

Moonlight Hero

Ashton Grove Werewolves, Book 2

Written by Jessica Coulter Smith



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Chapter One

Late April

Kiera ran on silent feet through the darkened alley. It probably would have been easier to escape if she had shifted into her animal form, but then she would have been stuck without clothes later. That would have been a little hard to explain to the average human.

Running for all she was worth, she could sense the vampire's presence not far behind her. Going into that bar was the dumbest thing she had ever done! Why had she allowed the girls to talk her into it? Shaking her head, she continued to the end of the alley. Hopefully she would live to see another day.

When she reached the corner, she looked around. There wasn't much nearby except an old Victorian home and an auto repair shop. Noticing the lights were on in the auto shop, she hurried across the street. Reaching for the door, she glanced over her shoulder and gasped. The vampire was standing on the corner under the street lamp. To a passerby he would seem harmless, but Kiera knew better, knew him for the predator he was. She was trembling as she watched the vampire; she knew he could smell her fear but was helpless to do anything about it.

Pushing the door open, Kiera rushed inside. As soon as she closed the door, she turned the lock. The logical part of her brain was calling her an idiot for thinking a lock would keep out a vampire, but her self-preservation skills were kicking in. That small piece of metal made her feel a little bit safer, even if her safety was nothing more than an illusion.

Across the room, Gabriel heard the door close and lock. As he slid out from under the Mustang he had been working on, he noticed the disheveled woman warily watching the street through the glass door. He got up and walked slowly toward her. Taking in her creamy complexion, petite stature and long ebony hair, his body immediately responded to her. She was definitely something to look at, curved in all the right places.

"May I help you?" he asked.

Kiera gasped and spun toward the deep voice. Momentarily startled, she regained her composure, trying to keep her expression as neutral as possible. "Is it alright if I stay here for a minute?"

Gabriel casually looked her over, appreciating the way her black dress clung to her curves. "Everything okay?"

Kiera glanced back outside. The vampire was still on the corner, watching her every move. She knew that he was waiting for her to leave. It wasn't fair to involve this stranger in her problems, but she didn't have much of a choice if she wanted to live. And she *definitely* wanted to live!

Looking back at Gabriel, she said, "That man across the street has been following me. I'm a little nervous about going back outside."

Gabriel looked through the glass door. Sure enough, a tall blond man was standing on the corner, watching them. An inner voice was screaming at him that the man was a vampire and to be wary. Gabriel shook his head, clearing the ridiculous thought from his mind. Vampires? He was starting to lose it. Granted, being an alpha werewolf made him believe in the impossible, but he had yet to see proof that vampires existed.

Gently taking her arm, he pulled her away from the door. "You're safe here. You can stay as long as you need to."

Kiera gave him a shaky smile. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate that."

"Since I'm offering sanctuary, mind telling me how that guy ended up following you?" If he was getting pulled into a domestic dispute, now was the time to find out. The last thing he needed was an angry husband coming after him.

Kiera sighed, realizing she could only tell him half of the truth. If she said that a vampire was following her, she had no doubt she would be dragged off to the loony bin. Granted, that would be the perfect ending to her not so perfect day, but she would prefer to not land herself in a padded cell.

"The short version is that he tried to pick me up in a bar. I told him that I wasn't interested, but he wouldn't take no for an

answer. When I left, he followed me. He kind of gave me the creeps so I ran.”

Something seemed a little off with her story. If she had been running, why wasn’t she winded? Not that he wouldn’t have enjoyed watching her run in that skin tight dress and heels; it definitely would have been a sight to behold, especially with her being so top heavy. He almost grinned at the image his mind was creating.

Giving himself a mental shake, he asked, “How did you end up here at my garage? There isn’t a bar for at least three or four miles.”

Kiera hoped the shock didn’t show on her face. Had she really run that far? “I guess I got lost. I was just trying to get away from him and didn’t really pay attention to where I was going.”

She knew her excuse sounded feeble, but she couldn’t very well tell him she was a werefox, giving her more agility and stamina than your average human. There were some things that humans just weren’t prepared to hear. The fact that “make believe” creatures really existed ranked high on that list.

Gabriel looked skeptical. There had to be more to her story than that, but obviously she wasn’t going to share the full tale. “What’s your name?”

“Kiera.”

“I’m Gabriel.”

Kiera smiled. “It’s nice to meet you. I just wish it was under better circumstances.”

“Do you need to use the phone to call someone? It doesn’t look like that guy is leaving anytime soon,” Gabriel said, glancing out the door.

“Oh.” Kiera followed his gaze. Sure enough, the vampire was still watching from across the street. “Um, I don’t really have anyone to call.”

Gabriel arched an eyebrow, but didn’t say anything. Just what kind of trouble was she in? She didn’t look more than twenty-one or so. A deep primal instinct arose, making him want to comfort her and protect her. The wolf in him

responded to her soft feminine scent while the man responded to her lush curves. She didn't even reach his shoulder, which told him that she was under five-foot two since he was a little over six-feet tall. She wasn't bone thin like a lot of women he'd met, but she wasn't fat either. Her elfin shaped face held full rosy lips and beautiful green eyes that were almost almond shaped. They reminded him of cat eyes.

Kiera noticed the appraisal. "I don't want to keep you from your work. Please don't feel like you have to keep me company."

Gabriel grunted, noting the obvious dismissal. Evidently mechanics weren't good enough for her. He should have known that a woman as pretty and as well dressed as this one was would have an attitude. Paper pushers were probably more her style; wealthy paper pushers.

"Guess I can finish up this job while you wait to see if your admirer goes away."

Walking away from her, he slowly climbed back under the Mustang. It was difficult to concentrate on his work, but he managed. There was something about her that wasn't entirely human. He knew she wasn't a werewolf, but she was definitely something special. His alpha instincts told him that she was a mate for his pack. Since Cole was already married, that meant that she belonged to either him or Michael. Just thinking of Michael being with her made him grind his teeth.

Kiera watched Gabriel effortlessly slide under the car. She started feeling light headed and realized that she had been holding her breath. He was the most gorgeous guy she had ever seen! Easily over six-feet tall, he had medium length black hair, piercing blue eyes, and was well muscled. It had been difficult to not throw herself into his arms. If he had stood by her much longer, she wouldn't have been able to keep her hands to herself. She hoped that he hadn't noticed the effect he had on her. Her animal instincts were going to get her into trouble one of these days.

As she glanced back out the door, she realized that the vampire was crossing the street. Startled, she instinctively

started backing toward Gabriel. It wasn't fair to ask for his protection, but she had never been so terrified in her life. She couldn't put her finger on it, but something about the mechanic made her feel safe and protected.

Hearing her footsteps drawing near, Gabriel slid out from under the car and looked up at her. "What's wrong Kiera?"

"He's coming over. I know that I have no right to ask this, but please help me." As she looked down at him, her eyes were wide with fear. Her heart had doubled its rhythm and felt as it would burst from her chest.

Gabriel stood up and drew her close to him. She trembled against his body. He absently stroked her back, trying to soothe her. His extra sensitive hearing told him that the guy was almost to the door. Thinking fast, he came up with a plan; one that she probably wouldn't like, but he was going to enjoy every minute of it.

"Kiera, I'm going to ask you to trust me. Just go with whatever story I have to come up with in order to get that guy out of here. Do you think you can do that? Even if it means being ... *close* to me?"

Kiera looked up into his bright blue eyes and knew without a doubt that she could trust him. "Okay."

The vampire jerked the door open, tearing the lock apart as the door was torn loose. While Gabriel tried to process that small fact, he bent his head to Kiera's and kissed her. He had only planned on a short kiss, more for show than anything else, but when Kiera responded to him he pulled her roughly against his chest and deepened the kiss. Every primal instinct in him was yelling for him to claim her as his mate. Her scent surrounded him and he lost himself in the pleasure of her soft body and warm lips.

The vampire stepped into the shop and cleared his throat, attempting to act human. Apparently he didn't realize how ridiculous that was after tearing open a locked door. Gabriel pulled away from Kiera, but kept her pulled firmly against his body. As he looked the intruder over, taking in the deathly pale

skin and nearly black eyes, he realized that his first assessment hadn't been far off. It seemed that vampires really did exist.

"I'm sorry, may I help you?" he asked the vampire, trying to sound nonchalant, as if a vampire ripping his door apart was an everyday occurrence.

"I was looking for my girlfriend. I'm afraid I was a little surprised to see her kissing someone else," the vampire replied smoothly.

Gabriel looked down at Kiera with a questioning look. "Something you haven't told me sweetheart?"

"No," Kiera said in a husky voice, still reeling from his kiss. Hearing him call her sweetheart, even if it was for pretend, made her tingle all the way to her toes. What was wrong with her? He was a stranger and here she was ready to jump his bones! She was starting to feel like a horny teenager. Just the same, she felt safe standing in his arms. Her traitorous body probably wouldn't move even if she wanted it to.

Gabriel looked back at the vampire, "I'm afraid you must be mistaken."

The vampire wasn't happy with the way things were turning out. Why had the stupid woman run in here? Could the two of them really be together? Or was it just chance and they were acting for his benefit? He refused to let his prey slip through his fingers. It wasn't often that his kind found those of fairy descent. Their blood was intoxicating.

"I don't think so," the vampire replied with a low growl.

Gabriel could tell the vampire wasn't going to back down. His body tensed, ready for a fight. Swiftly, he maneuvered Kiera behind him to shield her from the vampire. He knew it was only a matter of time before the confrontation went to the next level. He wouldn't be able to forgive himself if something happened to her.

"What makes you so sure she's your girlfriend?" Gabriel asked, not entirely sure it was smart to taunt a vampire. "Obviously *she* doesn't think she is, not with the way she was kissing me."

The vampire smiled, showing the tips of his fangs. Now that Gabriel had stepped in front of Kiera he could smell the wolf scent on him. He hadn't seen a werewolf in a hundred years. Too bad they weren't extinct as he had thought, however, that could be easily remedied.

"I think I would recognize my own girlfriend. Besides, you've never laid eyes on her before tonight. Admit it wolf!"

Gabriel was surprised that the vampire recognized what he was, but he refused to react. "I have no idea what you're talking about. We've been together for a while now. Matter of fact, we live together."

The vampire narrowed his eyes, "Why would a wolf associate with a fox?"

A fox? Did he mean that Kiera could shapeshift into a fox? That would explain a few things. A little stunned, Gabriel managed to keep his expression neutral and his voice steady.

"Maybe because the wolf recognized her as his mate regardless of what she could turn into," Gabriel replied.

The vampire laughed. "Yeah, right. Like an alpha wolf would lower his standards to that of a fox."

Kiera stiffened behind Gabriel. He was an alpha werewolf? Would he still protect her? In her hometown in Tennessee, the wolves did *not* associate with any other shapeshifters. They considered themselves above everyone else, superior in all ways. More than once Kiera had been the brunt of their cruel jokes. She pressed herself closer to him, hoping he wouldn't hand her over. Gabriel was all that stood between her and death, of that she had no doubt.

Gabriel growled low in his throat. "There are no standards to lower. She is my mate and as such my equal."

The smile slipped from the vampire's face. This was proving much more difficult than he had imagined. If it weren't for the fairy blood he smelled running through her veins, he would have given up long ago. Fairy blood was very rare and something he couldn't pass up. The magic in their blood lasted for at least a year and made the vampire invincible, even against stakes through the heart or decapitation. This was quite

literally a game of life and death...his life or death to be exact. The little werefox was of no consequence.

"If she's your mate, why was she at a club alone? The true mate of an alpha wouldn't seek the companionship of other males! It's obvious that you haven't claimed her."

Kiera decided it was time to speak up. "I wasn't looking for men. I went with some friends to keep them company. I was trying to leave when you approached me."

Gabriel held her back. She had spunk, but he was afraid it would get her killed. Having never met a shifter that wasn't a wolf, he wasn't sure how quick she was or how strong. Even though he didn't really know her, his wolf's instinct to protect his mate was strong... and Gabriel had no doubt that she was his.

"Kiera is my mate in every sense of the word. To doubt me would be a deadly mistake Vampire."

The vampire smiled. "What makes you think a single wolf is going to stop me?"

Gabriel felt Kiera stiffen behind him. He wasn't sure if it was from fear of the vampire or fear that a pack of wolves could come bursting through the door at any moment.

Keeping his gaze calm, he asked, "What makes you think you'd only have to deal with me? In case you've forgotten, the fact that I'm the alpha means I have a pack."

The vampire looked at him uncertainly. One werewolf wouldn't be a problem, but a pack of them would be a different story. Maybe he could still trick the wolf into handing over his prey. He still wasn't convinced the woman was really the wolf's mate. If she wasn't, there was no way the man would bind her to him permanently.

"I'll make a deal with you."

"What kind of deal?" Gabriel asked, knowing the vampire had to be up to something. Why would the bloodsucker give up his meal so easily?

"Since you claim she's your mate, you shouldn't have any problem binding her to you in a more official way... say, through marriage?"

The vampire had certainly shocked him with that one. It was his experience that women tended to prefer courtship before a marriage, but if it saved her life then maybe Kiera would be up for it. Knowing she was his mate was answer enough for him. The vampire was actually doing him a favor by requesting the marriage.

Kiera cautiously walked to Gabriel's side. She knew that if they were married, he would be giving up his chance to find his true mate. Werewolves mated for life. It didn't matter if it was a human marriage or a pack mating ritual; the end result was still the same. She couldn't ask that of him and she was prepared to turn herself over to the vampire, even knowing that it meant she would die.

As if sensing her thoughts, he gently brushed his fingers across her cheek. "What do you say sweetheart? Think you can handle a wedding ceremony?"

Kiera forgot to breathe. He was going to do it! He was really going to give up his future happiness in order to protect her. Never had she met a werewolf like him. But she couldn't allow him to do it. Marrying him, denying him a mate, it would be too cruel. He seemed like a genuinely nice guy and deserved better.

"I ..."

Sensing her hesitation, Gabriel stopped her words with a soft kiss. He gently moved his lips across hers. When he pulled back, he could see the desire in her eyes and knew he had won. He had to fight back a smile of victory. While the vampire was their enemy, part of him wanted to thank the leech. Although, just because Kiera was married to him by law, it didn't mean they would have a real marriage. He would probably still have some work ahead of him to truly make her his mate. Regardless, he knew it would be well worth it in the end.

"Yes," she whispered, still dizzy from his kiss.

He smiled and pulled her to him. Being a shifter, she was aware that this would bind them together forever. Unlike humans, there would be no divorce. He was glad that she hadn't turned him down, for both of their sakes.

He gave the vampire an insolent look. "Satisfied?"

The vampire was furious. Damn the both of them! How dare they try to thwart him on this? There was no way the wolf had seen her before today. If they had truly been mated, the wolf's scent would have been on the woman. The smell of an alpha werewolf was very distinct; it wasn't something a vampire would miss.

"Not entirely. You have one day to arrange the ceremony. I'll find you tomorrow evening to witness the event myself," the vampire told them. He wanted to make sure they were stuck with each other if he couldn't drain her. And honestly, did the idiot think that marrying the werewolf would guarantee her safety? This was only a minor delay. In the end, he would drain the woman dry. What were a few days or weeks to someone with eternal life?

Gabriel was a little surprised by both the timeline and the vampire's response. Trying to buy Kiera more time, he said, "You know it's hard for a woman to choose her wedding dress in just one day."

The vampire sneered, "What do I care? She could wear a burlap sack or nothing at all; as long as you're married it doesn't matter." He gave them an evil grin, "And should you fail to get married tomorrow night, she becomes mine to do with as I please. At first I had just thought of draining her, but maybe I could have a little fun first. And don't even think of trying to hide her; I'll find her one way or another."

Gabriel clenched his fists to keep from attacking the bloodsucker. "You'll never touch her," he growled.

In the blink of an eye, the vampire disappeared. Beside him, Gabriel felt Kiera tremble. They may have saved her life, but now she would lose everything familiar to her. He couldn't have been happier with their predicament, but he was worried that he might lose his mate. True, she would be bound to him, but would she be happy about it?

"I'm sorry that it came to this. For all I know, you have a husband and kids at home; not that you look old enough for that." He looked thoughtful. "How old are you anyway? I'm not going to end up in jail, will I?"

Kiera laughed; the sound coming out shaky and uncertain. "I'm twenty-eight and no, there's no one at home. I never knew my mother and my father passed away a few years ago. I'm the only werefox in the area at home."

Gabriel released a breath he didn't realize he had been holding. "What about friends? Anyone you need to get in touch with? Or explain things to?"

Kiera slowly shook her head. "I came with a group of shapeshifters, but they aren't really friends. They tolerate me and feel sorry for me. Being the only one of my kind has made me a rather solitary person I guess."

Gabriel wanted to pull her into his arms to comfort her, but he wasn't sure how she would react. "You said you came in with them. Came in from where?"

"West Tennessee. I live in a rural shifter community there."

Gabriel nodded. It made sense that a large number of shapeshifters would inhabit a town of their own. It made things easier when the moon was full for one thing. Gabriel and his brothers weren't controlled by the moon, but he had heard of some werewolves who were. "We'll have to go and get your things after the ceremony."

Kiera wasn't sure how to respond. She had never met anyone, much less a werewolf, like Gabriel before. He was definitely a pleasant surprise.

Dropping her eyes to the floor, she said, "I'm sorry for all of this."

Gabriel tipped her chin up so he could see her eyes. "You have nothing to be sorry for."

"But now you've lost your chance to find your real mate!" Her eyes suddenly widened. "You weren't already with someone were you?"

"No. I've been casually dating someone off and on, but nothing serious."

Kiera looked at him doubtfully. He was so good looking and so nice that she had a hard time imagining him having a lack of options. Women were surely falling over themselves for a date

with him. "You don't seem very upset about being stuck with me."

Gabriel smiled at her. "At the risk of you running from me in terror, I'm going to share something with you. I wasn't lying to that leech when I said that you were my mate. I recognized you by your scent when you came into the shop." He let his gaze wander from the top of her head to her toes and back again. "Not to mention that you're beautiful."

Kiera stared at him, completely dumbfounded. "But... how is it possible for me to be your mate? I'm just a werefox! If you're the alpha, don't you have to mate with another werewolf? Your line won't be pure if you're mated to me."

Gabriel burst out laughing. "Pure line? Who have you been talking to?"

Kiera looked at him doubtfully. "The werewolves that run the Memphis territory. They practically own my town."

That sobered him immediately. "What exactly did they say to you?"

"That wolves didn't mix with other creatures. They said they wouldn't have me if I were the last shapeshifter on earth."

Gabriel could tell there was more. "What else Kiera? If we're going to make this work, you need to be completely honest with me."

Kiera looked at the floor in embarrassment. "Please don't make me tell you. It's too humiliating."

He pulled her into his arms and hugged her to him. She felt so soft and feminine. She also felt fragile and he had to remember not to squeeze too hard. Foxes were timid by nature, but she had stood up to the vampire. There was certainly more to her than met the eye.

What had the wolves told her that was so horrible? Or was it more something they had done than what was said? The thought of anyone harming her made him furious.

"Kiera, even though we're getting married tomorrow, I won't expect anything from you. After all, we're strangers to each other still. You can take as much time as you need."

She froze in his arms and cautiously looked up at him. The pain in her eyes nearly took his breath away.

"You don't want me?" she asked in a hushed voice. The wolves at home might not want anything to do with her, but it hurt that her mate might not want her either. She had thought she had finally found someone who could accept her for who she was, someone who could come to love her one day regardless of what she shifted into.

"Sweetheart, I want you so bad that holding you like this is torture. But I don't want you to feel obligated to do something you don't want to do or aren't ready to do. We have plenty of time to get to know one another first. This isn't something I want to rush you into. The wedding can't be helped, but the rest I *do* have some control over."

Her hormones were kicking into over-drive again. Just the thought of consummating their marriage was enough to turn her on. A light blush stained her cheeks. "What if I don't want to wait?"

"I just thought that since you obviously had a rough time with the wolves at home that you might not want to be intimate with a werewolf; at least, not until that wolf has a chance to gain your trust," he said with a grin.

Kiera placed her hand on his cheek. "That's very sweet of you, but you already gained my trust. You saved my life tonight. Besides, if I'm truly your mate as you claim, then we're destined to be together. It won't matter if we start our life together immediately, in a month, or in a year. Either way, we're going to be married to each other and living under the same roof. Why prolong the inevitable?"

