed back tears. “I hurt you.”

“Yes.”

I nodded, met her gaze with the all the open honesty I could muster. No shields, no more room for doubts and fears. “I’m sorry, Lena.”

She stared at me for long moments, tension running through her body. She sighed and closed her eyes, sagging a little. “Don’t do it again.”

“I won’t.” I offered up a wry smile. “I’ll probably make other mistakes, but not that one.”

“Everyone makes mistakes.” Her lips pressed together, and she looked away. Stepping back, she let me inside. She turned and led the way to a big couch upholstered in black leather. Her arms crossed tight over her ample breasts while she propped herself against the arm of the couch.

I reached out and cupped her cheek, running my thumb over her silky dark chocolate skin. Leaning forward, I rested my forehead against hers. “I’m sorry, my mate.”

“Rachel.” Her full lips brushed against mine when they moved, and I didn’t bother to fight the shudder that ran through me. My eyes slid shut. God, the feel of her, the smell of her. I wanted her, but I savored the warmth of her lush body pressed against mine. This was precious. This was what was important. My mate. Both of my mates. I wasn’t foolish enough to think this was the only hurdle we’d have to get over before we managed to balance the complexities of a three-way mating, but it was worth it. This feeling, this peace that wrapped around me. This wholeness, like the halves of my sexuality, of my

soul, had finally come together. For so long, I'd been denied this side of myself, and I needed to embrace it.

Her mouth whispered over mine again, and heat shot through me, pulsing through my sex. She slipped her hand into my hair, twining her fingers through the length of it. Tugging on the dark strands, she angled my chin up so she could kiss me. Her tongue flicked out. "I've missed this. Not even a day and I crave it like an addict."

"That's how it is between mates."

She sighed against my lips. "I don't know if I'll ever get used to it."

"You will. Jerrod and I will help you." I pulled back a little to look at her. She was so lovely.

"Are you sure that you can handle this? I don't—I couldn't stand it if I made you unhappy." Her dark eyes shimmered with tears, but she coughed and blinked them back, glancing away.

I cupped her jaw in my palm and pulled her around to face me. "I have issues with change. You didn't do anything wrong. I want you. I want to be mated to you. Jerrod and I went before the pack leaders to make them see we belong together. Forever. You're ours now."

She nodded. "I can only trust that you mean it."

"I do. You can tell me to pipe down if I say anything like that again. That's Jerrod's favorite approach. That and fucking my brains out until I forget about what I was freaking about. I prefer that approach, frankly."

A small huff of laughter erupted from her throat. "I'll keep that in mind."

"Good." I cupped her hips in my hands and slipped down until I knelt before her. "In the meantime, I think I should really make this up to you somehow."

Her eyes widened, and she sucked in a breath that lifted her breasts. I wanted my lips on them, wanted to suck them deep into my mouth and bite her nipples. "Wh-what did you have in mind?"

"Can't you guess?" My fingers hooked in the waistband of her yoga pants. She lifted her hips from the couch so I could ease them down her legs.

“Show me.” She grinned, her teeth flashing white against her cocoa skin.

She wore nothing under her pants. No underwear. Well, my mate wasn’t shy. Come to think of it, neither of them was. Then again, I wasn’t wearing panties either. We were well-suited, the three of us. I smiled against her skin as I moved forward to kiss the slope of her belly. Her breath caught when I moved lower.

Slipping my hand between her silky soft thighs, I tugged one of them up to rest over my shoulder. She was wide open, and I could see how slick she was for me. Juices glistened on her pussy lips. I glanced up to meet her gaze. A moment of sheer heat and anticipation spun between us. My heart raced so fast I could hear it pounding in my ears. “I’m going to make you scream for me, Lena.”

A naughty little grin lit her face. “You can try.”

I licked my lips, letting my gaze fall to her sex. The musky scent of her filled my nose. I slipped my fingers up her thigh to rub over her wet folds. She moaned and arched her hips a little to open herself further for my touch. A gasp strangled out of her when I plunged two fingers deep inside her, beginning a fast pace. She fell back on her hands, clutching the leather of the sofa arm tight. Her hips lifted into my thrusting movements. I leaned forward to press my lips to her sex. The flavor of her burst over my tongue as I licked her clitoris.