Gabriel had to bite his tongue. How had he become so fortunate? Not only was his mate drop dead gorgeous, but she was sensible too. He wasn't sure if it was so much him saving her, or her saving him. "Of course I saved you! It's not like I was going to let that vampire run off with you."

"What if I hadn't been your mate?"

"I still wouldn't have let him have you," Gabriel responded without pause.

Kiera pursed her lips in thought. "Would you have told him that I was your mate if in fact I hadn't been? Would you still have married me just to protect me from him?"

Gabriel paused. "I'm not sure. I know I would have done what I could to save you, but I don't know if I would have announced you were my mate and gone through with a wedding. I would like to think that I would have done anything necessary to save your life regardless of who you were." Gabriel frowned. Maybe he wasn't as honorable as he had once thought himself to be.

Kiera smiled. "And that is why I trust you. You are *nothing* like the wolves back home! Their alpha can't compare to you. He is a mean, lecherous fool who thinks he's better than everyone else and that the rest of us should be grateful he allows us to live. You could never be like that."

Gabriel kissed her. "I can't imagine anyone being foolish enough to think you weren't good enough for them."

She blushed in response and buried her face against his shirt. A thought dawned on her. The group she had arrived with had surely left the bar by now. That meant she was completely alone and didn't have a change of clothes with her. They had planned on checking into the hotel later tonight.

"Gabriel, would you mind doing me another favor?"

"Anything."

"The other shapeshifters I came with were going to check into a hotel tonight. My bag is still in their car. Could you drive me to the hotel? It's the Mayfair on Park."

Gabriel ran a hand down her arm. "Do you want to stay with your friends tonight? Or would you like to stay at my place?"

Kiera hesitated. She hadn't expected that question from him. While they were getting married tomorrow, thanks to the vampire's rather odd demands, it still shocked her that he would want to spend time with her. Her thoughts were in a whirlwind, leaving her confused and uncertain.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

Gabriel nodded his head toward the house across the street. "I share the Victorian across the street with my brother,

Michael. My other brother, Cole, used to live there too, but he recently got married and moved out. I have two cousins that stayed with us for a little while as well, but they moved out last week.”

Kiera remembered seeing the house during her mad dash to the repair shop. “Your brother won’t mind me being there?”

What she really wanted to ask was how his brother would react to finding out she shifted into a fox. Gabriel may not be worried about her status in his pack, but she was. She didn’t want to discredit him or make him look like a fool in front of the others. He deserved better than that.

“No, he won’t mind at all. Why don’t we walk across the street and you can meet him while I clean up a bit? Then I can take you by the hotel to get your things. You can pick any room in the house you want. We have plenty to spare.”

Blushing furiously she decided to bite the bullet. She wasn’t sure if it was just surging hormones controlling her or if it was her animal instincts. “Even yours?”

Gabriel froze. “If that’s where you want to be, but you don’t have to. I meant it when I said that you didn’t have to do anything you didn’t want to, that you could have as much time as you needed.”

“I was hoping that maybe you could just hold me tonight. I can’t explain it, but I feel so safe when I’m with you. Most of my life I’ve been picked on and ridiculed by werewolves, but having your arms around me makes me feel protected.” Kiera blushed, why had she just admitted that to him? He may be her mate, but she had just met the man!

“I’m glad to hear that. I would be honored to hold you tonight,” he said. While he meant every word, he knew that it was going to be an agonizingly long night. Just thinking of Kiera’s soft curves pressed against him made him grow hard. The next twenty-four hours were going to be interesting.

Kiera smiled up at him and laced her fingers with his. “Might as well get the introduction to your brother out of the way.”

Gabriel grinned at her. “He’s going to love you. You really don’t have anything to worry about.”

“When do I get to meet your pack?”

Gabriel stopped. He had forgotten to mention that to her. “Actually, my pack consists of just me and my brothers. We have two cousins who live one town over, but that’s it. There aren’t any other shapeshifters in this area.”

Kiera didn’t know what to think about that. “Just the three of you? What about your cousins, are they part of your pack?”

“No, they have their own pack. Well, if two wolves can make a pack. Is that going to be a problem? I know you’re used to an area full of shapeshifters...”

“No! It’s actually wonderful!”

Gabriel smiled at her and tugged her toward the door. He stopped and surveyed the damage for a minute. He realized that the door was beyond destroyed. For the sake of his customer’s cars, he had to find a way to lock up tonight. Looking around, he spotted an old metal door lying at the edge of the parking lot.

“Wait here just a minute. I need to cover up the doorway so people won’t break in tonight.”

He walked over to the door and hoisted it onto his shoulder. It probably weighed a few hundred pounds, but to a werewolf that was nothing. When he was beside Kiera again, he asked her to step back. He sat the door down and covered the doorway the best he could. The metal door was a little larger than the glass one had been, but a regular human wouldn’t be able to budge it during the night.

He dusted his hands off and took her hand again. “There. A temporary fix until I can stop by the hardware store tomorrow.”

They walked across the street and stopped in the yard of the Victorian. Up close, Kiera could see the fresh paint on the gingerbread trim. The shutters were a beautiful dark blue-green and the trim and front door had accents in the same color family. It was a beautiful home.

“Your home is lovely,” she told Gabriel.

“Thanks. Cole helped me repaint it last week. Personally, I think he was just trying to get away from Marin’s ‘honey-do’

list. The house they bought needed some remodeling so he's kept pretty busy when he isn't at work."

"Does he work at the garage with you?"

Gabriel shook his head, "Not anymore. Cole has a degree in biology and works for Sabin Bio-Med. Michael works at the garage with me though. He's only been back at work for a week or two after being injured."

"I hope it wasn't anything too serious."

He looked thoughtful as if trying to decide what to say or if he should say anything. "If you're going to be part of the family, you might as well know. Marin was abducted by a really deranged man. When he tracked her to our house, he ended up attacking Michael. We weren't sure if Michael would make it that night, but thankfully he's okay. He healed pretty quick, but I made him rest a few weeks before he came back to work."

Kiera looked at him with wide eyes. "You certainly have an interesting family."

Gabriel grinned. "That I do. Sure you want to join this crazy lot?"

Kiera smiled back. "Yes, I'm sure."

She wouldn't admit it, but being part of a crazy family was better than having no family at all. The last thing she wanted was his pity so she refrained from speaking her thoughts out loud. She only hoped her emotions didn't show on her face.

They walked up the front steps and through the door. When Kiera stepped into the entry, she looked around. Everything was neat and tidy. The wallpaper was a little out-dated, but it still looked nice. The hardwood floors gleamed as if they had just been shined that morning.

Gabriel pulled her toward the stairs. "Come on, Michael and I sleep on the third floor."

When they got to the third floor landing, they heard Michael yell through his door, "It's about time you got home bro! I was starting to think a car had fallen on you."

Gabriel shook his head and pushed Michael's door open. His brother was sprawled across his queen size bed flipping

through a magazine. Michael glanced their way and quickly sat up, stuffing the magazine behind him.

"I didn't realize you had company. Sorry about that," Michael said with a sheepish grin.

Gabriel looked down at Kiera. "Actually, she isn't company."

Michael looked perplexed. "If she isn't company, then what is she exactly?"

Gabriel cleared his throat. "My mate."

Michael just about fell off the bed. "Whoa. That's ... wow, that's great!"

He pushed to his feet and rushed over to Kiera. He enveloped her in a big bear hug. "Welcome to the family!"

Kiera looked at him hesitantly. "Would you still welcome me if you knew that I could shapeshift too?"

Michael stepped back and raised his eyebrows. "You're a werewolf too?"

Kiera shook her head. "No, I'm a werefox actually."

"Sweet! I've never met anyone before who could shift into anything other than a wolf. That's awesome!"

"You really don't mind that I don't turn into a wolf?" she asked him.

Michael looked at her uncertainly, "Why would I?" He looked at Gabriel. "Am I missing something here?"

Gabriel sighed. "The town she lives in apparently is run by werewolves who think they're better than the other shapeshifters. She doesn't feel like she's good enough to be with me and was worried that you and Cole wouldn't accept her as my mate. I told her that she didn't have anything to worry about."

Michael shook his head. He had never heard anything so ridiculous before.

"Good thing the Atlanta pack isn't like that. I don't think I could stand to visit them if they were," Michael replied.

Kiera was amazed that Michael was so ready to accept her, not only as the mate to his pack master, but also as his sister-in-law. It was mind boggling.

"Michael, would you keep Kiera company for a minute? I'm going to jump in the shower so I can run her by her hotel."

"No problem, but why is she staying in a hotel when we have so much space here?"

Gabriel smiled. Leave it to Michael to get right to the point. "She just needs to get her things." He turned to leave, but stopped. "Um, there's actually something else we'll need to discuss."

Michael raised an eyebrow. "Something more significant than you finding your mate?"

"It's more in the 'how' really..."

Kiera looked at Gabriel. "I can tell him while you shower if you'd like."

Gabriel walked over and kissed her on the cheek. "That would be great. I'll be back in a minute."

While Gabriel showered and changed, Kiera told Michael about the vampire following her and how she had taken shelter in the garage. She stumbled over her words a little when she got to the whole wedding part. Michael look stunned, but didn't say a word. When she was finished with her story, she looked at him expectantly. Would he still welcome her after finding out that she could have gotten Gabriel killed?

"Wow, that's some story. So y'all are getting married tomorrow? Is that even possible? I mean, can you get a marriage license the same day as the ceremony?"

Kiera hadn't thought of that. "I ... I don't know. If we can't, then I guess ... I guess I'll have to go with the vampire."

"No," bellowed Gabriel from the doorway. "You *will not* go with him!"

"Chill bro. Why don't you take Kiera to her hotel and I'll call Matt and Cassie and see if they can lend a hand? You know that he gets things done quickly around this town," Michael told him.

Gabriel visibly relaxed. "You're right. See what he can do and we'll be back shortly."

Kiera followed Gabriel down the stairs. When they reached the bottom, she placed her hand on his arm. "Who are Matt and Cassie?"

"Friends of ours. Matt is a millionaire who used to be a ghost and Cassie is his witchy wife."

"I'm sorry; did you just say he was a ghost?" Kiera was certain she had misheard him.

"Used to be. It's a long story."

Kiera just nodded numbly, not really sure what to say to that. She took a moment to admire Gabriel's clean clothes. Not that he hadn't looked wonderful in his grease stained white tee and tight holey jeans, but he looked absolutely mouthwatering when he was cleaned up. He had on a black short sleeve shirt and dark jeans with black motorcycle style boots. He looked like the bad boy momma's always warned their little girls about. Good thing Kiera's mom hadn't been around to warn her off of bad boys, she thought with a grin.

Gabriel ran his fingers through her hair. "Let's go get your stuff so we can get you settled for the night. I have a feeling that tomorrow will be a busy day."

When he got to the driveway, he froze. He hadn't thought about what they would drive. Gabriel only had a Harley and he couldn't picture her riding on it in heels and a dress. Turning he walked back into the house and grabbed Michael's keys to the Corvette. Looked like he was going to have to go car shopping...

"I wasn't thinking. We'll have to take Michael's car."

Kiera looked at him questioningly, "Why?"

Gabriel pointed to the Harley further down the drive, "Because that's mine. Looks like I need to do a little car shopping this week."

"Actually, when you take me home for the rest of my things, we'll have another vehicle. I have a Toyota Highlander."

Gabriel smiled at her. "I think I'll ask Cole to ride with us to your place. He has a large truck and we can load it up and only have to make one trip. Then you and I can ride back in your car."

Kiera was smiling as she climbed into the Vette. She had gone from being on the dinner menu tonight to having a family again. Things were definitely looking up. She only hoped that the Memphis area werewolves wouldn't cause problems for Cole and Gabriel when they took her home. No, when they took her to get her things. Her home was here now, in Ashton Grove, she corrected herself.

Things were happening so quickly that Kiera's head was spinning. Had anyone else told her they had met the man of their dreams and were getting married twenty four hours later, she would have told them they were insane! People just didn't do that. Or at least normal people didn't. In a way, shapeshifters had it easy. Each of them had a destined mate; one person in the entire world who was meant for them and only them. It took away a lot of the guess work that went into human relationships.

As they pulled into the hotel parking lot, Kiera spotted the Mercedes she and her friends had arrived in. She pointed it out to Gabriel and he parked nearby. They walked over to the hotel room door and knocked. Suzey, a blonde werelion, answered the door. Her eyes immediately dismissed Kiera, but she was openly drooling over Gabriel. Kiera felt the prick of jealousy, but tried not to show it.

"Hi, Suzey. I just need to get my things out of the car. Could you have Sierra unlock it for me?" she asked.

Suzey tore her gaze away from Gabriel and looked at Kiera, "You aren't staying with us?"

Gabriel had had enough of the woman's insolent behavior. She had ignored Kiera as if she weren't even there; then the blasted woman had practically undressed him with her eyes. Had she been a wolf, he would have expected to see her tongue hanging out! Bringing himself to his full height, he stared the woman down. "No, she won't be."

Suzey gasped. She lightly sniffed the air and her eyes widened in shock. "You're an alpha wolf!"

Gabriel gave her a lazy grin. "Last time I checked. I believe Kiera asked for her things. Are you going to help her or do I need to break into the vehicle to retrieve them?"

Suzey jerked back as if she'd been slapped. She wasn't used to being treated callously by men, especially gorgeous, powerful men. Looking over her shoulder, she yelled for Sierra.

It turned out that Sierra was a red head who had the body of a cheerleader. She might have been attractive if she hadn't had such a crappy attitude. Gabriel wasn't impressed with her, although she seemed highly impressed with herself. The sooner he was able to get away from these crazy women, the better. All he wanted was to go home and spend a quiet evening with Kiera.

Sierra pushed her way around Suzey and practically glued herself to the front of Gabriel. "What's a big strong alpha like you doing with a timid little fox? Wouldn't you prefer a real woman in your bed?"

Gabriel smiled at her. "Yes, I would very much like to have a real woman in my bed. And if you'd be so kind as to get her things, then maybe that will happen sometime tonight."

Kiera tried not to laugh at the expressions on Sierra's and Suzey's faces. It was priceless! She could tell they were trying really hard to figure out what on earth Gabriel would want with her. Especially since Sierra was a werewolf. She had practically every wolf in Tennessee panting after her and here Gabriel was telling her that he preferred a werefox.

Sierra was fuming, but she went to the Mercedes and pulled out Kiera's bag. Walking back over to the couple, she tossed the bag on the ground. "Here. Don't expect us to wait around for you. You'll have to find your own way home."

Gabriel picked up the bag. "She's already home."

Looking down at Kiera, he pulled her closer and claimed her lips in a possessive kiss. Slipping his tongue between her lips, he glided his tongue along hers, enjoying the taste of her. When she moaned and leaned into him further, he broke the kiss and smiled down at her. Taking her hand, they walked back to the Vette, leaving the two shapeshifters staring after them in open-

mouthed shock. He opened the passenger door for her and stowed her bag in the trunk before climbing into the driver's seat. Without a backward glance, he drove out of the parking lot and headed back to the Victorian. He was pretty sure that both women were still staring after them, trying to process what had just happened. If he weren't so damn mad at them, he would have laughed. It seemed completely unbelievable to them that he would prefer Kiera over them.

When they got home, Gabriel carried Kiera's bag to his room and placed it on the floor at the foot of the bed. In the morning, he'd have to do something about re-arranging his clothes so she'd have some space in the dresser. There was plenty of room in the closet so that would work for now. Being a jeans and tee shirt kind of guy, he didn't have much use for the closet. There were only a few nice things in there for emergencies.

"I'm afraid I don't have any empty drawers in the dresser right now, but I'll take care of that in the morning. There should be empty hangers in the closet though," he told her.

"Thank you. I'll probably just leave my stuff in the bag for tonight."

Gabriel walked over and opened a door. "Here's the bathroom if you want to freshen up or anything. I'm going to talk with Michael for a minute. Do you have everything you need?"

Kiera nodded her head. "Yes, thank you."

Gabriel gave her a brief smile before closing the bedroom door behind him. Kiera walked over to the bathroom and peered inside. There was a large garden tub with jets and a large walk-in shower that could have easily held four or five people. It was by far the biggest bathroom she'd ever seen.

Grabbing her nightgown and toiletries, she headed into the bathroom and decided a soak in the tub would be nice. As the tub filled with hot steamy water, she pulled her hair into a twist and put a clip in it. As long and thick as her hair was, it would take forever for it to dry so washing it this late at night was out of the question. She rummaged through the cabinets and closet

until she found a washcloth and towel before climbing into the tub. Sinking into the water up to her neck, she closed her eyes and let the hot water sooth away the stress of the day.



Gabriel had been in Michael's room longer than he had planned. It had taken at least half an hour to go over the plans that Matt and Cassie had been able to throw together. How they managed to set an appointment for a marriage license, procure a minister, arrange for a florist and caterer, and set an appointment at a bridal boutique when it was almost midnight was beyond Gabriel. Money apparently really did move mountains. He hoped that even with such short notice Kiera could still have the wedding of her dreams. He was going to owe Matt and Cassie big time!

When he got back to his bedroom, he noticed that the bathroom door was open a little bit and Kiera was nowhere in sight. He crept to the bathroom door and peeked in. She was lying in the tub with her head tipped back and her eyes closed. It looked like she had fallen asleep.

From across the room, all Gabriel could see were her naked shoulders and arms. He knew that if he went any closer he would see a lot more, but he was afraid she would react badly; he wasn't certain that he could control himself if he saw her naked right now.

Inspiration struck and he shifted into a wolf. He was still large enough to see over the edge of the tub, but it was somehow different when he was in his animal form. He nudged her arm with his cold wet nose. She murmured something in her sleep, but didn't wake up. He edged a little closer and licked her cheek.

Kiera slowly opened her eyes. Turning her head, she saw a large black wolf standing next to the tub. Her first reaction was to shriek. Once her heart settled down, she remembered that she wasn't at home. Hesitantly she reached for the wolf.

"Gabriel?"

The wolf nodded his head yes.

Kiera smiled at him. "You make a beautiful wolf. I'm sorry I fell asleep; the water just felt so relaxing I couldn't help myself."

Gabriel nudged her towel closer to her and padded out of the bathroom. He shifted back into his human form and threw on some pajama pants. He didn't wear them very often, but he kept a pair on hand in case of an emergency. He figured that tonight was definitely an emergency. If he held Kiera against his naked body, they would be doing a lot more than sleeping. The woman lit him on fire.

He had just picked up his dirty clothes when Kiera came out of the bathroom in a long white nightgown. It had thin straps and a hint of lace at the bottom. She looked like an angel and somehow managed to look sexy as hell at the same time. She had that innocent and yet naughty look to her.

Gabriel started to turn down the covers. Turning to face her he asked, "What side of the bed do you normally sleep on?"

"Oh, um, the left."

Gabriel walked around to the other side of the bed and turned down the covers. He held his hand out to her and she slowly walked over to him. She was so tired that she looked like she would collapse at any moment. Gabriel picked her up and gently laid her down on the soft mattress. He had a large king size bed with a hand-carved wooden headboard. Kiera was so petite that he would have to get some steps for her to use; or buy a different bed.

Once she was tucked in, Gabriel walked around to the other side and climbed under the covers. In her sleep, Kiera moved closer to him until she was pressed against his side. Gabriel sighed and drew her into his arms. It was going to be a very, very long night.

Chapter Two

Kiera woke the next morning to a hard warm body pressed against her back and sunlight filtering through the bedroom window. She stretched and slowly opened her eyes. Looking around the room, she felt a little disoriented. Rolling to her other side, she came face to face with a sleeping Gabriel. She reached out and smoothed an unruly lock of hair back from his face.

Gabriel wrapped his arm around Kiera and pulled her close. He was in that in-between state where he wasn't really asleep but he wasn't fully awake either. Rolling to his back, he pulled Kiera with him.

Sprawled across his chest, she watched him sleep. At least, she assumed he was still asleep. He didn't seem to be the type to play possum. Figuring she could be stuck there for a while, she rested her cheek on his chest. Breathing in his woodsy scent, she released a contented sigh.

Feeling her breath ruffle the hair on his chest, Gabriel knew he had to shift her weight; soon. Having her pressed against the front of him was starting to cause his entire body to wake up; particularly the area pressed against the apex of her thighs.

Gabriel opened his eyes and looked at Kiera. "Good morning, sweetheart."

Kiera lifted her head to look at Gabriel. "Good morning."

Gabriel shifted them to their sides so that his condition wouldn't be quite so noticeable. "Did you sleep well?"

"Better than I think I ever have before."

He smiled at her. "I'm glad to hear you're well-rested. I talked to Michael last night and it seems that Matt and Cassie were able to pull a lot of strings late last night and we have a lot of appointments today."

Kiera looked at him questioningly. "Oh? Like what?"

Smoothing her hair away from her face, he answered, "Like getting a marriage license this morning; meeting a florist and a caterer; and getting you fitted for a wedding gown."

Her eyes widened. "They were able to do all of that? Wow! But ... a florist and caterer are going to cost a lot of money. We don't have to have a big wedding. Besides, I don't have anyone to invite."

Gabriel smiled. "I want you to have a real wedding. It only seems fair since you've been forced into this."

"Me? You're the one who's been forced to marry me!"

He shook his head. "No, honey. I'm not being forced. I already told you that you're my mate. The timing is a little off as I would have preferred time to get to know you better and do things the traditional way, but either way I want you to be mine."

She smiled at him. "You really mean that, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. Now let's get up and get dressed. We should have just enough time for breakfast before we have to go to the courthouse for our license."

Gabriel climbed out of bed, but Kiera faced a slight dilemma as she peered down at the floor, which seemed a really long ways away. "Um, Gabriel? Could you please help me down?"

He chuckled and lifted her out of the bed. Setting her down on her feet, he brushed a kiss on her cheek. "When I stop at the hardware store to replace the shop door, I'll see if they have some wooden steps. You can pick out a new bed later, or maybe a thinner mattress would work. These double-pillow tops tend to add height to any bed."

"Oh, no! I don't want a new bed."

Gabriel arched an eyebrow and looked at her. "You like not being able to get into your own bed?"

She blushed. "Actually, the stairs wouldn't be a bad idea, but I kind of like the bed."

He grinned at her and headed to the closet to pull some clothes out. He pulled out a tux and laid it across the bed before he grabbed some jeans and a blue shirt out of the dresser to wear for the day.

Kiera eyed the tux. "So you keep a tux on hand? Get married often?"

“Matt and Cassie bought all three of us one when they got married several years ago. I hung on to mine and used it again when Cole got married a few months ago. Figured it might come in handy.”

Kiera shook her head before she knelt on the floor to dig through her bag. The man had hidden layers; and she fully intended to explore them all.

She pulled out a pair of black Capri pants and a green top that matched her eyes. Digging around in the bottom of the bag, she pulled out her black heeled sandals. She wanted to look nice for Gabriel without dressing up too much.

Gabriel had been covertly watching her across the room. “Why don’t you take the bathroom and I’ll change out here?”

She nodded and walked into the bathroom, closing the door behind her. She quickly put on her clothes, brushed her teeth and washed her face. She untangled her unruly hair. After putting on some makeup, she started to pull her hair back in a pony tail. Then she remembered that Gabriel seemed taken with the curly mess and left it hanging loose down her back. She probably should get it cut a little as it hung all the way down to her waist, but she just never seemed to have the time.

When she stepped out of the bathroom, Gabriel was waiting for her. He looked just as wonderful in the daylight as he had looked last night. She wasn’t sure that she would be able to keep her hands to herself. This was definitely a new feeling for her and she wondered if it had anything to do with being his mate. Maybe it was the animal side of her that made her feel this way.

Gabriel stared at her. “You look so beautiful.”

She blushed. “Thank you.”

He held his hand out to her and she walked over to him, placing her hand in his. Looking up into his blue eyes, she wanted him to kiss her. As if reading her mind, he bent his head to hers and claimed her lips in a gentle kiss. Kiera moaned and threw her arms around his neck.

Gabriel smiled against her lips and untangled her arms from his neck. "If we don't stop right now, I have a feeling that we'll miss our own wedding."

"You're probably right. Guess we should go downstairs."

Gabriel took her hand and led her down the staircase. Judging by the sounds coming from the kitchen, he figured that Michael must have gotten industrious and decided to make breakfast. As they walked into the brightly lit kitchen, they were shocked to see a full house. It seemed that Cole and Marin, along with the cousins, had heard the news and decided to come and check things out.

"Well, I hadn't expected the whole family to be here this morning," Gabriel said.

Cole and Marin looked at him with huge grins on their faces. Connor and Colin both grinned at him and checked Kiera out. Michael had found something very interesting on the floor. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Michael had called Colin, Connor, and Cole this morning with the news.

Gabriel put his arm around Kiera's waist. "Since you're all here this morning, I'm assuming that Michael told you I have found my mate."

Cole came over and hugged Gabriel. "I'm happy for you."

Turning to Kiera, Cole said, "Welcome to the family."

"Thank you. Although I wish it had been under better circumstances."

Cole nodded. "Yeah, I heard about the rushed wedding. No matter though. The two of you were meant to be together so everything will be fine."

"I wish I could be as sure as you are. I keep telling him that he's making a mistake," Kiera replied.

Gabriel's arm tightened around her. When was she going to realize that he didn't care what she shifted into? He had to get permission from the Memphis pack master to enter her hometown, but being there wasn't going to be easy. It was going to take everything in him not to rip every werewolf apart.

Connor and Colin both came over and briefly hugged Kiera and congratulated them both.

Clearing his throat, Gabriel asked Cole, "Would you mind driving with us tomorrow to her house? It's outside of Memphis. She needs to clean out her place and I thought your truck might come in handy."

"Sure. Just let me know what time you plan on leaving. I think Cassie and Marin were going shopping tomorrow anyway."

Marin swatted her husband on the arm. "As if you mind having Sundays to yourself!"

He grinned at her. "You know I don't mind your shopping trips. I'm glad that you and Cassie get along so well."

Connor cleared his throat. "If you need more hands, Colin and I can go with you too. Two trucks are better than one after all."

Kiera wasn't sure what to make of all of this. From what she could tell, Marin was human, and seemed to be pregnant. Kiera had heard of other shapeshifters choosing human mates, but she had never met a werewolf who had done so. The three brothers seemed to be really close, which was typical in a shifter family. She hadn't quite figured out Connor and Colin being their own pack, but assumed that one of them was also an alpha. And for some reason Cassie and Matt were friends who were as close to the brothers as family. This was not what she was used to at all, but she liked it. She liked the closeness and she was looking forward to her life with such a large, caring family.

Gabriel was watching Kiera, trying to judge her reaction to his family. He knew they were a lot to take in, but he hoped that she would feel comfortable around them. She had a myriad of emotions running across her face. Mostly, she just seemed uncertain. It was going to take a while to undo everything the Memphis wolves had done to her. He knew there was a spunky confident woman dying to get out, he just had to figure out how to release her.

He looked around at his family. "Well, since Michael felt guilty enough to cook, we might as well eat."

Everyone sat down at the table and ate. They all had a few questions for Kiera. The wolves mostly wanted to know about the town she lived in. The better informed they were, the smoother things would go when they cleaned out Kiera's place. The dynamics of the wolf pack in Memphis was vastly different than that of the Atlanta group. They were going to have to tread carefully tomorrow.

Once everyone was finished with their meal, they put their dishes in the sink. Michael offered to take care of the clean-up so that Gabriel and Kiera wouldn't be late for their appointment. He even loaned them his car again.

The trip to the courthouse didn't take as long as Kiera had expected it would. Apparently Matt had taken care of everything but their personal information. The forms were waiting for them when they arrived. Within minutes, they were leaving with their license in hand. Next stop was the florist.

The woman in the floral shop was thrilled to see them. She had known Gabriel's family and had been friends with his mother. If she was shocked over the expediency of the wedding, she didn't show it. Both Kiera and Gabriel were stumped when she asked where the wedding would take place. Of all the things for them to forget, that was the worst.

Kiera touched Gabriel's arm, "What about having it at your house? I saw a gazebo in the backyard that would be a nice place to say our vows."

He smiled at her. "I'd like that."

Looking at the florist he asked, "Think you could put different types of roses around the gazebo? Maybe we can put a carpet running from the house to the gazebo and the flower girl could drop rose petals."

"But Gabriel, we don't have a flower girl," Kiera said.

He winked at her. "Sure we do. Cassie has an adorable little girl who would fit the bill perfectly."

Kiera laughed. "Then I guess we *do* have one." She looked at the florist. "I love the idea of roses, but do you think it would be possible to add some jasmine to the mix?"

The florist smiled at them. "Just leave it all to me."



Several hours later, they had flowers and food taken care of. Gabriel had dropped Kiera off at the bridal shop while he went to the hardware store. He was able to purchase a replacement door for the shop and have it delivered. He knew he should check on some stairs for the bed, but truth be told he rather enjoyed having to help Kiera get in and out of bed. He loved the feel of her in his arms. After making his purchase, Gabriel went to the bridal shop to pick up Kiera.

Kiera's dress was tucked securely in the trunk of the Vette and they were heading home. They had about two hours before the wedding was to take place. Hopefully that would give Kiera enough time to get ready.

Gabriel had made a few phone calls throughout the day. He had contacted the Memphis pack and secured their permission to be in their territory. He had also found out that Kiera had one friend in the whole town; a woman who could shift into an ocelot. He had immediately contacted Matt to make sure Kiera's friend would be at the wedding; he wanted it to be a surprise for her. Gabriel had also invited all of their friends from the area, along with Cassie's family. The wedding would still be small, but hopefully it would be memorable for Kiera. He just wished that she had family who could be there for her. It was a special day and it was sad that her mother and father couldn't be present.

When they got home, Cassie and Marin were waiting for them. They immediately rushed Kiera up to one of the second floor bedrooms. She was pampered and primped for over an hour. When she put on her wedding dress, both women told her how radiant she looked. It was a sleeveless white satin gown with a flared skirt that went down to her ankles. She opted not to have a train since the wedding was to take place outside. She had chosen something simple, not wanting a lot of seed pearls or sequins, it was understated yet elegant.

Once Marin had made certain the men were already at the gazebo waiting on the bride, the trio headed downstairs. The sun had finished setting and every star in the sky shone brightly.

Outside, they had hung blush, white and lavender colored paper lanterns around the yard. There was a gray carpet running from the back steps to the gazebo. The florist had not only wrapped flowers around the gazebo railing, but she had also added potted jasmine around the yard. The reception tables each had a vase of irises in the center.

Before the women could open the door, there was a brilliant flash of light behind them. They turned as one to behold a stunning woman with long ebony hair and violet eyes. However, her most startling feature was her wings. Yes, wings! She had large wings that looked almost like stained glass and she wore a dark purple gown. The woman stepped toward them and held her arms out to Kiera.

“Daughter, you look lovely tonight.”

Kiera stared at the woman with large eyes. Looking at her, there was no doubt they were related, but her mother? Could it really be? Her father had told her there was something special about her mother, but she had thought he was just saying that because of how much he had loved her. She knew her mother hadn’t been a shapeshifter, but her father had never mentioned anything about her being a fairy; he’d also neglected to mention the fact that she was still alive.

“Mother?”

The woman smiled. “Yes, dear heart. I am your mother.”

Kiera hesitantly stepped into her mother’s embrace. She hugged her mother tight and breathed in her floral fragrance. She smelled of lavender and jasmine, two of Kiera’s favorite scents. Having never hugged her mother before, she didn’t want to let go.

Taking a step back, Kiera looked into her mother’s eyes. “Why are you here? Why did you leave after I was born? And why didn’t father say anything about you being a fairy?”

Her mother laughed. “One at a time my dear! I’m here to see you on your wedding day. I can’t tell you how happy I am that you found your life mate.”

Kiera smiled at her. "I'm happy mother. I truly am." Her brow puckered. "But there's a vampire on his way here. He can't find you here!"

"I know. I'm the reason he was chasing you to begin with. If not for me, your blood would be pure werefox, but instead you're only half werefox and half fairy."

Kiera shook her head. She wasn't sure what to say to all of this. There was a knock on the door behind them and Marin turned to answer it. Michael was on the other side.

"I think Gabriel is starting to get a little worried that his bride has changed her mind. The bloodsucker is outside too."

Marin glanced over her shoulder. "Kiera sort of had a surprise visitor, but I think she's about to leave. We'll be out in a few minutes."

Michael gave her a questioning look and moved her aside. Nothing could have prepared him for the shock of seeing a fairy standing in their home.

"Is she what I think she is?" Michael asked in a near whisper.

Marin grinned at him. "That depends. Do you think she's a fairy or Kiera's mother?"

Michael's eyes grew huge. "Kiera's mother is a fairy? Does Gabriel know about this?"

Kiera turned to Michael. "Please don't say anything right now Michael. The vampire doesn't know my mother is here. It would be deadly for her if he did. And no, Gabriel doesn't know I'm half fairy. Until a few minutes ago, I didn't even know I was half fairy!"

Michael nodded and closed the door. He went to give his brother, the antsy groom, the news that his bride was ready to marry him but just needed another minute. The tension visibly left Gabriel's shoulders after being reassured that Kiera hadn't changed her mind.

Back in the house, Kiera and her mother said their goodbyes to one another.

"When will I see you again, Mother?"

"I'm not sure. This was the first time I was allowed to visit the mortal realm since having you. My punishment for falling in love with your father was to not set foot in the human world again for at least a hundred years. I was able to talk your grandfather into a short visit for your special day."

It was all a bit much for Kiera to take in. Her mother kissed her and in a flash of light vanished. Marin and Cassie both had stunned expressions on their faces. Kiera was fairly certain she had a deer in the headlights expression herself. It wasn't everyday you discovered the mother you had thought was dead was really a fairy; a fairy who had been banished from the human world. Only in her life could weird things like this happen on a regular basis. First a vampire and now fairies... was Bigfoot going to show up next?

Clearing her throat Kiera told Marin, "Well, I guess I should get outside to my groom."

The women lined up at the door, with Cassie and Marin in front. Cassie's daughter had been unable to be a flower girl because she had woken up with chicken pox that morning. All in all, everything else was perfect. The florist had done a terrific job; the caterer had created a fabulous buffet out in the yard complete with round tables and chairs; and her best friend had been flown in that morning. And did she mention that her groom was the most perfect man on the planet? Weirdness aside, it was a perfect evening.

As Cassie and Marin started down the back stairs to the yard, a quartet started playing the wedding march. Cassie and Matt had truly thought of every little detail. Their thoughtfulness touched Kiera. She made her way to Gabriel's side. When she was finally by his side, she gave him a watery smile. She was fighting tears of happiness, but she could tell by Gabriel's expression that he thought she was upset. Grabbing his hand, she squeezed his fingers in reassurance.

The minister started the service. Everything passed in a bit of a blur. Kiera was happy to be joining her life to Gabriel's, but the vampire in the crowd made her a little nervous. Just because he had said he would leave her alone if she married the

alpha, didn't mean that he would keep his word. She wasn't sure how honorable vampires were. Anyone who lived off the death of others probably shouldn't be trusted.

At the end of the service, the minister declared them husband and wife.

"You may kiss the bride," he told Gabriel with a smile.

Gabriel bent his head to Kiera's and kissed her softly on the lips. "You look beautiful tonight."

She smiled up at him. "Thank you."

As they turned to face their guests, the minister said, "I present to you Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel Andrews."

Half way down the aisle, the vampire walked over to them. He nodded his head to each of them. "You have both kept your word and so shall I keep mine. But know this, I will be watching. If you should separate or divorce for any reason, I will come back to claim her."

Gabriel tightened his grip on his new bride. "That won't be necessary. I'll never leave her side."

"And I'll never leave his," Kiera told the vampire, meeting his gaze boldly.

The vampire quirked his lips in what might have been a smile. The fangs made it look more threatening than amusing. He didn't plan on keeping his word, but let them think they had won. When their guard was down, he would strike. Not only would her blood make him invincible, but he would be taking the mate of an alpha wolf. Oh the possibilities! Things were getting better and better.

With another nod to each of them, the vampire turned and disappeared. Kiera wasn't sure whether he was able to vanish into thin air or if he just moved so fast that it appeared he could do so.

Kiera relaxed into Gabriel. "I'm so glad he's gone."

"Me too. I was more than prepared to fight him, but he moves so fast I'm not sure I would have won."

Looking up at her new husband she said, "I have faith in you. You would have won."

He smiled at her. "I'm glad that you have so much faith in me. We should probably finish greeting our guests and start moving through the buffet. No one will start eating before us."

They made their way through the small crowd, side by side. After they had greeted everyone and thanked them for coming, they started fixing their plates. Kiera was so nervous about her wedding night that she wasn't sure she would be able to eat anything. She hadn't told Gabriel something very important about herself. Tonight was going to be her first time to be with a man. Since none of the shapeshifters at home had wanted her, she had remained a virgin. She knew it was going to come as a shock to him. Who had heard of a twenty-eight year old virgin?

The rest of the evening seemed to fly by. Before Kiera knew it, the guests were leaving. Michael, Cole and Marin were the last to go. Michael walked over to them and hugged Kiera.

"Welcome to the family little sister."

Hugging him back, she said, "Thank you."

"So ... since this is your wedding night, I'm going to catch a ride with Cole and Marin and crash at their place tonight. I figured you would want your privacy. I already stashed a bag in their car."

Kiera blushed, but Gabriel just grinned at his brother. As Michael turned to leave, Gabriel tugged Kiera toward the house. When they got to the top of the stairs, he lifted her into his arms and carried her across the threshold and up the stairs to their room on the third floor. Gabriel put her down after he closed the bedroom door.

Looking around, Kiera was surprised. Someone had come in and set up the room to make it as romantic as possible. The lights were off, but the room had the soft glow of candle light from the ten or so candles spread around the room. Rose petals dusted the floor and were strewn across the bed. The dark bedding from that morning had been replaced with light blue satin sheets and a silver satin comforter. Noticing that candle light was spilling out of the partially open bathroom door, she peeked inside and saw that the large tub had been

filled with hot water; rose petals were floating on top of the water.

She felt Gabriel's presence behind her. It was still hard to believe he was her husband. Even more incredible was the fact that the vampire had kept his word and had left once the ceremony was over. It was all a little strange. Something told Kiera they hadn't seen the last of the vampire, regardless of what he'd told them, but those were thoughts best left for another day. Tonight was her wedding night.

She turned and smiled up at her new husband. "It seems that we have the house all to ourselves for the night."

Gabriel wrapped his arms around her. "Yes, we do. I still stand by what I told you yesterday. We really don't have to do anything you don't want to."

"I know. But I want us to have a real marriage. It had a rather unconventional start, but what we do with it is up to us. We can either embrace what destiny has brought us, or we can try to ignore it. I'd rather embrace it personally."

He smiled at her. "The fates chose well when they picked you as my mate. I think we're going to do quite well together."

It wasn't the words of undying love she had always imagined her groom saying to her on her wedding night, but all things considered it would do. It was hardly fair for her to expect him to love her after only twenty-four hours. Married or not, life just didn't work that way. There was a difference in being a mate and being in love. If you were destined to be someone's mate, then you had a closeness that most people couldn't fathom. But it wasn't love... it was something more primitive, more like animal instinct.

Kiera hoped that one day Gabriel would come to love her. Until then, she would have to satisfy herself with the knowledge that as her mate he would never cheat on her or abuse her. To do so would go against everything they believed in as shapeshifters. She sometimes envied the humans who married for love, but in some ways being someone's mate was better. People could fall out of love and get divorced, leaving both

parties hurt and angry. When you were mated to a shapeshifter, it was forever.

Smiling at him, she replied, "It would be a shame to let that hot bath go to waste."

"Why don't you climb in first? Neither of us got a chance to eat much tonight. I'll see if there's some leftover champagne and maybe some crackers and cheese in the fridge. I'll be right back."

He brushed a quick kiss across her lips and headed out the door. Kiera looked around. Her wedding night! She was excited, but also nervous. She wasn't naïve enough to not know what happened between a man and a woman. After all, what woman didn't enjoy a good romance novel every now and then? But there was a vast difference in reading about it and actually being part of it.

Sighing, she unzipped her dress. Letting it pool at her feet, she slipped out of her undergarments and headed into the bathroom. Her hair was going to get soaked if she didn't pull it up. She piled it on top of her head with lots of bobby pins before climbing into the tub. A few minutes later, she heard Gabriel return to the bedroom.