Cream pooled in my sex, slipping down my legs. The taste of her turned me on so much, I could almost come right now. I closed my eyes and shuddered. My nipples peaked tight, thrust against the front of my silk shirt. The prim calf-length skirt I’d worn to meet with the pack leaders rode up to bunch around my thighs as my knees slid apart on the slick tile floor. Cool air brushed over my pussy, contrasting with the heat rushing through me.

“That is the hottest thing I have ever seen.” The rough edge of Jerrod’s voice caressed my ears. When had he arrived? I’d been so focused on Lena, I forgot he was following me up, forgot we hadn’t locked the door behind us. I heard the bolt slide home and the heavy tread of Jerrod’s boots as he walked toward us.

“Hello, Jerrod.” Lena’s tone was Sunday morning casual. Grinning against her slick flesh, I nipped her clitoris hard. She squealed, her fingers twisting in my hair to the point of pain. I winced as fire spread down my scalp, but somehow it was more of a turn on than anything else. The muscles of her thighs quivered against my shoulder where I held her open.

Jarrod knelt on the couch behind her, sliding her shirt over her head. His palms covered her large breasts, tweaking her dark nipples. She moaned while he bent her over the arm of the sofa to suck the tight crests deep into his mouth. I knew from experience how his teeth would nip and his tongue would sooth the erotic sting.

Her body twisted when I chuckled against her damp flesh. I suckled her hard little clit while I worked my fingers deep inside her. She writhed in my arms. Her walls clenched around my fingers, and I could tell she was going to come. I angled one finger to rub over her G-spot and she screamed, a long, high, keening sound. Her pussy milked my hand while Jerrod grazed his teeth over her tight nipples. She sobbed, her body shaking as she collapsed in our arms.

Jerrod tugged her onto his lap and cuddled her close while I climbed onto the couch with them. She reached out an arm to pull me in, and we curled together, nothing but the sound of her soft sobs cutting the silence. My heart clenched with each one, knowing whatever pain she felt was my doing. I took a breath. I wouldn’t hurt her like that again...but the love that made people vulnerable was what broke their hearts, so there was no guarantee I wouldn’t hurt her again *at all*. I could try, though. And I would. Her breathing quieted to soft hiccups while I rubbed her naked back.

She sniffled, wiped her eyes, and leaned back in Jerrod’s lap. “You’re hard.”

He coughed, a flush of passion racing under his skin. She rolled her hips against him, making him shudder. His fingers bit into her soft flesh to hold her still, and his eyes glittered with hard passion. “I said watching the two of you was the hottest thing I’ve ever laid eyes on. I wasn’t kidding.”

“I have an idea.” Her eyebrows arched, and that wicked look I was beginning to associate with her returned to her eyes. She scooted off his lap and stood. Jerrod and I

followed her lead, and he reached out to pull my back to his front. I could feel the rigid heat of his cock pressed to my bottom. Lena's gaze went over my shoulder to look at him, a little smile crossing her face. Oh shit. This did not bode well for me. Molten heat rushed through my body. God, I knew how creative Jerrod could be, I couldn't imagine what he would do with help.

He leaned me forward, his big palms cupping my ass. His hands gathered my skirt up until it was around my waist, and then he slid his fingers in until they spread my cheeks wide. I shuddered, pressing back into his touch. He dipped in further to swirl around my anus, and further still to push inside my ass. He withdrew to move to my pussy where he gathered my wetness and trailed it back to my anus. Again and again until his fingers slid easily in and out of my ass. My muscles shook with need. I wanted more. Anything and everything he could give me. "Please."

"I'm going to please you. Don't I always?" He stretched me wide, sliding two and then three fingers into me.

"Yes." I shuddered at the impact as he thrust in and out, each push faster and harder than the last. Desperation clawed at me, fierce and insatiable. "More. Please, more." He pulled his hand away, and I moaned aloud. I arched my back to try and keep his thrusting digits inside me. "No. I need more. Please."

The head of his thick cock nudged against my ass, pushing steadily in until he was seated to the hilt within me. The stretch bordered on pain, but I didn't care, I needed to quench the fire that burned through my veins. It consumed me, made me rock my hips towards him even as I sobbed for breath. He grasped my hips, holding me still, and I choked on the need to move. The muscles in my body tensed as I tried to wriggle in his grasp. Lena cupped my breasts in her palms, moving her hands down my body as she knelt before me. Oh God. Want exploded hot wild inside me.