The first thing Gabriel noticed was the pile of clothes in the floor. It seemed that his new bride had already stripped and gotten into the tub. Grinning, he sat the bottle of champagne, glasses and snacks down on a nearby chair. He removed his clothes in record time. He figured the food could wait, but grabbed the champagne bottle and glasses before heading into the bathroom.

Having seen her in the tub last night, he should have been prepared. He wasn't. Knowing that the beautiful woman before him was his wife changed everything. When she saw him, Kiera smiled. Her eyes traveled down his body, a becoming blush staining her cheeks. The animal side of him was screaming for him to mate with her. The human side, which was thankfully winning, was telling him to make this as slow and romantic as possible. After all, you didn't get to have a wedding night every night.

“Mind if I join you?”

It didn't seem possible, but Kiera's blush grew even brighter. “I was hoping you would.”

Kiera had no idea how to act. She had never seen a naked man before, much less been in the same room with one. She only hoped that her inexperience didn't ruin the evening for him. He seemed to want her as much as she wanted him. Hopefully that wouldn't change when he found out she was still a virgin.

The tub was so large that with Kiera sitting in the middle there was plenty of room for Gabriel on either side of her. He stepped into the tub and pulled Kiera into his arms. It amazed him that this tiny, beautiful woman was his.

“You're so small I'm afraid I'm going to hurt you.”

Kiera giggled. “I'm not that small, Gabriel. I'm just short.”

He shook his head. “Trust me, you're small.”

Kiera was happy that he saw her that way. In reality, she was just an average size for a woman. She wore a size twelve, but had been blessed with enough bust and hip to give her a nice hourglass shaped figure. Far be it for her to discourage him against calling her small!

She scooted over closer to him and kissed him. His lips were smooth and yet firm. Kiera ran her hands over the hard muscles of his chest. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pressed herself closer to him. She may be inexperienced, but her body knew what it wanted... and it wanted Gabriel.

Gabriel grabbed her hips and readjusted her so that she was straddling him. Kiera gasped and pulled back a little. She could feel the hard length of him pushing against her, trying to gain entry. While she wanted him, she knew that the first time could hurt, especially if she didn't tell him that she'd never been with another man.

Concerned over her retreat, he gently ran his fingers down her cheek. “If you want to stop, we can.”

“It isn't that.”

“Then what is it sweetheart? You can tell me anything.”

“I'm still a virgin,” she blurted out.

Beneath her, she felt Gabriel go very still. She wasn't even sure he was breathing. She searched his face trying to judge his reaction. It was like looking at a blank slate; no emotions showed at all. In hindsight, she probably should have told him before now. The moment just never really presented itself. Besides, she had told him that none of the shapeshifters in her town had wanted anything to do with her. Surely he could have guessed.

Thinking he didn't want her anymore, she started to back away. Gabriel wrapped his arms around her to keep her from leaving.

He looked into her beautiful green eyes and gently rubbed his hands down her back. "I'm honored that I'm your first."

Kiera relaxed when she realized he wasn't mad at her. "I'm glad that you're my first, too."

"I should probably warn you that it's going to hurt your first time."

"I know, but I also know the pain won't last long," she said.

He smiled at her. She was so trusting. "We should probably move to the bed for your first time."

Kiera shook her head. "No. I want to stay right here. Everything was perfect until I told you I hadn't done this before."

"Are you sure?"

In response, she pressed her body closer to his and kissed him. She could still feel him pressing against her and she slowly pressed her hips forward. The tip of his erection had just barely rubbed against her hot folds when his hands clamped down on her hips to keep her from moving.

"Maybe you should let me be in charge the first time."

She smiled at him and pried his hands loose. She backed away until she wasn't straddling him anymore. "Okay. Now what?"

Gabriel shifted to his knees and turned her around. "Why don't you hold on to the side of the tub?" he whispered in her ear.

Kiera felt his hands gently touch her waist. His touch was light and very erotic. Every nerve in her body was at attention. He slid his hands around to her stomach and massaged his way up to her breasts. The moment his hands touched her nipples, they hardened against his palms.

Kiera had never felt anything like this before. Not even in her wildest dreams had she imagined it would feel this incredible. She felt the tip of him gently pressing into her, felt herself stretch to accommodate him. She hadn't really felt any pain.

Once he was all the way inside of her, he stopped, allowing her time to adjust. She had barely made a sound as he had torn through her hymen.

"I don't want to hurt you Kiera."

"I'm fine Gabriel. I promise; I barely even felt it."

He started moving again, but very slowly. He stroked her nipples with his thumbs and gently nipped her on the neck. Kiera gasped and thrust her hips back. She wanted all of him, wanted him to stop holding back.

"Damn it Gabriel! I said I was fine!"

With a low growl, he grabbed her around the waist and thrust into her hard and fast. Her gasp of pleasure was his undoing. He continued thrusting deep and hard, pushing both of them closer and closer to the edge. He felt her muscle clamp down on him as she climaxed and he soon followed, reveling in the feel of his seed spurting into her hot body. He was a little ashamed that he had allowed his animal side to win; he should have made it last longer, should have been gentler.

Afterwards, Gabriel pulled her into his arms. Being with Kiera had been different than anything he had experienced before. While he still didn't understand why the vampire had chased her all the way to his shop, only to leave empty handed, he wasn't going to question his good fortune. She was definitely the best thing that had ever happened to him.

He brushed a gentle kiss across her lips. "I promise that next time will be better. I should have taken things slower."

She leaned into him. "It's impossible to make it any better. That was absolutely perfect."

Smiling, he asked, "Would you like some champagne?"

Kiera smiled at him. Before she could reply, the champagne bottle and both glasses appeared on the edge of the tub. She stared at them wide-eyed.

"Please tell me you did you that," she whispered.

Gabriel was shaking his head and looking at her strangely. "No, it wasn't me."

"Do you sense any other presence in the room? Maybe you have a ghost?"

"No. I think... I think *you* made them appear over here," he answered.

Her eyes got even wider, "Me?"

"There's almost a glow to you," he said, raking his eyes over her beautiful, naked body.

"All brides have that," she lightly scoffed.

"Not *that* kind of glow. You're literally glowing!"

Looking down at herself, Kiera saw that he was right. She *was* glowing. It wasn't as bright as the light that had signaled her mother's appearance, and disappearance, but she was most definitely glowing. She started to run her hands through hair, but realized it was still pinned up. She settled for twisting the tendrils that had escaped, which was a nervous habit of hers, and noticed that her ears didn't feel quite the same.

Practically jumping out of the tub, she went to look in the mirror. Sure enough, the tops of her ears were a little more pointed than before. Why was she suddenly showing signs of her fairy heritage? What did all of this mean?

"Kiera, what's going on?"

"I'm not entirely sure, but I bet my mother would know," she replied.

"Your mother? I thought you hadn't seen her since you were born," Gabriel said.

"I hadn't. Not until today." She turned to face him. "Just before the wedding she appeared to me downstairs. And when I

say appeared, I mean that she materialized in a ray of blinding light.”

“What is she? An angel or something?” Gabriel asked.

“She’s a fairy.”

Both of his eyebrows went up. “You’re half fairy? I thought you were a werefox?”

She sighed, she obviously needed to start at the beginning. “My dad never said much about my mother, except to tell me she was special. I always thought it was just because he loved her so much, but apparently he meant special in a supernatural sense. My mother is a fairy, which makes me half a fairy.”

“Wow. I’m not quite sure what to say.” Gabriel hadn’t realized that fairies even existed and now he found himself married to a woman who was half fairy. It was mind boggling to say the least; he wasn’t sure what to make of it all.

She stepped toward him hesitantly. “Are you sorry that you married me?”

Gabriel stepped out of the tub and wrapped his arms around her. “No, I’m not. I don’t care if you’re a fairy, a fox, or a human. You’re my mate and you belong to me.”

She liked hearing the possessiveness in his voice. “Would you make love to me again? Maybe in the bed this time?”

Gabriel smiled. “I can think of nothing I’d like more.”

Grabbing the towel she had pulled out earlier, Gabriel dried off his bride. He quickly dried himself and then picked her up. Walking into the bedroom, he laid her on the bed. Letting his eyes roam over her gorgeous body, he noticed that her glow had faded. Maybe it was only something that happened when she climaxed. Only one way to find out...

Gabriel climbed into the bed beside her and pulled her into his arms. He slowly removed the pins from her hair, watching the curly mass tumble to the bed. He’d never seen hair as lovely as hers before.

Kiera watched him, noting every expression that crossed his face. She had convinced herself that she would always be alone; and now she had a husband, one who appeared to be quite happy with his new wife.

Pulling his head down, she kissed him. Gabriel made her feel things and want things that she had never thought were possible. She'd never really dated before and had certainly never had a man kiss her the way Gabriel did. Being in his arms made her heart beat erratically and made her feel like she had a mass of butterflies in her stomach. Touching him made a liquid heat pool between her legs. She'd admired guys before, but never had her body reacted the way it did when Gabriel was around. The slightest touch made her want to beg for more.

Gabriel broke the kiss and looked down at his wife. His wife! The idea of a wife still shocked him. He had so many emotions swirling through him that he didn't understand or recognize half of them. All he knew was that she was his and that she was precious to him.

"Kiera, I want you to know that I'm going to make you happy. I don't want you to ever regret marrying me."

Kiera smiled at him. "I could never regret marrying you. You're my mate, the one man in the world who is destined to be with me."

Gabriel gently trailed his fingers across her cheek. "As long as you don't have any regrets."

Kiera shook her head. "Not a one. Now shut up and kiss me."

Gabriel chuckled and bent his head to hers, claiming her lips in a kiss. Without breaking the kiss, he rolled so that she sprawled across him.

Kiera looked at him questioningly.

"Why don't you take charge? You can do whatever you want," he told her.

"But... I, um... I don't know what to do," she said, slightly embarrassed.

Gabriel tucked her hair behind her ears. "Just do whatever makes you happy, whatever brings you pleasure."

Kiera hesitantly reached between their bodies. When she found the hard length of him, she slowly slid her body down, taking him inside of her.

Gabriel watched her. He knew that she was uncertain of what she was doing, but he wanted to draw her out. He could tell that she was passionate; she just didn't realize it yet. Not to mention that he was exceedingly turned on, watching her take his dick in her hand, guiding it inside of her.

Once Kiera had Gabriel all the way inside of her, she wiggled her hips a little to get adjusted better. Gabriel groaned and thrust his hips upward, burying himself even further inside of her moist heat.

"Gabriel, I honestly don't know what to do."

"I think you're doing just fine, honey," he reassured her.

"But... I want..."

"What do you want?" he asked.

Kiera wet her lips. "I want you to take charge like before. I never thought I'd want a man to take charge, but I kind of liked it."

Gabriel grinned at her before rolling her over. Once he had her pinned beneath him, he grabbed her wrists and held them over her head.

"Are you sure you want me to be in charge?" he asked, giving her another chance.

Kiera nodded. "Yes," she whispered, loving the show of male dominance far more than she thought she would.

Gabriel kissed her as he thrust into her. She gasped against his mouth and arched her hips to meet his. Releasing her hands, he cupped her breast before letting his hand trail down to her stomach. Brushing against the soft skin of her belly, he reached for the curls at the juncture of her thighs. As he parted her lips, he could feel her enlarged clit. The slightest touch had Kiera arching off the bed. Feeling her inner walls spasm around him, Gabriel thrust into her harder and faster.

Kiera felt as if she couldn't get enough of him. Her whole body felt as if it were on fire. She grasped his shoulders and pulled him closer, wrapping her legs around his hips, taking him deeper.

Gabriel was so close to his release. He thrust deeper and faster, driving himself into her as hard as he could.

Kiera arched against him and cried out his name as her climax broke over her. Unable to hold back any longer, Gabriel found his release as well.

Rolling to his side, he took his bride with him. They were still joined and already Gabriel was growing hard again.

Gazing at his lovely wife, he realized that his theory was correct. She glowed when she had an orgasm. Grinning, he decided to see how long he could keep her glowing.

Chapter Three

Gabriel and Kiera slept late the next morning. They had spent the majority of the night making love; until they had both passed out shortly after three in the morning, completely exhausted.

Gabriel woke first. He felt Kiera's soft body wrapped around his and glanced down. Her head rested on his chest, her arms were around his waist and one of her legs was draped across his. He smiled; he definitely liked waking up next to Kiera in the morning.

Sliding out from under his wife, Gabriel went to the bathroom and started the shower. They needed to leave soon in order to make the long drive to her hometown, but he also wanted her well-rested. Deciding to let her sleep, he took a quick shower and got dressed.

As he pulled his shirt over his head, Kiera stirred on the bed. Gabriel could tell that she was searching for him in her sleep. Walking to the side of the bed, he brushed her hair out of her face.

Kiera murmured in her sleep and pressed her face into Gabriel's hand. Stretching, she slowly came awake.

Gabriel smiled down at her. "Good morning sweetheart."

She gave him a sleepy smile. "Good morning."

"Cole and my cousins should be here shortly. Why don't you take a shower while I scrounge up some breakfast for us?"

"As your wife, shouldn't I be the one cooking?" she asked sleepily.

Gabriel chuckled. "I've been cooking most of my life; I don't think one more morning will kill me. If you want to take over most of the cooking after today, I won't argue with you."

Kiera sat up in the bed and rubbed her eyes. A quick glance at the clock told her it was almost ten o'clock. She never slept this late, but then she'd never been kept awake into the wee hours of the morning making love before either.

Gabriel picked Kiera up and hugged her to him. Kissing the top of her head, he set her down in front of him.

As Kiera stretched, Gabriel drank her in. She was sensual and sexy without even realizing it. Watching her made him want to throw her on the bed and make love to her again.

He cleared his throat and tried to focus his mind elsewhere. "I'm going to head down to the kitchen. Come down when you're ready."

Kiera watched her husband scurry out of the bedroom and briefly wondered what his hurry was. Going to her bag, she pulled out a pair of jeans and a black top. If Gabriel thought it was possible for her to shower and dress quickly, he had better think again. It usually took her an hour to dry her hair. Maybe she should just braid it while it was wet.

Hurrying into the bathroom, Kiera took her shower, letting the hot water soothe her aching muscles. She wasn't as sore as she had thought she would be, but she could definitely tell her body had done things it never had before. Her lower abdomen felt slightly stretched, but in a good way.

Turning off the water, Kiera towel dried her hair and her body. Moisturizing her skin, she braided her hair and put on some mascara and blush. Even with the afterglow of making love to Gabriel all night she still looked a little pale.

Once she was dressed, she made her way downstairs. She hadn't gotten a complete tour of the house yet so she followed the sounds to the kitchen. Gabriel had set out plates with eggs and bacon and two glasses of orange juice. He was brewing a pot of coffee when she came up behind him.

Slipping her arms around his waist, she pressed her face against his back and breathed in his scent. Kiera couldn't believe that Gabriel was hers. How had she gotten so lucky? Then again, she did have a vampire who wanted to drain her dry. Maybe lucky wasn't the right word for it.

Gabriel turned and pulled her into his arms. He briefly kissed her and hugged her tight. "We should eat before everyone else gets here. I'm surprised they didn't show up at the crack of dawn."

Kiera released Gabriel and sat down at the table. Throughout her meal she kept stealing glances at her new

husband. Husband... the word both terrified her and thrilled her. She had given up on ever getting married. Now she found herself attached to a gorgeous alpha. It was mind boggling.

As they were finishing their breakfast, the front door opened. Cole, Connor, and Colin had arrived. Michael had decided to stay behind with Marin as a precaution. As the loud male voices drew nearer, Kiera instinctively moved closer to Gabriel. His large noisy family still unnerved her.

Gabriel walked to the coffee pot and poured four thermoses of coffee. Turning to Kiera he asked, "Do you want some coffee?"

Kiera shook her head. "No thank you, I prefer tea."

Gabriel dug through the cabinets but came up empty handed. "I'll have to get you some. We don't seem to have any right now."

Kiera smiled at him. "It's okay. If I can grab a soda along the way, I'll be fine."

Gabriel nodded and started passing out the coffee to his brother and noisy cousins. While the men figured out the game plan for the day, Kiera excused herself and went upstairs to get her purse.



Eight hours after being on the road, Cole neared Kiera's small town. Glancing in his rearview mirror, he saw that she was asleep.

"Gabriel, could you wake up your wife? I have no clue where I'm going once I get to the town."

Gabriel, who had opted to ride in the backseat with Kiera, gently nudged her awake. "Sweetheart, it's time to wake up."

Kiera murmured and leaned into Gabriel. She rubbed her eyes and slowly blinked awake. It was dark outside and Kiera didn't see any signs on the highway to indicate where they were.

"Where are we?" she asked softly, her voice still husky from sleep.

Cole glanced at her in the rearview mirror. "About ten minutes from your town. Once I get there, I'll need directions to your place."

Kiera nodded and smothered a yawn. She hadn't meant to fall asleep. Between her rather exhausting night and the long car ride, sleep had claimed her no matter how hard she had fought against it.

As they pulled into Kiera's little sleepy town, she gave directions to Cole. Within a few minutes, they were pulling up outside of her small home.

They climbed out of the car and stretched. Colin and Connor had parked behind them and were also getting out of their truck. Kiera dug through her purse for her keys.

Walking up to the porch, Kiera unlocked the front door and pushed it open. Her home was a small two bedroom two bath frame home. It was a white clapboard frame home with a small front porch. Kiera had done her best to decorate the place, but her job hadn't paid much. The best jobs were reserved for the werewolves. Kiera had been lucky to find a file clerk position. Most of the lower level shapeshifters ended up working in food service or another low paying unappreciated job.

As the group entered the house, Kiera flipped on the lights. Thankfully she had cleaned everything before she left with the girls. It was hard to believe it had only been a few days since she'd been here; it felt like forever.

"What do you want to do first, Kiera?"

She glanced up at her husband. "I'm not sure. I hadn't really thought about it. Your home is already furnished so I don't really need the furniture."

"Kiera, you can take whatever you want. If you want to put your furniture in the house, that's fine."

Kiera shook her head. "I'm not attached to any of it except an old rocking chair my dad claimed belonged to his mother and a hope chest that's been in the family for three generations."

"Is there a place to donate the rest of it? Or do you want to sell the house furnished?" Gabriel asked.

Sell the house? Kiera hadn't really contemplated what would happen to her home. It may be small, and she may hate this blasted town, but this had been her home since the day she was born. Selling it just somehow seemed wrong.

As if sensing her dilemma, Gabriel placed a hand on her shoulder. "If you want to keep your home, you can Kiera. I just thought you might like to sell it and put the money towards something else."

Kiera was thoughtful. He had a point. If she sold the house, she would have money to invest in something worthwhile. Unfortunately, she didn't have any skills to begin her own business. Maybe she could use the money to help Gabriel expand the garage he owned.

"We can sell it furnished; unless anyone wants the furniture?" Kiera glanced at the other men in the room.

"Marin already furnished our house, but Michael might be able to use it."

Gabriel looked confused. "Michael? What would he do with it?"

Cole rolled his eyes. His brother was a bit slow at times. "He's moving out to give you and Kiera more room. Matt was meeting with him today to show him some rental properties. Although, knowing Matt and Cassie, they'll end up selling the place to him cheap."

Gabriel shook his head. "Michael didn't have to move out just because I got married."

Cole shrugged. "You'll have to take that up with him. In the meantime, I'm going to text him and see if he wants any of this furniture for his new place."

Cole headed outside to text his brother and check in with his wife. He knew that Marin would worry if he didn't call her soon. It was the first time they had been apart for any length of time.

Inside the house, Kiera glanced around helplessly. She hadn't realized how much stuff she had accumulated over the years. None of them had thought to bring boxes on this trip. What was she going to pack everything in?

Connor seemed to understand her issue. "If you'll tell me where the local liquor store is, I'll go see if I can get some boxes from them."

Kiera gave him directions. After Connor left, she decided to organize the stuff in her bedroom and determine what she was taking and what she could leave. She didn't get very far before there was a knock on her door.

"Kiera, do you want to get the door or should one of us?" Colin asked.

Kiera turned and saw Colin standing in the doorway. She was nervous, knowing it was probably one of the werewolves in the neighborhood, one of the ones who had tormented her most of her life. "Why don't you let Gabriel get it?"

Colin smiled and nodded. He pushed away from the door frame and went back to the living room.

Gabriel, having heard his wife, went to open the door. On the other side was an average sized blond man. From the scent of him, Gabriel knew he was a werewolf.

"May I help you?" Gabriel asked the stranger.

Dan's brow furrowed. What in the hell was going on? He'd heard talk that Kiera was moving out, but he hadn't believed it. "Who the hell are you? Where's Kiera?"

Gabriel arched a brow. Just who did the pup think he was? Straightening to his full height, which towered over the other wolf by several inches, Gabriel glared down at him.

"My wife is in the other room."

Dan's eyes just about popped out of his head. Surely he hadn't heard correctly. If his nose didn't deceive him, this guy was an alpha. Why would he marry Kiera?

"Wife?"

Gabriel nodded.

Dan visibly swallowed. "I'm Dan. I live across the street. When I saw all of the cars I just thought I'd make sure Kiera was okay."

Gabriel crossed his arms over his chest, eyeing the man doubtfully. "Why the sudden concern? Werewolves in this

town haven't cared the slightest what happened to her before now."

Dan had the grace to blush. "That isn't entirely true. Some of us cared, we just weren't allowed to."

Ah-ha! So the young man had feelings for Kiera. Gabriel almost felt sorry for him – almost! If he had been a man, he would have stood up to the others and asked Kiera out. Then again, if that had happened, Gabriel wouldn't have been able to find her and marry her.

"Regardless, she's my wife now. Your concern is appreciated and noted. Now, unless you have some boxes to contribute for her packing needs, I'd suggest you go back home."

Kiera had heard everything from the bedroom. She had never known that Dan liked her. Pretty much every time he'd seen her, he'd been mean to her. Sometimes he was downright ruthless.

Gathering her courage, she walked into the living room to stand beside Gabriel. Her sweet alpha put his arm around her and pulled her close to his side. Kiera smiled up at him.

Looking at Dan, her smile faded. "What do you want Dan?"

He growled low in his throat. "Watch yourself woman!"

Kiera trembled slightly, but felt Gabriel's muscles tense. She felt the growl before she heard it. Before she had a chance to stop him, Gabriel had broken loose from her and had jerked Dan into the house and pinned him to the wall.

"You will watch how you speak to her! If you ever growl at my wife again, they will be looking for the pieces of your body for years to come! Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

Dan made a strange noise that Kiera assumed meant he understood. Of course, if Gabriel didn't have him by the throat, he might have made more sense. Should she stop him? She started to put a hand on Gabriel's arm, but quite frankly she was enjoying the fear on Dan's face a bit too much to put a halt to it just yet.

Cole stepped over beside his brother. "Gabriel, why don't you let him go? I think he got the message."

Gabriel growled, but released the worthless excuse of a man. Dan slumped to the floor gasping for air.

Glowering down at him, Gabriel tried not to rip the idiot apart. He couldn't believe the young man had actually growled at him! He backed up a step, allowing the man to stand.

"Get out," Gabriel rumbled, his rage barely concealed.

Dan stumbled to his feet and lurched out the door. He managed to stagger down the steps and across the street to his house. Once he could talk again, he would have to call Thomas. The alpha needed to know about the men he'd allowed into their town.

Chapter Four

A few hours later

Between Kiera and the werewolves, her entire house had been packed into boxes and grouped into “items to take” and “items to donate,” assuming they could find a place to pick up the donations. Kiera had also called the local realtor’s office and arranged for the house to be put on the market.

Kiera was exhausted and wished they could go home. Unfortunately, they still had to load the trucks and the back of her SUV. Sighing, she collapsed on the couch. Never again would she collect this much junk!

Gabriel saw Kiera flop down on the couch. He wasn’t sure she could stay standing for much longer. Walking over to her, he sat on the couch beside her; drawing her against his side, he pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

“Are you okay, honey?”

She sleepily nodded. “I’m fine, just tired.”

He absently rubbed her arm. “Does your friend live nearby? Maybe she’d let you rest at her place while we load everything into the vehicles.”

“I don’t mind helping,” she protested.

“I know you don’t, but I can tell that you’re wiped out. We still have a long drive back home.”

Kiera sighed. “We should have gotten up earlier today. As it is, everyone is going to miss work tomorrow. It’s almost midnight and it’s an eight hour drive back home.”

Gabriel hid a grin. He was happy that she already thought of Ashton Grove as her home. She did have a point about Monday. He would need to call Michael to have the garage closed for the day and Cole would have to call his boss and Marin.

“Since it seems we won’t be heading home until the morning anyway, is there a hotel around here?”

“Hmm. Well, there’s a small one on Main Street. I don’t know how comfortable it is though.”

"Kiera, as tired as we all are, I don't think it will matter much. Since we already packed up your bedding, we'll have to get a room as well."

She nodded against his shoulder. Honestly, she didn't care where they stayed as long as Gabriel was with her. Being back in her hometown had her feeling out of sorts.

Kiera got up and walked over to the kitchen. Picking up the phone, she called the motel. Being a small town, there were always empty rooms. She just wasn't sure how many rooms to ask for. Putting the phone down a moment, she turned to the guys.

"How many rooms do we need?"

Gabriel wasn't sure if his brother and cousins minded rooming together, but he knew he wanted Kiera all to himself. "See if they have a room with a king size bed," he told her.

Kiera blushed, but nodded. She looked at the other werewolves to see what they wanted.

Connor and Colin looked at each other and shrugged. "We can share a room," Connor told her. "Just make sure it has two beds."

"I don't mind having a room to myself," Cole replied, knowing the newlyweds would want to be alone.

Kiera picked the phone up and told the receptionist to book three rooms, one with a king size bed. Hanging up the phone, she looked at the four men standing in her living room. She almost laughed. The entire time she had lived here, men had never come to visit her. Now here she was, looking at four men gorgeous enough to be models. Okay, so one was married and another was her spouse; now that was a sobering thought. It still stunned her that someone like Gabriel was her husband.

"I don't suppose there's a twenty-four hour place where we can get a bite to eat?" Colin asked.

"Oh, um, actually there's a small diner a few blocks from here. They mostly serve breakfast food and sandwiches."

Colin shrugged. "I'm not picky, food is food."

Gabriel walked over to Kiera and pulled her into his arms. "Do you want a minute to say goodbye to your house?"

She smiled up at him. He was so thoughtful and kind. You'd never know it by looking at him though. He had a rough, dangerous look that would scare most people. It only turned Kiera on.

"I'm fine. I grew up here, but once dad passed away I was miserable. Honestly, I think I was miserable before that."

Gabriel nodded and pressed a kiss to the top of her head. If he had anything to say about it, she would never be miserable again. Once Marin and Cassie introduced her around town, Gabriel was certain that his wife would have plenty of friends.



At the diner, Kiera was having a great time. The guys were loud and rowdy, but they made sure to include her in their conversation. It was nice being part of a family again. She'd never had siblings before, but having brothers and cousins was great, even if they were through marriage.

Gabriel had his arm resting on the back of Kiera's chair, his fingers playing with the wisps of hair that had escaped her braid. Her hair felt like silk and smelled like heaven, even after hours of packing. The scent of her was enough to drive him mad. He couldn't wait to make love to her again.

Cole was smiling, watching his brother and sister-in-law. He was happy for both of them. Now they only needed to get Michael settled; he knew that his twin had been feeling left out. With both Gabriel and Cole married, Michael was probably feeling like a fifth wheel. Cole hoped that his twin would find the same happiness that he and Gabriel had found with their mates.

Connor and Colin were in some sort of debate. As the waitress delivered their food, they heard the bell over the door jingle. Kiera looked up and held her breath. Austin was heading their way. This was bad; this was *really* bad. Maybe she could head things off at the pass so to speak.

Smiling at the guys, she said, "I'll be back in a minute."

Standing, Kiera briskly walked over to Austin, intercepting him before he could reach their table.

"Hi Austin, I didn't expect to see you here."

He glowered down at her. "What the hell is going on Kiera? Dan called Thomas saying that an alpha from out of state tried to strangle him. Then I see you sitting in here, apparently having a *great* time, with the alpha and his pack."

Kiera looked down at the floor, automatically being submissive. Taking a breath, she decided it was time to take a stand. "I didn't realize I needed your permission to hang out with people."

"I'm Thomas's second in command. If I were you, I'd watch my tone." Austin crossed his arms and looked down at the little werefox. She'd always been timid before. He had been surprised at her small show of spunk; and oddly turned on by it. The woman apparently had depths he had never seen before. She'd always been a hot little thing, but wolves mated with wolves. Even just playing around with another type of shapeshifter wasn't done.

"I take it you're here because of Dan," she stated.

Austin shifted, a little uncomfortable. "That's part of it."

Kiera looked up, surprised. "Part? What's the other part?"

"I saw you sitting with them. I didn't like it."

Kiera's mouth almost dropped to the floor. Austin sounded jealous. Surely she was mistaken. He had been nicer to her than the other werewolves in town, but he had never actually been *nice*.

"Austin, are you feeling okay?"

He shrugged. "I think you need to head home while I go talk to those guys."

Kiera shook her head. "I'm not leaving, Austin."

He stared at her. Had she actually just refused to follow an order?

"Kiera, go home!"

She shook her head. "No."

Kiera turned to go back to her table. She saw Cole, Connor, Colin, and Gabriel watching her. Before she could take another step, she felt a firm grip on her upper arm and she was spun to face Austin again.

"Don't walk away from me!" Austin yelled.

Kiera opened her mouth to reply, but she felt a presence behind her and saw Austin's mouth straighten into a grim line. There was a rumble behind her and she knew it was Gabriel, growling at Austin.

"This doesn't concern you. Go back to your table," Austin told the visiting werewolf. He still didn't understand why Thomas had let them into their town. The alpha hadn't given any details, just told him that a pack would be visiting for a day or two.

Gabriel reached out and forcibly removed the man's hand from Kiera's arm. Pulling her back against his chest, he glared at the other werewolf.

"Actually, it does concern me."

Austin was taken aback. What would an alpha want with Kiera? Yeah, she was hot, but she was still just a little werefox. Obviously a few pieces of the puzzle were missing.

"Excuse me?" Austin asked.

Gabriel sighed. The man looked more shocked than anything else. What was wrong with these people? So what if his wife shifted into a fox? Were they really that bigoted around here?

Turning Kiera in his arms, he kissed her. "Why don't you go sit with the others for a minute?"

Kiera buried her face against his chest, breathing in his scent. She nodded and walked around him and headed back over to the table. Cole, Connor and Colin were all watching the scene, fascinated. All that was lacking was the popcorn.

She plopped down in her seat by Cole. He put a protective arm around his sister-in-law. He wasn't sure what was about to happen, but it was unspoken that if anything happened to Gabriel, his pack would take care of Kiera. Not that Cole thought it would come to that. He mostly just wanted to comfort Kiera.

A few feet away, Gabriel and Austin stared each other down. Both were in a defensive stance with their arms crossed. Gabriel was an inch or two taller than Austin, both men had broad chests and were well muscled. They were a sight any

woman would have found drool worthy. There was nothing like a show of male dominance to get the blood pumping!

"I think it's time for you and your pack to leave," Austin told the alpha in front of him.

Gabriel raised a brow. "Your alpha gave us permission to be here. We're staying the night and then we'll leave by noon tomorrow."

"Do you even realize the woman you just kissed is only a werefox?"

Gabriel's mouth quirked in a half grin. "Just a werefox, huh? Funny, I thought she was much more than that."

Austin, misinterpreting Gabriel's statement, thought he had gotten through to the alpha. Now that the man knew Kiera was only a werefox, he was certain the pack would leave her alone.

"Well, why don't you and your pack go finish your meal and I'll walk Kiera home."

Gabriel growled. "I don't think so."

"I thought we had an understanding. She's just a werefox. You can't possibly want her."

Gabriel stalked toward Austin, pushing the man back towards the door. "Oh I want her all right. And if you have any sense, you'll walk out the door and keep walking."

"What the fuck is your problem? You don't even know her! She's just a piece of ass to you!"

Gabriel felt rage well up within him. Before he could reach out and rip the dumbass in two, he felt two restrictive hands on him. From scent, he knew it was Connor and Colin. His brother, Cole, was probably still with Kiera at the table.

"Come on, cousin. Take a deep calming breath. I'm sure the moron didn't mean to insult you," Connor said, with a glance at Austin. He saw the young man pale.

"No, of course not. I didn't mean to insult you. My concern was of course for a citizen of our fair town. I simply didn't want to see her hurt."

Connor knew the man was telling them a load of lies. From what Kiera had said, the people in this town didn't care for her

at all. They had delighted in tormenting her, had refused to date her. Maybe he should just let Gabriel go after all...

The tension left Gabriel's body slowly. "I would never hurt her."

"Then why are you playing with her like this? You're leaving tomorrow, or rather later today. You said as much yourself."

Gabriel nodded. "Yeah, I did. What your alpha apparently didn't tell you is that Kiera is going with me."

"What?" Austin was so surprised you could have knocked him over with a feather. "Why would you take her with you?"

"Because she's my wife."

Austin blindly grabbed behind himself, looking for a chair. Grabbing one, he pulled it over and sank into it. Kiera was married? To an alpha?

Gabriel watched the young man uncertainly. Why hadn't Thomas informed his pack that Kiera was married? That she was moving out of town? This town was strange to say the least. The sooner he put some miles between his family and this whacky place the better.

"I didn't mean to offend you or your pack. I hope you'll accept my apology," Austin said in a quiet voice.

Gabriel sighed. He turned and motioned for Kiera to join them. With his wife by his side, they sat across from Austin.

Austin looked Kiera over. She had always been pretty. If things had been different in their town, he would have asked her out a long time ago. Thomas, the town's alpha, wouldn't allow a werewolf to mate with another shapeshifter. Austin had always wondered if things were different in other packs; apparently they were.

"Kiera, I'm sorry if I've hurt you in the past. I just thought it was better to keep you at arm's length," Austin told her.

"But why?"

He sighed, glancing at the alpha, wondering if the man would punch him if he told Kiera the truth. "Because I've always liked you. If Thomas had allowed his werewolves to date other shapeshifters, I would have asked you out back in high school."

Kiera was stunned. "You would have?"

Austin nodded. "Yeah, but I wasn't brave enough to go against the alpha," he grudgingly admitted.

Gabriel watched his wife. He could tell she was surprised. He wasn't sure if he was comfortable knowing the young werewolf had desired Kiera for so long.

"It's okay Austin. I understand. Besides, it all turned out really well. I met Gabriel, and if I hadn't gone with Suzey and the girls the other day, I would have never met my mate," she told him.

"So you're really okay?" Austin asked.

Kiera smiled at him. He really did look concerned. "I'm perfect, Austin."

She glanced at her husband. If Austin was really unhappy about not being able to choose his own mate, then maybe he should get a different pack. The question was, would Gabriel go for it?

"Can I talk to you for a minute, Gabriel?"

He looked down at his wife in surprise. "Of course."

Standing, he held his hand out to her. The couple walked outside to talk in private.

"Are you okay, Kiera?" he asked once they were alone.

"I'm fine. I just had a question for you."

"What is it, Kiera? Are you changing your mind about us? I mean, Austin seems like a nice guy," Gabriel said, trying not to choke on the words.

"No! I mean, no, that isn't it! I could never change my mind about us! Don't you know that you're the best thing that ever happened to me? I feel like I've waited my whole life for you," she told him.

Gabriel pulled her into his arms and kissed her. Feeling her soft curves pressed against him and her full lips opening under his, he wished they were at the motel. He desperately wanted Kiera right then and there.

Kiera wrapped her arms around Gabriel, pulling him closer. Every time he kissed her, she felt like she was on fire. She'd never wanted a man as much as she wanted him.

Breaking the kiss, she looked up into his eyes. She knew right then that she loved him. They'd only known each other for two days, but she knew without a doubt that her heart belonged to him.

"What did you want to ask me?" he asked huskily.

"I was wondering if you would extend an invitation to Austin to join your pack. You don't have to! It's just... I never realized how miserable he was. It doesn't seem fair that he should run the risk of losing out on his true mate just because Thomas won't let the werewolves date anyone that isn't a werewolf."

Gabriel was a little surprised. "So let me get this straight. You want me to ask Austin, the guy who just informed you that he has a crush on you, to join my pack?"

"Well, I guess it *does* sound a little bad when you put it like that. I just feel sorry for him."

Gabriel sighed. She had a point. It wasn't right that Austin wasn't able to date who he wanted. No man should have someone dictate to him who he could and couldn't mate with.

He looked at his wife, with her pleading eyes and pouting lips. How could he deny her anything? He knew that he was lost. How could he have fallen in love with his wife so completely in such a short amount of time? It didn't seem possible, and yet it had happened.

"I'll talk to Austin and see if he wants to return home with us," he replied.

"Really? Oh thank you, Gabriel!"

Gabriel hugged his wife and they walked back into the diner. Cole, Connor, and Colin were all sitting at the table with Austin. Gabriel took the last open seat and pulled Kiera into his lap.

"Austin, I'd like to ask you something," Gabriel said.

Every eye at the table turned his way. Gabriel should have talked to Cole, but he didn't think his brother would mind their pack growing a little. It might be nice to have werewolves in the area that weren't related to them.

"You can ask me anything," Austin said, swallowing nervously. What could the alpha want? Hopefully he wasn't upset over their misunderstanding. Austin had no doubt he

would lose if he had to go up against the larger wolf. He was by no means a coward and would fight if it came to that, but he wasn't going to kid himself on what the outcome would be.

"Kiera has told me quite a bit about the town here so I knew what to expect before we arrived. What I didn't count on was you. Before now, I hadn't realized that the werewolves in the area might not be happy with things the way they were."

"I don't know if the others feel the same or not," Austin interjected, not wanting to get anyone in trouble with Thomas.

Gabriel shrugged. "Regardless, it's how *you* feel. Would you like to come to Ashton Grove with us and see how things are handled in our territory? Then, if you feel comfortable down there, you'll be welcome to join our pack."

Austin's eyes went wide. Was he serious? He'd insulted the guy, insulted his wife, and now he was offering him a spot in his pack? The man put Thomas to shame!

"If you're sure you wouldn't mind, I'd love to come check the place out. Will it be hard to get a hotel room down there?"

Connor and Colin looked at each other. Technically, they had a whole town at their disposal. Colin nodded at his brother.

"A hotel won't be necessary. There's a small set of empty duplexes in our town. You won't be in Ashton Grove, but we're just twenty minutes down the road," Connor told him.

"Wow, I don't know what to say," Austin replied, awed and humbled by the small group.



Later that day, the trucks and SUV were packed. As Connor and Colin climbed into their truck, Austin pulled up in a blue Mustang. He had a small duffle bag on the seat beside him.

Gabriel walked over to the driver side window of the car. As Austin rolled down his window, Gabriel leaned down to speak to him.

"You can follow any of us back to Ashton Grove. We'll have two stops to make before Connor and Colin head home. You can hang out with us while we unload stuff or you can head to my house and relax. Here are the directions in case we get separated," Gabriel said, handing him a piece of paper.

Austin nodded. "I'll help y'all unload. It will give me a chance to get to know everyone a little better. Besides, I don't mind pulling my weight."

Gabriel smiled. Kiera was right; Austin did appear to be a good guy. He felt good about offering the man a spot in his pack. Maybe the guy would take him up on his offer.

Across the street, Dan watched Austin join the group from Ashton Grove. What was going on? Why was the second of their pack leaving with the Ashton Grove group? Things were starting to get a little strange in their town. Another phone call to Thomas seemed to be in order.

Chapter Five

The next day

Kiera stretched, reaching out beside her to find an empty spot on the other side of the bed. Sitting up, she looked around the room. The bathroom door was open and the light was off. Gabriel must have already gotten up and gone to work.

Slipping out of the bed, she walked to the bathroom. After her morning ritual was completed, she dressed and went downstairs. It was odd to be in such a large house all by herself.

Kiera paused on the second landing. She noticed the three doors. She knew that one door led to a bedroom, having used it to change into her wedding dress, but wasn't sure about the other two.

Pushing open the first door, she saw the room the women had rushed her to the night of her wedding. It was a neutral colored bedroom. The door across from it opened to show another bedroom. From the décor, Kiera figured it must have belonged to Gabriel's parents. The third door revealed yet another bedroom.

Shaking her head, Kiera made her way down to the kitchen. Six bedrooms! Gabriel had told her, but she hadn't believed him. After living in a small two bedroom house her whole life, it was a bit much to take in. It both excited her and terrified her to know that it was her home now. What on earth was she going to do in this monstrosity day after day?