"Let's make it interesting. You need to try new things and change a bit...to learn *balance*, right, Rach?" One of her fingers slipped between my legs, dipping inside my pussy. One finger, two, then the hard ball of her fist. I whimpered at the stretched sensation. I hadn't been fisted since my last female lover—years before I'd mated to

Jerrod—and I'd almost forgotten how much I'd always liked it. How I reveled in the feel of each knuckle caressing my inner flesh, how it made me whimper, but I was so wet it made the slide possible. How it was almost too painful to bear, but the ecstasy was so worth it. That it was Lena's hand inside me, my mate, made it so much better than it ever had been before. Jerrod nudged in deep so that they were both inside me at once. I was so full, so taken by them. Reality slid away into nothing but the feeling my mates pulled from me. They set a slow, maddening pace for me. First Lena's hand would fill me, then Jerrod's long, hard cock. Over and over and over until I wanted to scream.

"Yes." My hips rocked back and forth as their rhythm picked up speed. Balance, just as Lena had said. I was caught between them, balanced on the razor's edge of pleasure and pain, only able to follow their lead toward the promise of ecstasy. God help me.

I reached one hand back to clench on Jerrod's thigh and the other forward to twine in Lena's thick curls. They anchored me in the wild storm that ripped through my system. My entire body was more alive than it ever had been before, every inch of me tingling, shaking with the sensations I couldn't control. They controlled them, controlled me. And I trusted them both to take me where I needed to go. With that I let go of everything but my need. Heat boiled inside me, consuming me. I closed my eyes and rested my head back on Jerrod's shoulder, tears leaking down my cheeks as I twisted my hips to move with them. His tongue flicked over my collarbone, over his mate mark. I choked, my sex clenching hard. His hand rose to cup my breasts and pinch my nipples, rolling the tight tips. Lena's fingers moved to stroke me just so, and a scream tore from my throat as I came.

My pussy fisted around Lena's plunging hand while she worked me harder and faster, pushing me higher than I'd ever gone before. She leaned in and bit the inside of my thigh, sinking her fangs into my flesh. I jolted in shock, shuddering over the edge into orgasm again. Jerrod slammed deep once more and froze, his come pumping into my ass. He groaned low in his throat, the sexy sound echoing in my ear. It was too much, too fast. Blackness swam through my vision, and I swayed on my feet. One moment I was shivering in the aftereffects of orgasm and the next the world went dark as I fainted.

When I resurfaced I was alone in an unfamiliar bed, but before I could panic, the mattress dipped as my mates crawled in on either side of me. Lena curled against me on my right, her leg looping over my thigh. I scooted so that my head pillowed on Jerrod's arm, and he idly toyed with my nipples. Slow desire coiled through me, and I knew we'd soon be rolling together on the wide bed. For now it was just us and the quiet that surrounded us. For the first time in my life, I felt whole. Replete. All the pieces of my soul were in place. Jerrod and Lena fulfilled me.

His hand slipped down to circle my belly button. Tears filled my eyes as Lena reached out to twine her fingers with his on my stomach. Emotion flooded my heart, made my breath hitch with the sweet intensity of it. I laid my palm over their hands. The three of us—joined until death. A grin tugged at my lips. Contentment ballooned inside me. "I love you, my mate. Both of you."

I wasn't naïve enough to think that Malcon's approval would make everyone in the werewolf community accept us, but I would fight tooth and claw for my mating. Of that much I was certain. It was that simple and that complicated. Jerrod was right. I couldn't force the world to agree with us. Not that I'd ever admit to a *male* out loud that he was right. It just wasn't seemly. I could only work to strengthen our bonds. The rest we would solve later. Together. For now, I had them in my arms, and I would make the most of every second we had. With any luck it might be another fifteen decades before we parted.

A huge smile spread across my face. I'd been right. It had been one hell of an anniversary. And I was glad the three of us shared it.

About the Author

Crystal Jordan began writing romance after she finished graduate school and needed something to fill the hours that used to be eaten away by homework. She is originally from California, but has lived and worked all over the United States. Currently, she serves as a librarian at a large research university in the Rocky Mountains and writes paranormal, futuristic and erotic romance.

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Look for these titles by Crystal Jordan

Now Available:

Treasured

Coming Soon:

Big Girls Don't Die

A love for which even time stands still.

Treasured

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Graduate student Rebecca Small is so obsessed with the past—especially the Golden Age of Piracy—she doesn't mind her unglamorous job preparing museum displays. This display is about her favorite subject, James Morrow, a famous pirate who mysteriously disappeared without a trace.

Becca touches the pirate's antique sword, and finds herself on a ship in the middle of a sword fight, saving the sexy captain from being stabbed in the back—literally. Once the smoke clears, the man who claims he's her husband is more than eager to reward her for her timely assistance.

James Morrow knows very little about the woman he was forced to marry five years ago, but the woman who saved him doesn't fit the portrait he's painted of her in his mind. She's strong, brave, and submits to his every dark desire. She seems the perfect woman for a pirate, but he makes his living among the dishonest and disreputable—trust isn't a commodity he trades in.

Warning: explicit sex, graphic language, anal sex, violence, light bondage, spanking, the occasional hot wax scene, and a string of pearls going where no jewels have gone before. You're welcome!

Enjoy the following excerpt for Treasured:

Almost a fortnight had passed since she'd saved him from being stabbed in the back. In that time she'd showed more passion than he'd ever seen in her. He scanned the horizon with his spyglass and saw nothing but clear blue sky meeting clear blue water. Excellent. He frowned, turning the glass to watch Rebecca spar with Willy.

"Enjoyin' the view, Cap'n?" Boyd's voice came out flat and even, but James felt the back of his neck heat just the same.

Damn. Caught staring at a woman like a foolish boy after his first bit of skirt. And she was his *wife*. He lowered the spyglass and met Boyd's smirk with a glare. Boyd

cleared his throat and focused on his duties at the helm. The sun beat down on them, and James swiped the back of his hand across his forehead. They weren't enjoying much of a breeze today, but Boyd's experience in these waters kept *The Dark Fortune* moving in the right direction. James's gaze snagged on his wife again.

She confounded him. Nothing about her made sense at all. She'd become almost a different woman overnight. As a pirate, he wasn't a man to give trust lightly. Ever. It had kept him and his men alive on more than one occasion. He'd expected Rebecca to be the harpy she'd always been—her tongue only sharpening with the passage of time. And he'd been correct for the first weeks she'd been on board. But now...now was a different tale. He found himself seeking her out during the day, turning to her to ask an opinion, reaching for her at night so often he was amazed either of them still walked upright. She responded to him every time, no matter what he did or how dark his desires were. He shuddered as he recalled the sweet heat of her wrapped tight around his thrusting cock. Sweat broke out on his brow for a different reason. His cock hardened at the mere thought of having her. It had never been this way between them. If he were honest with himself, it had never been this way with *any* woman. Except her. Rebecca. His wife.

His plan to push her into giving up her little charade had come crashing down around his ears. He craved her in a way he'd never craved a woman before. He shook his head. It was temporary. It had to be. He had no time for a wife, and his profession didn't make it possible to have a wife nearby. His cock throbbed at the mere thought of having her within easy reach forever.

No.

He became a pirate to protect his men, to keep them together. It was a fool's fancy to think a woman like Rebecca could remain on board. What would happen if they were boarded in the middle of the night? His gut clenched. A part of him was amazed he felt...*concerned* for her. He would have happily fed her to the sharks but weeks ago. Now the thought of even a small bruise on the woman turned his stomach. Unless, of course, he'd been the one to bruise her. Bloody hell.

She'd done it. She had gotten precisely what she wanted from him. He was putty in her hands. His eyes narrowed on her. Had she played him so easily? Was he so

transparent that she could sense the perfect woman for him? How could he trust that this new Rebecca would remain? He couldn't. A band tightened around his chest as the realization came to him. He couldn't trust her. Couldn't trust what she'd become so quickly, so seamlessly. A plantation mistress couldn't be as content on board a pirate ship as Rebecca now seemed.

Willy tumbled across the deck as Rebecca divested him of his sword. She knelt beside the boy to be certain he was unharmed, but she let him regain his feet on his own. He grunted in approval. Good. She let the boy keep his pride.