At the bottom of the stairs, she turned towards the kitchen. Since she was alone, Kiera didn't see the point in making a big breakfast. Putting some bread in the toaster, she pushed the lever down. They hadn't had the opportunity to buy any tea yet so she made do with a glass of juice. Maybe she'd go to the grocery store while Gabriel was at work today. At least it would give her something to do and give her the opportunity to familiarize herself with the town.

After breakfast, she brushed her teeth and wandered around the house a bit. Bored and unsure of what to do with herself, Kiera decided to pay a surprise visit to Gabriel. Grabbing the

spare set of house keys she had seen in the kitchen, she locked the front door and walked across the street.

As she neared the garage, she noticed the large doors were up and several cars were inside either being worked on or waiting their turn. A few people were seated in the waiting area.

Hesitantly, she entered and walked toward Gabriel. He may be under a car, but she'd recognize those legs anywhere. Michael was working on the car in the next bay and nodded at her. Smiling in return, she stopped beside her husband. When she didn't get a response to her presence, she nudged his leg with her foot.

Gabriel slid out from under the car and looked up at his wife. With the morning sun lighting her from behind, she looked angelic. He drank in the sight of her; wearing a short knit long-sleeve dress with her hair cascading down her back, he had to fight the urge to throw her over his shoulder and carry her back to their bedroom across the street.

"Everything okay, Kiera?"

"Of course. I just wanted to say good morning," she replied with a small smile.

Standing, he leaned over to give her a brief kiss, careful not to get grease stains on her dress. "Good morning."

"I thought I would stop by the grocery store, but then I realized that I don't know where it is."

Gabriel frowned. "I'd feel a lot more comfortable if you'd call Colin or Connor to ride with you."

Kiera arched a brow. "Is your town *that* dangerous? You really feel that I need an escort to go grocery shopping?"

Gabriel absently wiped a hand down his face, not caring that he smeared grease across one cheek in the process. "It isn't the town I'm worried about, Kiera, it's the vampire. Just because he *said* he was going to leave you alone, doesn't mean he will," he told her in a terse whisper.

Kiera had mixed feelings. She was happy that Gabriel wanted to take care of her, but she was less than thrilled with his current tone of voice.

"For your information, I've been taking care of myself for quite some time," she hissed in response.

"Aw, honey. I didn't mean it like that."

"Then how exactly *did* you mean it? What? I'm not supposed to ever leave the house without a bodyguard? You don't think that's going to look a little odd?" she demanded.

He reached for her, but stopped himself before he got grease all over her. "I can't help worrying about you, Kiera. You're my wife, my mate, my other half. If anything happened to you..."

Gabriel couldn't even bring himself to finish the sentence. Thoughts of Kiera being abducted or killed were too much for him to bear.

Seeing the anguish on Gabriel's face, Kiera softened toward him. She knew that he only had her best interest at heart, but she wasn't used to someone shadowing her every step. For that matter, she wasn't used to anyone caring enough to do so.

"If it will make you feel better, I'll call Colin and Connor and see if one of them can ride with me to the store." She paused, "But the last time I checked, vampires came out at night. I really think I'm safe in the daylight."

He gave her a small grin. "Thank you. I promise it won't always be like this, but I want to make sure it's safe before you go off on your own around town. I know the legend, but since I didn't think they actually existed until now, I'm not taking any chances."

Kiera nodded. She stepped forward to hug him, but he held his hand out to stop her.

"If you come any closer, you're going to ruin your dress. I'm already covered in grease and oil this morning."

She smiled. "Will you be home for lunch?"

He looked at Michael, who was pretending to ignore them, and then back at Kiera. "We'll both be home for lunch, but you don't have to make anything. We're fine with making our own sandwiches."

Kiera narrowed her eyes. "If you think for one moment that I'm going to sit around the house all day and do nothing, you

had better think again. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of picking up a newspaper and looking for a job."

"A job?" Gabriel's expression was unreadable, but he was wondering what to do about his new wife. He may not make a fortune, but he knew he could take care of his family.

"Yeah a job; you know something I can do during the day to make some money and keep me occupied?"

Gabriel crossed his arms over his chest and just looked at her. If she didn't think his job was sufficient, why had she agreed to marry him?

Kiera wasn't sure what Gabriel was thinking, but she knew his silence couldn't be a good thing. "Say something!"

"What do you want me to say, Kiera? You've obviously put a lot of thought into this."

She frowned, "Well, I wouldn't say *a lot* of thought, but I realized this morning that I won't do well just hanging around the house all day."

"So it isn't about the money? It's just for you to have something to do?" Gabriel asked carefully.

Kiera's eyes widened as she realized what he had been thinking. "Of course it isn't about the money! I know that you can provide for us, but I can't sit still long enough to be cooped up in the house all day."

Gabriel sighed. He should have realized she would need something to occupy herself with; he just didn't like the thought of her working forty hours a week. As much as he hated to admit it, not being the sole provider made him feel like less of a man. It didn't sit well with him, but if that's what would make Kiera happy then he couldn't argue with her.

"Depending on what type of work you want to do, I'm sure that we can come up with something without you digging through the newspaper ads for a job."

She shifted from foot to foot, obviously antsy about something. He had just given in to her wish to work, what else could she possibly want?

"Kiera, if you have something to say, just spit it out. I need to get back to work," he all but barked.

Kiera stopped fidgeting and looked at the ground. She hadn't meant to keep him from his work. "I just thought that maybe I could redecorate the house a little. Nothing drastic! But I noticed the wallpaper was a little dated and I'd like to touch up the paint on the crown molding."

Gabriel hid a grin. So his wife wanted to nest; that was a good sign. "I don't mind if you want to make changes around the house. It's as much your home as it is mine."

"I thought that maybe, once my house sold, that I could use the money from the sale to pay for some of the changes I had in mind."

Gabriel fought the urge to hold her. Every time the woman was within arm's length he wanted to touch her, hold her, kiss her ... make love to her. It touched him that she wanted to use her own money to make the changes around the house, but it wasn't necessary. What his brothers didn't realize, or anyone else for that matter, was that he had put money aside each month for the past several years. It wasn't a fortune, but it was enough to renovate the entire house if that's what Kiera wanted to do.

"I actually have some money set aside for redecorating the house. I just never got around to doing it."

Kiera looked surprised. "Really?"

He nodded. "Why don't you take one of my cousins to the hardware store while you're out today? You can get an idea of how much you'll need to get started on your project and I'll withdraw the money tomorrow. Matter of fact, we can open a checking account in both of our names and I'll just put all of the money in there."

Kiera's face lit up with a huge smile. "Thank you, Gabriel."

He returned her smile and leaned forward to kiss her briefly. "Now get out of here so I can get some work done. You'll find Connor and Colin's number in the phone book in the kitchen."

She nodded, waved bye to Michael, and practically skipped out of the garage.



Almost an hour later, Connor and Kiera were in her SUV heading toward the hardware store. She had briefly explained her plans for the Victorian. Now that she knew Gabriel didn't mind the changes, she was excited to get started.

Kiera pulled into a parking space in front of the store. Before she climbed out of the car, she glanced at Connor. "Thanks for coming with me today."

"It's no problem. Colin and I are doing a lot of repairs around town so I needed to come here anyway."

Kiera nodded and got out of the car. Before they entered the store, she set the alarm. They may be in a small town, but you could never be too careful.

Inside, Kiera was overwhelmed with paint colors, wallpaper samples, various types of crown molding and the other multitude of items one found in a hardware store. She was thankful to have Connor with her, otherwise she had no doubt she would be lost.

Connor gave his opinion whenever she asked for it, but he stayed silent the rest of the time. There was a restless energy about him that made him slightly scary. Kiera knew he would never harm her, but she certainly wouldn't want to be on his bad side. She imagined that in a fight he would be absolutely ruthless.

Kiera purchased a few small paint samples and a steamer to remove the wallpaper currently covering the front entry and upstairs bedrooms. While she knew she couldn't tackle the front entry on her own, she could at least get started on the second floor; working on the bedrooms one at a time.

If Gabriel didn't mind, she would like to turn his parents' bedroom into a recreational room. It was spacious enough for a pool table, a flat panel TV, a few comfy chairs and maybe a small mini bar in the corner. She wanted Gabriel to have an area where he could hang out with the guys and have fun; a place that was all his where he could escape if he felt the need to.

The other two bedrooms she would keep as guest rooms, but she wanted to change the décor a little. The furniture was

beautiful in both rooms, but the walls could use some paint and new linens for the beds and matching towels for the bathrooms. It was obvious to her that Gabriel loved his house, but she wanted to make it a home for him.

Chapter Six

Kiera returned to the house a few hours later. She had invited Connor to stay for lunch, but he had declined. Now the chicken parmesan was almost finished.

She flipped through the phone book, but couldn't find the number to the garage. Of course, the guys had all worked over there so there hadn't been a need to write it down previously. She'd have to make sure she got it from Gabriel.

Turning the heat down on the oven, she headed out the front door and made her way across the street. As she stepped into the garage, she noticed that the waiting room was empty. Michael was nowhere to be seen, but Gabriel was under yet another car.

Hearing footsteps and picking up Kiera's scent, Gabriel slid out from under the car. "Is it lunch time already?"

"I turned the oven down so I could come over to get the two of you, except Michael seems to have vanished."

Gabriel wiped his hands on a grease rag and climbed to his feet. "He's in the office going through some paperwork. We got a little behind while he was out."

"I would have called, but I didn't know the number," she admitted with a slight blush. It was embarrassing to not know her husband's work number, or his cell phone number. For that matter, she didn't even know the number to the house.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart. I didn't think to leave it for you. I'll be sure to write it down after lunch," Gabriel said.

"Thanks. I'll feel better knowing how to reach you," she replied.

"Let me tell Michael that lunch is ready and I'll walk over with you."

She nodded and walked over to the door to look out. The street was quiet and it was a beautiful sunny day, the type of day that Kiera preferred to spend outside. It was going to be hard breaking her old routines and starting over.

A moment later Gabriel returned to her side. "Now, let's go see this lunch you made."

They crossed the street and entered the house. Gabriel closed the door, but left it unlocked for Michael. "Just let me wash my hands and then I'll meet you in the kitchen."

"Okay," she smiled as he walked down the hall to the half bath.

Kiera busied herself by setting out plates, glasses, and utensils. She grabbed some napkins and had just placed them on the table when Gabriel entered the kitchen. His clothes were still smeared with grease and oil, but he had washed his hands and his face.

Looking at him made butterflies erupt in Kiera's stomach. Her skin hummed and a liquid fire started building within her. Gabriel caught her staring at him and gave her one of his devastating grins. She thought her legs would buckle at any moment and grabbed the counter for support.

Walking to her side, Gabriel brushed her hair back from her face. Placing a finger under her chin, he tipped her head back before claiming her lips in a searing kiss.

Kiera whimpered, wanting more. "Gabriel," she whispered, almost breathless from his kiss.

He grinned against her lips, hearing the need in her voice, a need that matched his own. "Later honey. Right now, I need to eat some lunch and get back to work. Besides, Michael will be here any minute."

She sighed, knowing he was right, but hating it just the same. "We didn't get much of a honeymoon, did we? Maybe we can take a long weekend sometime soon and go somewhere, just the two of us?"

Gabriel caressed her cheek. "I'd like that."

Kiera smiled and turned toward the stove. She opened the oven and pulled out their lunch. Carrying it to the table, she placed the casserole dish on the trivet in the center. After grabbing a serving spoon, she sat down next to Gabriel.

As she dished the food onto their plates, the front door opened and closed. Michael walked past the kitchen toward the small bathroom, calling out as he passed, "I'm just washing my hands and I'll be right there."

Kiera heaped a mountain of food onto both men's plates and put a much smaller portion on her own.

"I just gave everyone water since I wasn't sure what you preferred," she murmured to Gabriel, suddenly feeling unsure of herself.

Gabriel covered her hand with his. "You did a great job on lunch, honey."

She smiled her gratitude before turning to her plate. She didn't feel right starting without Michael. As if hearing her thoughts, the man in question materialized in the kitchen doorway.

Rubbing his hands together, Michael plopped down into his chair. "This looks fantastic, Kiera!"

A smile twitched at her lips. "You're welcome."

As they ate, the guys talked about the cars they needed to finish up before the end of the day. Kiera listened to them in silence, enjoying the sound of conversation at the table. She didn't understand half of what they said, but she enjoyed listening to them just the same.



The rest of the afternoon passed in a blur. The guys went back to work and Kiera went upstairs to tackle the second story bedrooms. She left their parents' room alone for the time being. She didn't want to disrupt anything in there until she'd had a chance to talk to Gabriel.

When it was time to start dinner, she had managed to get all of the wallpaper off the walls in the first bedroom and had dabbed a few smears of paint on the wall. She couldn't decide on the color, but she was leaning towards a moss green.

Washing out the paint brushes and closing up the paint, she decided to start dinner. The painting could wait another day. Maybe by morning, she'd have a better idea of what she wanted to do with this room. Now that she was familiar with the steamer used to remove the wallpaper, the second bedroom should be a breeze.

Once Kiera was in the kitchen, she perused the shelves and the fridge. If lunch had been any indication, the men would be

hungry enough to eat a horse by the time they came in. She needed to make sure that dinner was substantial enough to fill them up.

Deciding on red beans and rice, she pulled some Cajun sausage out of the fridge and got the other ingredients out of the cabinets and pantry. She'd picked up a loaf of French bread from the store so that would go nicely with the meal. Maybe she'd make an apple pie for dessert.

Kiera turned on the radio and hummed along as she prepared their meal. Once the red beans and rice were simmering nicely on the stove, she decided to kick back and relax. Walking into the living room, she sank down onto the sofa and turned on the TV. It was nice to sit back and enjoy a moment of peace and quiet.

It wasn't that she didn't love having Gabriel around, but she was used to being on her own. Suddenly having someone around all the time was a little odd; it made her feel out of sorts by the end of the day. Not that the honeymoon was over by any means! She wanted to be around Gabriel as much as possible, but she also needed a little alone time occasionally; just not an entire day's worth, she amended. She needed to find a balance between her old life and her new one.

Sighing, she settled back into the cushions and watched a show she hadn't seen before. Then again, she hadn't exactly had time for watching TV. Between her job and staying away from the local werewolves, Kiera had kept busy at home. She just needed to figure out how to do that here.

Sure, she was redecorating some of the rooms, but how long could that last? Gabriel had seemed offended that she wanted a job so she wasn't sure how that would turn out. Maybe she could at least find something part-time to keep her busy and give her some extra cash on the side.

She'd met Cole's wife, Marin, briefly at the wedding. She seemed nice and Kiera was hoping she would get a chance to hang out with her some. From what she had gathered, Marin worked at Sabin Bio-Med with her husband. It was obvious that Cole made enough to take care of Marin, but he didn't seem to

complain about her working. Maybe he would rub off on Gabriel.

Before long the buzzer on the stove went off. Kiera climbed to her feet and went to check on dinner. Stirring the red beans and rice, she turned the burner off and started to set the table. Once everything was ready, she picked up the phone and called Gabriel. Thankfully he had left a business card on the counter with both his work number and cell number written on it.

Michael answered on the third ring. "Andrews Auto Repairs, may I help you?"

"Hi Michael, I wanted to let you know that dinner is ready. I made enough for you to join us."

Michael grinned. "Thanks Kiera, that means a lot. I may just take you up on that offer. Let me grab Gabriel and we'll be over in a few minutes."

Hanging up the phone, Michael went to tell his big brother that dinner was ready. If lunch was any indication, Kiera could cook well. He couldn't wait to see what was for dinner.

Chapter Seven

After dinner, Michael had excused himself and headed home. Gabriel and Kiera did the dishes together before heading upstairs.

Gabriel paused on the second floor landing. The first bedroom door was open and he peered inside. He hadn't expected Kiera to have gotten so far, but he was impressed.

Waving a hand at the various paint splotches on the wall, he asked, "Have you decided on a color yet?"

"I was thinking about the green. What do you think?"

Gabriel nodded. "I think it's a good choice. I'm glad that you're decorating the house; I want you to feel like it's your home."

She slipped her hands around his waist and pressed her cheek to his back. "I do feel like it's my home."

Turning to face her, he pulled her into his arms and kissed her.

"I'm happy to hear that," he murmured against her lips.

Kissing him back, she wrapped her arms around him tightly. There wasn't another feeling in the world like being in Gabriel's arms. She pressed herself close to him, loving the feel of her chest pressed against his, of his hands in her hair.

Not wanting to wait another moment to have Kiera naked and beneath him, Gabriel lifted her into his arms and carried her to their bedroom.

Kicking the door shut behind him, he gently laid her on the bed. Following her down, he covered her mouth with his. Careful not to crush her with his weight, his hand trailed along her body, drifting across her collar bone and down to her breast. As his palm slid over the full mound, he felt her nipple pucker. Giving it a playful tweak, he continued his exploration down her ribs and stomach to her hip; pulling her hips closer to him, he pressed his erection against her.

Kiera whimpered and dug her hands into his shoulders, hanging on for dear life. Wrapping a leg around his, she pulled

him closer. She arched against him as his mouth trailed hot kisses down her throat.

"Gabriel, I think we have on too many clothes."

He chuckled against her throat. "I think you may be right."

Rising from the bed, he quickly divested himself of his clothing. Reaching for Kiera, he helped her pull her dress over her head. When she reached for the clasp on her bra, he stopped her.

"Not yet."

Gently, he traced the edge of her bra and the swell of her breasts. Grasping her hips, he pulled her closer, until her legs were draped on either side of his. He pushed her back onto the bed, cupping her breasts. Leaning down to kiss her, he pressed himself against the juncture of her thighs.

Kiera moaned, wanting more. "Gabriel, please stop torturing me."

He chuckled ran his finger under the edge of her panties. "Do you want to get rid of these?"

"Yes," she said, breathless from anticipation.

"Hmm... and what if I think you should keep them on longer?"

Kiera moaned again, lifting her hips. "Please Gabriel. I want to feel you inside of me."

Stepping back, he slowly slid her panties down her legs, letting them drop to the floor. Running his hands from her ankles, up her gorgeous legs, he slid his hands under her back and unclasped her bra. Pulling it loose, he let it drop to the floor next to the discarded panties. He filled his hands with her breasts, loving the feel of her satiny skin.

He pushed himself closer to her, feeling the length of him brush against her hot, wet folds. Lifting her hips, he entered her slowly, filling her completely.

Kiera gasped and wrapped her legs around his waist, drawing him closer. She tilted her hips, wanting him deeper.

Gabriel groaned. "You're going to be the death of me. Here I had planned to take my time and pleasure you for at least a good hour, but if you keep doing that it's going to end quickly."

"I don't care, I just want you."

Gabriel withdrew from her and pushed forward again, sliding all the way inside of her. "How do you want me?"

"Fast and hard," she whispered.

Gabriel grinned, now *that* he could do. Grabbing her hips, he withdrew and slammed into her, hard and fast, just as she had requested. Her gasp of pleasure just about undid him. As he slid in and out, faster and harder, he felt himself losing control. Just as he was about to find his release, Kiera cried out. Feeling her inner-walls clinch down on him as spasms wracked her body, he felt his own orgasm coming fast and hard, and he allowed it to break over him.

Sweaty and sated, he picked Kiera up and headed for the bathroom. Turning on the water in the tub, he gently sat down, bringing Kiera with him. She sat with her back to him, nestled between his thighs.

When the water reached the top of the tub, Gabriel turned it off. He wrapped his arms around Kiera and pulled her back against his chest.

"This is nice," she murmured.

"Mmm, I would have to agree."

Kiera tipped her head back and closed her eyes. She trailed her fingers over Gabriel's arms, feeling the crisp hair sprinkled across them. Who knew that being with a naked man could be so relaxing?

"You make me feel so safe and..." her eyes popped open. She had almost said the L word.

"And?"

There was no way she was going to tell him he made her feel loved. That was the surest way to send him running for the hills; and Kiera had every intention of Gabriel sticking around.

"Kiera?" Gabriel shifted to look down at her. "What were you going to say?"

"I'm not really sure. It's hard to describe how you make me feel."

Gabriel had a feeling there was more to it than that, but decided to let it slide... for the moment. If she wasn't comfortable talking about it, he wasn't going to push her.

"Why don't I help you decipher what you're feeling?"