As though she sensed his thoughts, she turned to him and met his gaze. Her brown eyes warmed and a sweet smile curled her full lips. God, she was lovely. She wasn't beautiful or stunning. Her allure was more subtle than that, more intriguing. She warranted a second glance, and then a third. Her hair flowed down her back like liquid silk, but she'd taken to leaving it in a long plait in the last fortnight. He liked that. He liked watching her take it down at night, or during the day if he didn't wish to wait to have her. The band around his chest tightened. She was everything he wanted, and it was all a lie. It had to be. No woman was so perfectly fashioned for him, and that was the damnable truth of it all. He *knew* this woman.

She took a step towards him, but he turned away to present her with his back. No. He wasn't in control of himself here. He needed to decide how to respond to her. His body wanted what his mind knew was a trap. The bait was too sweet.

"Is something wrong, James?"

Her arms closed around his waist from behind, and his cock twitched at the light contact. He wanted her naked on her knees before him, begging to be allowed to suck him. Or her bottom over his lap, warm and rosy under his palm. Or her curves bared and arched across his bed, bound and waiting for what he would do to her, hunger bright in her dark eyes as she gazed at him. And he could do anything he wanted and she couldn't stop him, would beg him for more. Another shudder wracked his body.

God, he wasn't strong enough to resist her now. He'd leave her on Barbados as planned, but for now...while he had her, he would enjoy her. He ignored the roiling in his gut at the thought of depositing her on his plantation and sailing away. He'd made

difficult decisions before and lived with the consequences. This was what she wanted, what was best for her. For now, she was here and his for the taking. That decision made, he turned in her embrace. Her left sleeve was sliced from shoulder to elbow, leaving her arm bared.

He cocked an eyebrow. "Willy caught you here."

"I let him." Her eyes twinkled up at him, her full lips stretching into a wide smile.

"We'll be in Port Royal tomorrow. You can test your land legs again." Reaching into the cut in her shirt—*his* shirt—he stroked his fingers down her arm.

Her eyes shuttered for a moment, and she glanced away. She cleared her throat. "Where were we last?"

He frowned. The occasional lapses of memory had seemed odd of late, and now the differences between the woman he'd married and the one in his arms sharpened. It began two weeks ago, he could mark the day. He tensed for a moment, then forced himself to relax. He'd already made his decision. There was no use dwelling upon it. He brushed at the wisps of hair that had escaped her braid. "Havana. And before that *The Fortune* retrieved you from the Tidewaters. Hampton Roads."

*Two mates. One sacrifice. It's a challenge that could save them all...
or destroy everything.*

Lux in Shadow

© 2008 R. G. Alexander

A Children of the Goddess story.

Because of his own carelessness, Lux Sariel lost his lover at the hands of the shaman Gray Wolf, and put his Trueblood family in grave danger. Now he's been sent on a mission to find and protect his mortal enemy's sister. His companion is Arygon, a sexy Alpha who won't take no for an answer.

When the two men find Sylvain, a sheltered and innocent beauty with power beyond imagining, passions ignite—and suddenly none of them are certain of the future.

No one but the Goddess.

She has a plan that will change everything for Her children, Were and Vampire alike. A challenge that will fulfill the promise of what this unusual threesome have found together...or destroy them all.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Lux in Shadow:

“No.”

A hand tightened in her hair and then she was gasping. Lux gripped her hips, raising her to the small pool's edge. His features were tight, lips swollen and fangs extended with desire.

He grabbed her wrist, pulling the forgotten hand from between her thighs to place it behind her back. She loved it. The aggression, the passion she could see in his eyes. All of it.

A haze had clouded her vision, wild frenzied feelings that seemed to be his and hers all at once. It scared her, excited her and embraced her like a lover. She lifted her face eagerly to his.

“Don’t think I forgot about you. Tempting as your hot little mouth is—your price was a kiss *from me*.” He nodded and a new set of hands slid over her shoulders.

Arygon. He caught her gaze as he lowered her to the ground, smiling tightly at her confusion. “You’re new at this type of bargaining, rabbit. Next time remember to be more specific about *where* you’d like to be kissed.”

A cool breeze hit her clit as his words sunk in, her head swiveling back toward Lux just as his lowered between her spread thighs.

Damp strands of wine colored hair clung to her skin. His mouth brushed against her, just grazing the bare lips of her sex. She whimpered and she could feel him smile at the sound. Was he teasing her?

Those impossibly blue eyes narrowed on the man beside her, watching as Arygon’s fingers brushed against the curve of her breast. A thrill shot through her at the touch, knowing both men were focused on her, wanting her.

The Were had paused in his caress at Lux’s glance. But only for an instant. She moaned, arching in surprised arousal when he cupped one breast in his palm, squeezing a hard, tingling nipple between his fingers.

They stared at each other in silence for one, breathless moment. It felt like forever. Some battle of wills was going on between the two Alphas—and that’s exactly how they were behaving, like two stubborn, posturing Alphas—but she couldn’t focus enough to sort it out. Every inch of her skin was on fire. Inside her, she could feel the spirit of her beast roaring for her mate.

Her hands speared through Lux’s mane, tugging until she got his attention. And boy did she get it. Fire flared to life in the deep blue. There was a challenge in his eyes. And maybe a hint of erotic warning. But she was beyond caring. “You promised me a kiss.”

At her words he inhaled sharply, hands tightening on her thighs. His mouth opened in a silent snarl, fangs fully extended toward Arygon. “Only her breasts, Dydarren.”

That cryptic command was all the warning she got. His head disappeared between her thighs, Arygon’s fingers twisting and plucking at her nipple more aggressively as she felt the first broad swipe of Lux’s tongue.

“Oh my Shining Mother.”

Arygon laughed at her gasped words. “Feel good, rabbit?” He lowered his mouth, closing his teeth on her nipple for a small teasing bite before wrapping his rough tongue around the peaked bud. His hand slid across her chest to stroke her neglected breast and she arched off the cool stone floor.

Lightning flashes of sensation flayed her. The hot mouth on her breast causing her womb to clench. The tongue thrusting inside her pussy, gathering the heated arousal that coated her sex. It was too much. She’d never imagined it would be this powerful. This all consuming.

Then there were *his* emotions. Lux. His need was a tidal wave. A hunger so strong she wasn’t sure how he could contain it. He groaned low as he pressed deeper, eating at her, consuming her as if he’d never get enough.

Arygon lifted his mouth from her breast. “Fuck, that is the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen. He loves it, rabbit. It’s enough to make me wish he’d kissed you first, just so I could get a taste.”

Lux growled a warning, continuing to drive her to distraction with his tongue. She cried out at the vibration, unable to still her movements as her hips thrust against his mouth. Tears streamed down her cheeks, the boiling wave crashing around her as she came with his name on her lips. “Lux. Oh Goddess, *Lux*.”

He rose up from the water, climbing over her, his lips panting against her own. Arygon’s mouth and hands disappeared and all she could see, all she could feel was Lux.

His cock slid against her sex and she trembled. The feel of his skin pressed against hers renewed her need for him. The need for her mate.

His jaw was clenched tight. She could feel his restraint. His gaze dropped to her neck, at the pulse she felt pounding there. “I could take you right now. You’re so ready for me. So wet. I could take you and drink your blood down. Then I would know all your secrets. Know why the male Weres fear the women. Know if I should fear you. If I can trust you.”

He nipped at her lips, leaning down to nuzzle her neck, lapping at the pulse point. “Let me, Sylvain. Let me taste you in everyway there is. Let me sink my cock inside you like I’m dying to. Invite me in.”

Her blood cooled at his words, panic replacing desire. She wanted to. If only he knew how much she wanted to. But her brother's ghost was too strong a presence. Voicing her own insecurities.

He'll know. If he bites you he'll know. If they find out what you are—this lifetime of hiding will mean nothing. They will kill you. No one can know, little sister. No one can ever know.

He must have seen the answer in her eyes, his own growing cold, shutting her out. In one fluid motion he left her, towering above her with a humorless smile. "Forgive me for offending you, Shadow. I forgot myself for a moment. It won't happen again."

She flinched at his words. He'd called her Shadow again. Did he think she was like her brother? That she hated him because he was Vampire? She caught a glimmer of what might be regret in his expression before it went hard once more. As hard and impenetrable as the rock around them.

"I'll take first watch. Get some sleep, both of you. Maybe tomorrow the old woman will wake and tell me why you are in hiding, what danger stalks you. If there is a way to resolve this, perhaps my sister-in-law will be satisfied—and I can leave you in peace."