Kiera opened her mouth to ask how, but Gabriel unwound his arms and slid his hands over her breasts. As her nipples puckered against his hands, whatever thoughts she had disappeared.

Gabriel nipped at her neck and kissed her shoulder. Nudging her hair back with his nose, he whispered in her ear, "Why don't you turn around?"

Kiera turned to face him, placing a leg on either side of his. "Like this?"

Gabriel groaned as he felt her slide down, taking him deep inside of her. "Yeah, just like that."

Giving him a naughty grin, Kiera leaned forward to kiss him, her breasts brushing against his chest in the process. Slipping her tongue past his lips, she thrust her hips forward taking him in deeper.

"If you don't stop that, this is going to be over before it truly starts," he murmured against her lips. "I haven't been this quick since high school; it's almost embarrassing."

Grinning, Kiera began moving her hips. "You mean if I don't stop *this*?"

Gabriel growled, grabbed her close and reversed their positions. Holding her close to his chest, he backed her up against the side of the tub. With her legs wrapped around his waist, he began thrusting in and out of her with more and more force. It seemed the faster and harder he moved, the more Kiera seemed to like it. When she cried out her release, Gabriel allowed himself to slip over the edge with her.

Kiera clung to him, feeling boneless. Gabriel was not only an amazing man, but he was one hell of a lover.

Gabriel sat back, pulling her into his lap. Pushing the hair back from her face, he gently kissed her lips.

"I don't want to ruin the moment, but there's something we should probably discuss," he told her quietly.

Kiera nibbled on her lower lip, worried. It couldn't be good that he had chosen this particular moment to have a discussion. Bracing herself for the worst, she nodded for him to continue.

"I know this isn't the best time to bring this up, but tonight isn't the first time we haven't used protection."

Kiera stilled against him. That's what he wanted to talk about? She honestly hadn't thought about it since they were married. Surely as the alpha of the pack he would want children? They hadn't discussed it, but she had just assumed... maybe she had assumed wrong?

Gabriel wasn't sure what to make of her silence so he continued, "Since you were a virgin, I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that you weren't on birth control."

She shook her head, incapable of speech at that moment.

Gabriel sighed and pressed his chin against her hair, cuddling her to him. "I didn't think so. We didn't discuss what exactly this marriage would be like. For all I know you don't even want children..."

Kiera looked up at him. "But I do!"

He caressed her jaw with his fingers, brushed his thumb across her full lips. "You do?"

She nodded. "I mean, assuming that *you* want to have children."

He gave her his slow sexy grin. "I can think of nothing I'd like more than having children with you."

Kiera gave him a hesitant smile. "Then it isn't a problem that we haven't used protection?"

"No, I guess it isn't. Unless you want to wait a bit before having kids? I don't want you to feel rushed, to feel like you have to get pregnant immediately. I'm a patient guy; I can wait a year or two before we try for a baby."

"While I've enjoyed it just being the two of us, I had actually thought of turning Michael's old room into a nursery. I just wasn't sure how to bring up the subject with you."

"So you were already thinking about kids?" he asked in surprise.

She nodded.

"Huh, well you know what they say."

"What?" she asked.

Giving her another wicked grin, he answered, "Practice makes perfect."

Kiera giggled and kissed him.

Draining the water from the tub, Gabriel carried his wife back to the bedroom where he spent the rest of the night showing her just how beautiful and amazing she was to him.



Across town, Michael slumped onto the sofa in his new living room. Matt and Cassie had really come through for him. The house might not be huge, but it had three bedrooms and two bathrooms. There was a decent size yard out back that opened up to a large park. The living room, dining room, and kitchen were all on the small side, but that didn't bother him.

It was a week night, but he had gone out anyway. He'd hit a local bar, had a beer or two, but had ended up coming home. There were a few pretty women there, and more than a few women had hit on him, but for whatever reason Michael just wasn't interested.

Hell, if he were honest with himself, he'd just admit that every time he looked at a woman, he saw a petite redhead. Chloe had managed to get under his skin and he couldn't seem to extract her.

Had Michael finally met his match? He shook the ridiculous thought from his head. Standing up, he grabbed his keys and headed back out. One way or another, he would exorcise Chloe from his system... one woman at a time. And right this minute, it didn't matter which woman it was. Any of the young hot girls at the bar would have done fine. Of course, it would look odd for him to return so soon. He'd hit another bar. Either way, the night would end with him in a woman's bed... any woman other than Chloe.

Chapter Eight

The next morning, Kiera pushed her hair out of her eyes. She knew without looking that Gabriel was already gone. It royally sucked waking up every morning completely alone.

Sighing, she burrowed further under the covers. Not having a job meant that she could sleep as long as she wanted. It wasn't like she had anything that had to be done today. Sure, she wanted to get started on another bedroom on the second floor, but she didn't *have* to do it.

Wriggling out of her nightgown, she dropped it on the floor beside the bed. Closing her eyes, she shifted into her fox form. It had been at least a week since she'd shifted and it felt good to be on four legs.

Nosing her way further under the covers, she curled up in a ball at the foot of the bed. The nice dark, warm cocoon put her to sleep in no time. Unfortunately, it was a little *too* comfortable and she slept straight through the morning.



Gabriel walked over to the house for lunch. As he opened the door, he noticed how quiet and still the house seemed. Where was Kiera? Her car was in the driveway so he knew that she had to be home.

Anxiety crept up on him, making the hair on the back of his neck stand at attention. He had hoped the legend of vampires not being able to enter a home uninvited had been true, but what if it wasn't?

Quietly climbing the stairs, he checked the rooms on the second floor. None of them looked touched; they looked exactly the same as they had the night before. The fact that Kiera hadn't worked on her new project worried him even more.

Climbing the remaining stairs to the third floor, he pushed open the bedroom door. The first thing he noticed was her nightgown on the floor. Rushing to the side of the bed, he picked it up.

Glancing around, he didn't see any signs of Kiera. He ran to the bathroom, hoping she was soaking in the tub. The bathroom was dark and unused.

Turning back to the bedroom, he noticed a small lump in the bed. Slowly walking toward the bed, he drew the covers back inch by inch. When he uncovered the small fox curled up at the foot of the bed, he heaved a sigh of relief.

"Kiera, you scared the hell out of me!"

The fox twitched and popped its head up, looking at Gabriel in shock. Its nose twitched and one ear flicked to the side. It watched him with wide eyes.

Gabriel grinned down at her. She was pretty darn cute as a fox. Reaching out to her, he gently rubbed his fingers over the top of her head.

Kiera closed her eyes in bliss. No one had ever petted her before. Very few people had ever seen her in her fox form. She was glad that Gabriel was able to accept her this way just as much as he did when she was a human.

Shifting back to her womanly form, she held her arms out to him. "I'm sorry I slept so long. I didn't mean to scare you."

A hungry heated look filled Gabriel's eyes as they roamed over her from head to toe, paying particularly close attention to the parts in-between.

"I think I can forgive you," he said, pulling her into his arms.

"I'll get dressed and go fix some sandwiches or something."

Gabriel stopped her before she could leave the bed. "I have a better idea. Why don't you *not* get dressed and I'll have my dessert before my meal?"

Kiera giggled at him. So he wanted to play did he? She inched closer to him and slipped her hands under his shirt. As her fingers traced the contours of his stomach, she leaned closer and kissed him.

Gabriel plunged his hands into her hair, deepening the kiss, devouring her mouth. Pulling her to him roughly, hands splayed against her back, he pressed his erection against her.

"You're wearing too many clothes," she murmured against his lips.

"I can fix that," he said stepping away from her. He lifted his shirt over his head and dropped it on the floor. Kicking off his work boots, he slipped out of his jeans.

Standing before her in all his naked glory he cocked an eyebrow at her. "Better?"

Kiera licked her lips, taking in every delicious inch of him. "Oh yes, much better."

The look in her eyes set him on fire. Pushing her back onto the bed, he entered her swiftly. She was so tight and wet that he closed his eyes in ecstasy.

Kiera grabbed his shoulders, digging in her nails. Lifting her hips, she met him thrust for thrust. Closing her eyes and arching her neck, she cried out his name as her orgasm broke over her.

Gabriel trailed kisses up her neck, across her jaw and claimed her lips in a searing kiss, swallowing her cries of passion. He was close to finding his own release, but wanted to please Kiera more.

Looking up at her husband with passion glazed eyes, she begged, "Harder, Gabriel."

Hearing her soft plea sent him over the edge. He thrust into her harder and faster until they both climaxed together.



After their unusual lunch break, Gabriel went back to the garage to work. Kiera lay in the bed staring at the ceiling. She knew she needed to eat something and heaven only knew she had plenty of projects around the house to keep her occupied, but something just felt off.

Considering that she'd just spent an amazing hour in her husband's arms, all should have been right with the world. Then why did something feel as if it were out of place?

Kiera shook her head and got up. Throwing on some clothes, she headed down to the second floor. Looking at the bedroom she had worked on the previous day, decided to go ahead and finish with it before starting on the others.

Pulling out the primer, paint roller and paint tray, she set to work. An hour and a half later, all four walls were primed. She

opened the door to the small bathroom. There was wallpaper in there, too.

Sighing, Kiera pulled out the steamer and tackled the bathroom. Since there were no windows in the small room, she needed to do something to brighten it up. She thought about using the same moss green she was going to use in the bedroom with white accents. Hopefully Gabriel wouldn't mind if she painted the cabinets.

By the time she finished steaming the wallpaper in the bathroom and had the walls bare, her arms were aching and her back had a slight twinge. Putting away her supplies, she decided to call it a day. The primer in the bedroom needed a day to dry so she wouldn't be able to paint in there until tomorrow anyway.

Her stomach growled, reminding her that she had skipped both breakfast and lunch. A quick glance at her watch told her that Gabriel would be home soon.

Kiera slipped on a pair of shoes and walked across the street to the garage. As she pushed open the glass door, she saw her husband in the office speaking with a customer. There was no sign of Michael so she figured he had cut out early.

She patiently waited in the bay area until Gabriel was finished. When the customer left, Kiera walked into the office.

Gabriel looked up in surprise. "What are you doing over here?"

She shrugged. "I was wondering if we could go out to dinner tonight. I've been working on the bedroom and bathroom all day and a night out of the house sounded nice."

"If that's what you want, that's what we'll do. I'll just need to grab a quick shower when I get home."

Kiera looked down at her mussed, sweaty clothes. "That makes two of us."

Gabriel raised a brow at her.

She blushed. "Not together. If we shower together, we'll never leave the house."

He smiled. "You have a point. So why don't you go ahead and shower and get ready. It won't take me long once I get home."

She nodded. "Okay. I'll see you shortly."

With a quick grin, she left the office and walked back over to the house.

Closing the front door behind her, she rushed up the stairs. Quickly selecting a casual dress, she laid it out on the bed with a matching pair of heels. Kiera walked into the bathroom and turned on the light. She turned on the shower and stripped out of her clothes.

Stepping under the warm spray, Kiera sighed. The water felt wonderful, easing the aches and pains from all of her hard work. She lathered her hair and conditioned it, then grabbed a loofah to wash her body. When she was finished, she rinsed and shut off the water.

As Kiera grabbed her towel and wrapped it around her body, out of the corner of her eye she noticed something stuck to the mirror. She walked over and examined the small piece of paper stuck to the middle of the large mirror. With a shaking hand, she pulled it down and read it.

*Such a lovely young woman. Can't wait to see if
you taste as good as you look.*

Kiera sank to the floor. The vampire had been in their house; in their bathroom. He'd come in while she was in the shower, completely unaware of his presence. He could have easily killed her and she never would have known it was coming.

Was this what her feelings of unease had been about earlier? Had he been around the house just waiting for an opportunity? And how had he managed it? The sun hadn't completely set yet and he'd never been invited inside. Were those only myths?

Downstairs a door slammed and Kiera heard Gabriel's boots coming up the stairs. Thinking quickly, she wadded up the note and threw it away. She took a deep breath to collect herself. She didn't want to worry Gabriel anymore than she had to.

Pulling her brush out of the drawer, she started working the knots out of her hair. She was half-way through when Gabriel walked into the bathroom wearing only his jeans.

"If I had known I would be greeted by such a charming sight, I would have come home sooner," he said, grinning at her.

Kiera smiled. "If you had come home sooner, I still would have been in the shower."

Gabriel walked over and kissed her cheek. "I wouldn't have minded that at all."

Kiera playfully slapped his arm. "You better shower if we're going to dinner."

"Yes ma'am," he answered, reaching into the shower to turn on the water.

As Gabriel took his shower, Kiera finished brushing her hair, moisturized her face and body and went into the bedroom to change.

She reached for her panties and realized her hands were shaking. Sinking to the floor, she tried to calm her nerves. She couldn't let Gabriel see her fall apart; he'd know something was wrong then. Taking a deep breath, she stood up and got dressed. She was just slipping on her shoes when Gabriel walked into the bedroom with a towel wrapped around his waist.

He paused to admire Kiera for a moment. "You look beautiful," he said.

Kiera blushed. "Thank you."

She itched to run her hands over his chest, to smooth a wayward lock of hair off his forehead, to wrap her arms around him and kiss him until she didn't have breath left in her body. Instead, she gave him a small smile and scurried into the bathroom to finish getting ready. If she didn't, she knew they wouldn't make it to dinner.

Chapter Nine

Ashton Grove was small, but it had a decent selection of restaurants. Since Kiera had taken the time to wear a dress, Gabriel decided to take her to a family restaurant with a business casual atmosphere. While he owned business casual clothes, he refused to wear them. Instead, he had donned a clean pair of jeans, a white t-shirt and an un-tucked long-sleeve blue button down with the sleeves rolled to expose his forearms. It was as close to dressing up as he was going to get.

As the hostess seated them, Gabriel took the time to study Kiera. She seldom wore very much make-up, but in his opinion she didn't need to wear any. Her long hair was still slightly damp, but curled around her face, the soft tendrils brushing her cheeks. She had put on a soft petal pink lip gloss that made her lips look soft and kissable.

Kiera noticed that he was staring. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I was just admiring the spectacular view," he answered.

Kiera blushed and looked down at her menu. It would still take a little time for her to become accustomed to Gabriel's constant compliments.

Their waitress came bustling over, a big smile on her face and a sway to her hips once she caught an eyeful of Gabriel. Kiera had to quell the urge to bare her teeth at the woman.

"What can I do for y'all?" she asked, looking only at Gabriel.

Gabriel looked at Kiera, "Sweetheart, do you know what you want?"

The waitress had no choice but to look at Kiera. As Kiera rattled off her order, the woman wrote it down on her pad. Turning back to Gabriel, she waited for his order. Scribbling down the meal he had ordered, she flashed him another smile.

"Your order will be out soon. Is there anything else I can get for you?" she asked.

"Just our drinks," he answered.

The waitress looked a little disappointed, but nodded.

"Ah, alone at last," Gabriel said after the irritating woman had left. Why was it that no one seemed to realize he was with Kiera?

Kiera grinned. "As long as you remember we aren't completely alone," she said.

Gabriel chuckled. "In other words, I can't take you right here and now on the table?" he asked.

"Gabriel!" Kiera hissed, looking around. "What if someone had heard you?"

"Relax Kiera. No one's paying any attention to us," he answered.

Kiera glanced around one more time. "You can say the most outrageous things sometimes."

"It's a quirk. I'm sure you'll come to love it," he said.

Kiera opened her mouth and snapped it shut. Once again she'd almost blurted out that she loved him. What was she thinking? He would probably laugh, or feel sorry for her. No, it was best to keep it to herself that she had fallen for him, at least for now. Maybe someday soon she would be able to tell him, but right now she didn't feel ready to take that step.

"You do that a lot," he said.

"Do what?"

"Look like you're about to say something and then change your mind. It's happened at least twice now," he commented.

She hadn't realized that he'd noticed. Obviously she would have to be more careful. "I just lost my train of thought is all."

Gabriel didn't believe her, but left it alone. He knew she was hiding something, or at the very least didn't feel comfortable enough to share whatever was on her mind. It galled him that they had made love countless times, were married and living together, but she still didn't trust him one-hundred percent. What was it going to take to win her over?

The waitress interrupted his thoughts.

"Here we are; the steak and baked potato for you sir, and the meatloaf with mashed potatoes for you ma'am."

"Thank you," Kiera said with a smile.

"Do you need anything else?" the waitress asked them.

"Thank you, but that's all," Gabriel answered.

The waitress nodded and left, leaving them alone once more.

They ate in relative silence; Kiera concentrating on the note she'd found attached to her bathroom mirror, Gabriel wondering what had been on his wife's mind of late.

After they paid their bill, they walked out to Kiera's SUV. Gabriel held the passenger door open for her, closing it once she was in and buckled. Walking around to the driver's side, he opened the door and slid into the car.

"Is everything okay?" Kiera asked, sensing some tension between them.

He closed the door and looked over at her. "I'm fine, why?"

Kiera shrugged. "I don't know. It just feels tense between us all of a sudden."

Gabriel started the car and backed out of the parking space. "You mean ever since I realized you're keeping something from me?" he asked, mentally cursing himself. Why had he said that? He had decided to leave it alone and let Kiera tell him whenever she was ready.

Her heart nearly stopped. Had he found the note in the bathroom? "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Twice now you've acted like you wanted to tell me something and changed your mind. It's just bugging me is all."

"I told you had I forgotten what I was going to say," she answered, getting defensive.

Gabriel sighed. "I don't want to argue, Kiera. I just want you to feel like you can tell me anything."

"I know I can, Gabriel. There are just certain things I'm not ready to say out loud yet," she said.

Gabriel chewed that over for a moment. "I guess I can live with that," he said.



When they arrived home, Gabriel locked up the downstairs and set the alarm.

"It's still early, did you want to stay down here or go upstairs?" he asked Kiera.

"I think I want to go lie down," Kiera answered, her voice sounding tired.

He nodded. "After you," he said motioning toward the stairs.

As he followed her up the stairs, he watched the sway of her hips. Unbidden, desire welled up inside of him, making his pants tight as his erection strained against the zipper of his jeans. Was he always going to act like a randy teenager around her? He had absolutely no control over himself when it came to Kiera.

Kiera reached the top of the stairs and pushed open the bedroom door. Stepping inside, she kicked off her shoes.

Gabriel headed for the bathroom to brush his teeth and give Kiera a moment to herself. He accidentally knocked Kiera's ponytail holder off the counter and into the trash can. Reaching over to fish it back out, he saw the wadded up note. Curiosity got the better of him and he pulled it out of the trash can. Opening it, he stilled as he read the words written on the paper.

The vampire had been their house. He'd threatened Kiera and she hadn't even said anything. Did she think so little of him? Did she think he wouldn't be able to protect her?

Anger over-took him leaving him shaking and ready to pummel something; anger at the vampire for threatening his mate and anger at Kiera for keeping it from him.

Stalking out of the bathroom, he tossed the note on the bed beside Kiera. "Care to explain that to me?" he demanded.

Kiera nibbled on her lower lip, nervous in the face of Gabriel's anger. "I found it when I got out of the shower."

"He came in and left you a note while you were naked in the shower? Did you even hear him?"

She shook her head. "I was going to tell you, but I was afraid of how you would react."

"Jesus Kiera! How am I supposed to react? That blood-sucking monster broke into our home, threatened my wife, and I'm supposed to what? Sit back and let him take you?"

A tear slipped down her cheek. "No, I just didn't want you to worry," she said in a small voice.

Gabriel sighed, some of the tension leaving him. "I'm sorry for yelling. Do you have any idea what I felt when I found that note? The horror I felt over what could have happened to you? The hurt I felt when I realized you didn't trust me to protect you?"

"No, Gabriel, it wasn't that all!" she assured him. "I know you can protect me. I just didn't want you to worry any more than you already have been. You have enough to deal with right now," she said.

"Like what?"

"Well, you've lived with just your brothers for so long and now you suddenly have a wife thrust upon you, a wife you don't even know. You have a new werewolf in the area, the garage has been busy; your house is getting turned upside down, you suddenly have way more to worry about than you normally would," she answered.

Gabriel sat on the bed and pulled Kiera into his lap. "Honey, having you 'thrust upon me' as you put it, isn't a hardship. I like having you around; so much in fact that I'd like to keep you around. That's why I got so angry about the note."

Kiera nuzzled him. "So I'm forgiven?"

He chuckled. "Yeah, you're forgiven. Like I could stay mad at you for any length of time."