He turned without another word. She felt her heart breaking with each step he took away from her. No matter what choice she made, it seemed, he would be lost to her.

"Why would you deny your mate?" Arygon's somber voice broke the oppressive silence that had descended on the small, warm room. Her pulse stuttered as she glanced over at Arygon.

"It's an undeniable aroma. You've begun emitting the pheromone that precedes the mating cycle. Since we're not in mating season that can only mean one thing."

"Yo-you won't tell him?" He tilted his head, studying her for long, silent moments as she held her breath.

"You won't tell him he is your mate and you wouldn't let him bite you. A female who has found her mate is usually compelled by an instinct she cannot control to tie her mate to her—and yet you resist. You are not the average Were, even for a Shadow Wolf, are you?"

"Neither are you."

Arygon grimaced as he stood, heedless of his nudity and still flagrant erection, walking over to where his clothes had been folded neatly by Lux and his interesting abilities. “I won’t deny the obvious, rabbit.”

He laughed as he pulled his shirt over his head. “Aren’t we a pair? Both far from our packs, from our families. Both of us holding tight to our secrets.”

He knelt down beside her, looking into her eyes and giving her a quick kiss on the forehead. Before he stood he repeated the formal words usually reserved for the males during season. “Thank you for honoring me with your body, little sister. I hold you in the highest respect.”

Before he left he smiled over his shoulder with a wink, making her smile in return. “And I hope you will honor me again.”

One woman's mission to bring down a sexy elemental shifter turns into a battle of wills...and hearts.

Into the Mist

© 2008 Maya Banks

Falcon Mercenary Group, Book 1.

Hostage recovery specialist Eli Chance has a secret. He was born a shifter. A freak of nature.

While on a mission, Eli's men and their mercenary guide are exposed to a powerful chemical agent, and suddenly his secret has become easier to hide. Now he's not the only one with the gift. But for his men, this "gift" is becoming more and more of a curse.

Tyana Berezovsky's brother Damiano was the guide for Eli's team and was the worst affected by the chemical. As he grows increasingly unstable, Tyana fears she's going to lose him to the beast he is becoming.

Tyana will do whatever it takes to help him, even if it means using her body to go after the one man she thinks holds all the blame—and possibly the cure. Eli Chance.

Warning: Violence, blood, guns, knives, ass kicking, people who do mean things, bad people dying, explicit sex and smart mouths.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Into the Mist:

And so it began.

Eli bit out a curse as one of the silent alarms was triggered. Though he'd been expecting company, he hadn't expected it so soon.

She certainly could have picked a better time. One when both Ian and Braden weren't off prowling the grounds looking for kitty food.

Then again, he might do well to be more worried about them than Tyana Berezovsky. She might shoot first and ask questions later.

Gabe was God knows where, having decided yesterday to disappear into the village down the mountain, probably in search of pussy. His parting words had been something

to the effect that since Eli was so keen for Tyana to find his ass then he could deal with her when she got here.

Good help was hard to find and harder to keep.

None of the others seem to think Tyana posed any sort of threat. Eli knew better. To them she was just a woman. Easily handled, easily subdued.

He smiled. He was looking forward to the challenge.

Pulling his hair behind his neck, he secured it with a leather tie then reached for his shoes and tugged them on. He might as well either go save her from the cats or save the cats from her. One way or another, someone better damn well be grateful.

A quick glance of the infrared monitor told him she was slowly making her way toward the south entrance. The most obvious course would just be to meet her, but where would the fun be in that?

No, he was going to enjoy this. Savor it. He smiled again. And maybe before the night was over, he'd take the impending confrontation to the bedroom.

He stepped into the night and breathed deep of the chilly air. Quietly he slipped beyond the shadows cast by the glow of the interior lights. He went east, cutting a direct path to intercept her...from behind.

He closed his eyes and let go, embraced the faint mist, let it curl around him, and then he became the very air he breathed.

A faint breeze carried him through the trees. Ahead, he saw movement. He looked down as he floated above the figure clad in black.

She moved with grace and stealth, her movements slow and calculated. She made no noise, left no disturbance in her wake.

He contented himself with watching her, gauging her patterns as she stopped and patiently observed the area around her. He saw her shiver then look quickly back, and he wondered if she'd sensed him again.

He ventured closer, wrapping around her hair and whispering softly against the nape of her neck. A slight shift in the air alerted him to her movement. Silver glinted in moonlight as a knife appeared in her hand. With the other, she grasped the barrel of her rifle and hauled it over her shoulder to cradle in front of her.

A faint apparition, he wrapped himself around her in a veil of mist, faint trails of smoke curling around her wrists. Then he jolted back to his human form, his fingers like bands around her small bones.

She exploded in a flurry of motion. He went sailing over her shoulder and wondered again how the hell she always managed to get the drop on him no matter how prepared he was. He was starting to take it personally.

There was the wee little matter that he honestly wasn't trying to hurt her, but still. He could have simply slit her throat, and he consoled himself with the fact that if he was a real bastard, he could have broken her neck.

But no, instead he was lying on the ground feeling like a goddamn sissy for being beaten up by a girl.

He started to pick himself up and found a boot pressed against his neck. He grabbed her ankle, yanked the knife out of the side sleeve then wrenched her back, making her fall.

They both bolted to their feet, knives in hand, and began circling.

"You're late," he said, though he wasn't about to admit he hadn't really expected her for a few more days.

"I had a few technical difficulties," she said, and it was then, when she turned her head and a sliver of moonlight hit her face that he could see her split lip.

"Piss off one too many people, my love?"

She bared her teeth. "The last man to piss me off died in a Paris alley. I wouldn't push my luck if I were you."

"Isn't that what you're here to do, though? Kill me?"

He watched intently for any change, any flicker, some sign of what was going round that pretty head of hers. That incredibly stubborn, obnoxious, gorgeous head of hers.

"I'm pretty sure we've had this conversation before," she said in a bored voice.

"Then what are you here for?"

He blinked, and she was in his face, her knee planted in his stomach and one fist buried in his ribs. He let out a growl of pain but didn't budge. Instead he yanked her against him. She gasped in surprise and the knife fell from her hand.

When she brought her other knee up, he blocked it with his.

“You’re getting too predictable, love,” he murmured. “You have a morbid fascination with a man’s balls. Is that any way to treat such delicate equipment?”

She cursed in what sounded like four different languages. He recognized at least two and raised his eyebrows.

“And to think I’ve kissed that mouth.”

Her eyes glittered in the moonlight. Just before she reared back and head butted him.

Pain exploded over him. He let go and stumbled back, holding his nose as blood gushed. Jesus H. Christ. Bitch was vicious!

She took off in a dead run. He watched her leap like a damn gazelle over rocks and roots and disappear into the night.

He vaporized into smoke and streamed after her.

He materialized in front of her this time, stopping her in her tracks. She let out a disgusted grunt.

“Can’t beat the weak woman without resorting to your little smoke tricks?” she taunted.

He grinned and wiped more blood from his nose. “If you want me to apologize for pressing my advantage, you’ll be waiting a long time. If you’d just play nice, I’d invite you in for a drink...” he made a slow up and down sweep of her body with his gaze, “...and maybe show you just how hospitable I can be.”

“And you say *I* have an obsession with that part of the male anatomy.”

“I’m a man. We think with our dicks, remember?”

She responded with a quick jab. He dodged and punched back, connecting with her shoulder. It wasn’t enough to even knock her back, but he heard her quick intake of breath, and he frowned.

Then once again, he found himself staring up at the stars when she executed a lightning roundhouse kick to his jaw. And she was off again.

Damn but he must have it awfully bad for this chick to put this much effort into getting into her pants.

He got up, rubbing his jaw, and set off. She was making steady progress toward the house. What did she want? She wasn't trying to kill him. Hurt him? Taunt him? Yes. But she was pulling her punches every bit as much as he was, and she hadn't tried to filet him with the damn machete she called a knife.

Chasing after women wasn't his style, but damn if he wasn't wagging his ass after her like a damn lap dog. He had a sneaking suspicion the feisty little wench just might be his dream woman.

The constantly trying to do him bodily harm could put a serious kink in their relationship, though.

He shifted again and streaked after her, suddenly weary of the chase. It was time to end it. He wanted her. Wanted to taste her again. To get so deep inside her that he lost all sense of himself.

A low growl echoed across the night.

As he rounded the corner of the west wing of the house, he saw Tyana frozen, staring at two pacing cats.

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