Chapter Ten

A week later

Kiera was standing at the kitchen sink cleaning the lunch dishes when she heard the front door open. She dried her hands on a towel and turned toward the kitchen door.

Austin strolled in like he owned the place. "Hi Kiera; is Gabriel around?"

"Hi Austin, he's across the street at the garage. You just missed him," she answered.

He nodded. "I just got back from Tennessee and thought I'd stop by and talk to him for a minute."

"How are things back home?" she asked.

He shrugged. "About the same, except Thomas is pissed at me for leaving. At first I wasn't sure he would care."

"Could he have kept you there?" she asked.

Austin shrugged. "He could have made me fight him for the right to leave, but he didn't. He asked me why."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I just felt it was time for a change. I left out the other stuff," he answered.

"Have you had lunch?" Kiera asked, trying to be hospitable.

"I grabbed something on the way in town, but thanks for asking."

Kiera nodded. "Well, if you want to catch Gabriel..." she trailed off, gesturing across the street.

He nodded. "Yeah, I guess I'll head over there and check in with him."

Austin gave Kiera a long look, his eyes raking her body from head to toe. "There's something different about you," he said, "an energy that wasn't there before."

Kiera blushed, uncomfortable with his observation. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Is there something going on around here that I should know about?" Austin asked, picking up the scent of her fear and anxiety.

"Nothing that will concern you," she answered, ending the conversation.

He shrugged. "Whatever you say, Kiera; just thought I'd offer my help if you needed it."

"Thank you, Austin, but I'm okay," she said.

He nodded. "Well, I guess I better go check in with Gabriel. I'll see you around."

Kiera watched Austin leave, relieved to not be alone with him any longer. Honestly, the man made her a little nervous when she didn't have Gabriel around to back her up.

She turned back to the sink of dishes and froze. On the edge of the counter was a long-stemmed red rose with a note lying underneath.

A rose to represent our coming union; the soft petals for your skin, the thorns my teeth; I'm going to savor every drop of your blood.

Kiera bit back a sob. He'd been in the house again! And during full daylight! She knew it was only a matter of time before he decided to stop toying with her; decided to take the game a step further and take her, draining her dry. She could only hope that was all he had in mind. She hadn't forgotten his threat at her wedding, to "play" with her first.

Grabbing the offending flower and note, she took off out of the house and ran across the street to the garage.

As she burst through the door, Gabriel turned in surprise. He had been talking to Austin, but came to her side immediately at the terrified look on her face.

"Kiera, honey, what's wrong?" he asked, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

Kiera was shaking and didn't know how she was still standing. She felt like she would collapse at any moment. "He's been in the house again, Gabriel."

"Who has sweetheart?" he asked.

"The vampire; the vampire has been in the house again. He left me another message," she said, handing him the note and the rose.

"He came in the house during the day?" he asked in shock.

She nodded. "If everything we think we know about him isn't true, where does that leave us? If he doesn't have to be invited in and doesn't have to stay hidden in the day, what will we do? We can't fight him!"

Gabriel dropped the rose and note, pulling Kiera into his arms. He smoothed her hair and whispered in her ear, "Shh. It's okay honey. I promise I'll protect you."

"I'm so scared, Gabriel. I'm not only scared that he'll take me, but what if you're home when he comes for me? I couldn't stand it if he did anything to you."

He hugged her tight. "I'm more worried about what he'll do to you than what he'd do to me."

Across the room, Michael and Austin watched them, knowing they obviously needed some time alone, but also wanting to know what was going on. Michael decided to take a chance on incurring his brother's wrath.

Michael tapped Gabriel on the shoulder. "Everything okay?"

Gabriel nodded toward the note on the floor. "The bloodsucking leech lied. He's after Kiera."

Michael swore, scooped up the flower and note, reading it quickly. "So what's the plan?"

"I honestly don't know, Michael. The guy is so fast he can leave notes in plain sight when you've been standing in the room the whole time. He's strong enough to rip the door off the hinges. And apparently he can come and go out of the house as he pleases without an invitation and doesn't have to stay inside out of the sunlight. What the hell do you do when you're faced with a monster with those abilities?"

"I don't know, but we'll think of something. I think it's time to call a family meeting," Michael said.

"No, it's time to call a supernatural one. Austin, Matt, and Cassie should be there too," Gabriel said, resolve strengthening his tone. It might take all of their abilities to get rid of the vampire once and for all.

"I'm on it," Michael said, heading for the office to start making calls.



Later that night as they were all gathered in the living room of the Victorian, Kiera snuggled with Gabriel, afraid to let him out of her sight.

The two notes the vampire had left were laid out on the table.

"Some of you know that Kiera was chased to the garage on the night I met her. A vampire had caught her scent at the club she had gone to with her friends. At the time, we didn't understand what was so special about her blood; not until her mother showed up at the wedding," Gabriel said.

"Kiera's mother? I thought she was dead," Austin interjected.

Gabriel nodded. "So did Kiera. It seems her mother was banished from the human realm." At Austin's blank look, he continued, "Her mother is a fairy. If I had to guess, I'd say she's a fairy of royal descent."

"So the fairy blood is what attracted the vampire," Cole chimed in.

"Yeah, it would seem so," Gabriel answered.

Connor shifted in his seat. "So if the vampire is attracted to her fairy blood, what we really need is a full-blooded fairy to lure him away; preferably a few states away."

"I don't think we're going to find a fairy, let alone one willing to be bait," Gabriel said.

Connor shrugged. "Maybe not, but if Kiera's mother is a descendant of the royal fairy line, that means her daughter is too. Maybe what we should be concentrating on is a way to reach their King or Queen."

Gabriel sharpened his focus on his cousin. "So you're thinking that if the royal family knows one of their own is in trouble, they might be willing to help?"

"Wouldn't hurt to try," he answered.

Matt glanced at Cassie. If anyone knew how to contact the fairies, it would be her father. He looked at Gabriel, "We may be able to find out how to contact them."

Gabriel looked at him in interest. "Really? Care to share with the group?"

"Cassie's father knows more about her abilities than he let on. Apparently her gifts come from his side of the family. Since the ring Stan gave me came from Morgan Le Fey that means Cassie is also of fairy descent," Matt answered, "although her ancestry goes back to the time of King Arthur and is diluted enough that the vampire probably won't even notice her."

"But you think he may know how to contact them?" Gabriel asked.

"There's a good chance he will. We can ask him and get back to you," Matt answered.

"Okay, while you work on that angle, the rest of us need to find a way to protect Kiera and the house," Gabriel said.

Connor and Colin looked at each in silent communication. While all twins had a special connection to each other, Connor and Colin had a few other abilities to go along with it. They might be werewolves, but psychics ran in their family too.

"What if we put the word out to the other packs? See if anyone is willing to lend a hand... strength in numbers and all that," Colin said.

Gabriel rubbed his jaw thoughtfully, "It certainly wouldn't hurt."

"We're on it," Colin said with a nod toward his brother. They had enough friends in various packs across the country that it shouldn't be hard to get a decent turn-out.

"Does anyone know anything about vampires?" Gabriel asked.

Everyone looked blankly at each other. They hadn't realized that vampires existed. The only information they had was from movies and books, which obviously wasn't accurate since the vampire had already been in the house uninvited and during the daytime.

Gabriel sighed. "It's probably like finding a needle in a haystack trying to weed fact from fiction. I'm not sure if there's any way for us to prepare ourselves adequately. Not unless we can find someone who's already tangled with one of these creatures."

Connor spoke up, "When we contact the other packs, we'll see if they have had any dealings with vampires or know anything about them."

Gabriel looked at Cassie. "I don't suppose there's a spell or something that would keep him out?"

Cassie shrugged. "I'm not really sure. I can consult with my friends and family. If there isn't anything in place, maybe we can come up with one."

Gabriel nodded. He appreciated everyone's help, but he wished there was more they could do right away. He didn't feel safe leaving Kiera alone. And even if she weren't alone, he couldn't guarantee her safety. The vampire was faster and quieter than anything he'd ever seen.

Kiera stood. "If everyone will come to the kitchen, I have a small spread and drinks set out. You're welcome to help yourselves."

A few murmured their appreciation for her thoughtfulness and everyone slowly walked to the kitchen. Gabriel and Kiera followed behind.

Pulling his wife close, Gabriel kissed the top of her head. "We'll get it all figured out, honey. One way or another, I'll keep you safe."

Kiera looked up at him with troubled eyes. "Don't make promises you can't keep, Gabriel. I know you mean well, but right now none of us are equipped to handle a vampire. If he were to show up right now, there wouldn't be anything you could do to stop him from taking me."

Gabriel growled softly. "You better damn well believe that I would try! I may not be as fast as he is and possibly not as strong, but he wouldn't walk out of here with you without a fight on his hands."

Kiera caressed his cheek. "That's what worries me the most. If he's going to come and take me, the last thing I want is for you to be injured or worse. You have a pack and family to consider. Promise me you won't do anything foolish."

He shook his head. "I can't promise that, Kiera. You're my mate, my wife... I can't promise that I won't fight for you if it comes down to that."

Kiera realized he hadn't mentioned love anywhere in his little speech. At least he cared enough to want to save her, even if she thought he shouldn't. "I just don't want to see you hurt, or worse, dead."

"And that's how I feel about you; it's why I can't make that promise. Do you think I want to see you at his mercy; unable to do anything to stop him for torturing you or killing you?"

Kiera sighed. "I guess we'll have to call it a draw. You aren't going to get what you want and I won't get what I want."

"Hopefully we'll both get what we want; don't underestimate that group in there," he said with a nod toward the kitchen.

She nodded and wrapped her arms around him. "I won't. Now let's go join them before they start wondering what we're up to."

He smiled. "I'm sure my cousins and brothers are already speculating."

Chapter Eleven

The next morning Kiera once again woke to an empty bed. She sighed and rolled over, burying her face in her pillow. There were times she wondered if Gabriel worked long hours because it's what he had always done, or if he worked long hours to avoid her. They were great together in bed and most days he was attentive at other times as well, but there just seemed to be something lacking.

Kiera rolled back over and stared at the ceiling. She knew she hadn't made a mistake by marrying him. He was her mate and destined to be with her. The question was, did *he* regret marrying *her*? She knew that she should just talk to him and let him know what she was feeling, but that was easier said than done. In theory, it made perfect sense. In reality, it wasn't easy to have an intimate conversation with someone who was still a virtual stranger to you, even if you were sleeping with them.

Obviously lying in bed all day wasn't going to help anything. Stretching, Kiera slipped out of bed and walked into the bathroom. She flipped on the light and looked at her reflection in the mirror.

"A lovely sight first thing in the morning," a voice murmured behind her.

Spinning to face the intruder, Kiera spotted the vampire in the corner. Looking over her shoulder at the mirror, she realized that the myth about vampires not having a reflection was true. Unfortunately it was too little information and it was a little too late.

"What do you want?" she asked her voice shakier than she had hoped it would be. She didn't want to show her fear.

He chuckled. "I thought that would have been rather obvious by now. I want you, of course."

Kiera's heart was racing. She knew she couldn't outrun him, couldn't fight him off, and had no prayer of surviving. She'd never been so terrified in her life.

The vampire took a step toward her. "You know, I had thought it would be harder to get you alone, especially after my

little notes. Don't you find it odd that your mate has left you unprotected even after my threats?"

Kiera eyed him uncertainly. What was he getting at? "Gabriel's at work. It isn't like he can stop working just because I'm in danger."

"Are you sure that's it? Are you sure he couldn't take off? If he loved you, don't you think he'd be here now?" the vampire asked, preying on her fears.

Kiera swallowed, doubts swirling through her mind. Gabriel had been good to her, but he had yet to mention the word "love." She had hoped that love would come in time, but what if it didn't? What if she spent her whole life wondering what it would be like to be loved?

"I see I've hit upon something," the vampire said. "Obviously he hasn't confessed his love to you."

Kiera met his gaze, "Just because he hasn't said it doesn't mean he doesn't feel it. Not all men are free with their emotions."

"True, very true, but seeing as how you're married surely he would have said something," the vampire replied.

Kiera shrugged, feigning nonchalance that she really didn't feel. Her self-doubts were eating away at her and the vampire knew it. He had known exactly where to fling his barbs.

"What does it matter to you?" she asked.

The vampire smiled. "It doesn't, not really. However, I find it interesting that you haven't denied the fact that you love *him*. What's it like to love someone who doesn't return your affection?"

"Just stop it! If you're going to kill me, get it over with," Kiera said, tired of his games.

With lightning speed, the vampire was behind her, his arm wrapped around her waist, his other hand tipping her head sideways, exposing her long throat. "Are you sure that's what you want me to do?" he asked softly.

Kiera was so nervous she was shaking. Why had she baited him like that? Was it going to hurt when he bit her? Would it be a slow death? Would she know her life was ending?

The vampire bent his head closer, inhaling her scent. "Your blood calls to me, begs to be taken," he said, trailing his tongue along her skin.

Kiera shivered in revulsion. "What do you want from me? If you were going to kill me, you would have done it already."

Nuzzling her neck, the vampire murmured, "Are you sure? Maybe I just like playing with my food," he said, rubbing himself against her.

Kiera could feel his erection as he pressed himself closer. She closed her eyes, terrified of what would happen next. She hadn't counted on him wanting her in *that* way. Her skin broke out in a fine sweat as she contemplated her fate. If she screamed, would anyone hear her? Would they get to her in time?

Pulling her tighter against his body, the vampire kissed her neck. "Yes, I'm definitely going to enjoy playing with my food."

Abruptly he released her. Kiera was too afraid to move. Prying her eyes open, she turned her head to look over her shoulder. He was gone!

She collapsed to the floor, sobbing. Why was he toying with her like this? Why was he dragging it out?

Crawling over to the shower, Kiera turned it on. She stripped out of her gown and crawled under the water. Not bothering to close the shower door, she curled up and cried. She cried for the fate she knew was surely coming; she cried for the love she wished she had; and she cried for what would never be. She had no doubt that the vampire would eventually finish what he started; one day he would tire of his games and kill her, draining her dry.

She heard Connor's voice calling from the hallway, but she couldn't answer. She rocked back and forth under the water, her arms wrapped around her knees, reliving the past few minutes over and over.

"Kiera, are you in there?" Connor asked as he neared the bathroom door. He could hear the shower running, but the door was wide open. Wouldn't she have closed it before getting in the shower?

"Kiera," he called out once more.

When he didn't get an answer, he stepped into the bathroom and froze. He saw Kiera curled up in the bottom of the shower, crying. He quickly averted his eyes.

"Kiera, are you okay?" he asked.

She didn't answer.

Connor wasn't sure what to do. He didn't want to embarrass her or anger Gabriel. Deciding that he shouldn't be the one to extract her from the shower, he quickly ran downstairs. He had offered to stop by this morning to keep an eye on Kiera, but apparently he hadn't arrived soon enough.

Rushing across the street, he ran into the garage. He spotted Gabriel under a car and jogged over to him.

Hearing footsteps, Gabriel slid out from under the Charger he was working on. "What's wrong?" he asked, noticing the panicked look on Connor's face.

"There's something wrong with Kiera. She's in the shower, curled up on the floor. I think the vampire's been back," he said in a voice low enough that customer's wouldn't overhear.

Gabriel jerked to his feet and took off for the house. Taking the stairs two at a time, he bolted for his bedroom. Seeing the open bathroom door, he approached the door with caution.

When he looked inside and saw Kiera rocking back and forth under the water, his heart broke. Walking to her side, he kneeled outside of the shower door.

"Kiera, sweetheart, can you hear me?" he asked softly.

Kiera didn't respond, just continued rocking back and forth.

Realizing she must be in shock, Gabriel turned off the water, wrapped her in a towel and lifted her into his arms. He walked into the bedroom with her and laid her on the bed.

Connor stood in the hallway just outside.

"Is she okay?" he asked.

Gabriel shook his head. "I don't know. Would you close the door? I'm going to get her dressed and see if I can get her to snap out of it," he answered.

Connor nodded and pulled the door shut as Gabriel has requested. He headed back downstairs to give the couple some privacy.

Once they were alone, Gabriel removed Kiera's towel and dried her off. Pulling out a pair of her panties and a bra, he slipped them on her. He rummaged through her things and found a loose pair of pants and a knit top.

Dressing Kiera, he watched her face for any sign that she was coming back to him. She stared vacantly at the ceiling, completely unaware of what was happening.

Lifting her into his arms, he held her close.

"Come back to me, Kiera. Please come back to me," he murmured in her ear. He gently rocked her and rubbed her back.

What had happened? Connor had mentioned the vampire, but Gabriel hadn't seen any evidence that the bloodsucker had been around.

"Honey, you're scaring me. Please talk to me. Tell me what happened," he coaxed, hoping she would respond.

There was a knock at the door.

"What?" Gabriel growled, hating the interruption.

Connor stepped into the room. "I think I can help."

Gabriel looked at his cousin, thinking. "What can you do for her?"

"I don't know how to explain it, but there's a chance I might be able to connect with her – mentally. I can't promise it will work, but I thought I could try," he replied.

Gabriel gave him a terse nod.

Connor stepped closer, stopping when he stood beside them. He reached for Kiera's hands, taking them in his own. Hunkering down so that he was eye level with her, he concentrated.

The fear he saw in her mind made him wince. He tried to sort through her thoughts and memories, piecing together what had happened to her. Shaken from what he saw, he released her hands and looked at Gabriel.

"What? What did you see?" Gabriel asked.

"You don't want to know," Connor answered.

"She's my wife damn it! Of course I want to know," he growled.

"He caught her when she was alone, surprising her in the bathroom. He terrorized her, making her think he was going to kill her, before threatening to..." Connor trailed off, unable to complete the thought much less the sentence.

"Threatening to what?" Gabriel asked in a flat voice, terrified that he already knew the answer.

Connor swallowed the knot in his throat. "He told her that he was going to enjoy playing with her before he killed her." He stopped and looked Gabriel in the eye. "Don't make me say it... don't make me tell you the rest."

Gabriel tightened his hold on Kiera. "We won't let that happen; we won't let him near her."

Connor took Kiera's hands again, trying to get past the fear and memories, trying to find her. She had hidden herself away somewhere deep inside. Connor just needed to find her and coax her back out.

After what seemed like an eternity, Kiera blinked and slowly looked around the room.

"Where am I?" she asked quietly.

"Oh thank god!" Gabriel exclaimed, hugging her, kissing her hair.

"Gabriel?" she asked, looking up at him. "What are you doing home?"

He laughed weakly. "I came home for you, sweetheart. I came home to see you."

She nodded and looked at Connor, who was still eye level with her. "Hi Connor, I didn't realize you were here."

He smiled. "Morning Kiera, I haven't been here for long; just stopped in to spend a little time with you today."

She nodded; a frown on her face. Everything was a little fuzzy. Looking down, she noticed her clothes. When had she gotten dressed?

"Gabriel, what's going on? I don't remember getting dressed," she said.

He hugged her tightly. "Don't worry about it, honey. You weren't feeling well this morning so I had to help you."

Kiera fought to remember what had happened. She felt fine, maybe a little weak, but overall she felt the same as she always did. Why had Gabriel had to help her with her clothes?

In a flash, the memories nearly suffocated her; the vampire, his threats, how scared she had felt. She gasped, "He was here."

"Shh; you're okay now. He isn't going to hurt you, Kiera. I'm here and so is Connor," Gabriel told her.

She huddled into him, drawing strength from being near him. "I was so scared, and he said such awful things to me," she said, a silent tear falling on her cheek.

"I won't make the same mistake twice. I won't leave the house until I know someone is here to watch over you," he said.

Connor decided to leave the two alone and quietly slipped out of the room. After seeing Kiera's memories, he felt sick and angry. So far, only one pack had responded to his inquiry for more werewolves. Pulling his cell phone out, he decided he wasn't taking no for an answer and started making phone calls. One way or another, Kiera would be protected. No woman should ever have to go through that.

Chapter Twelve

Early June, a month later

Kiera was in the living room, surrounded by werewolves, or at least it felt that way. Connor had managed to get twenty wolves from various states to come to her aid. There were at least five in the house at all times, with another five patrolling the grounds. They worked in shifts with ten on and ten off duty twenty-four hours a day.

She felt suffocated, but in a good way. The vampire hadn't been back in the house, at least not to her knowledge. There hadn't been another note or anymore threatening appearances. She hadn't relaxed yet. She knew the moment her guard was down he would strike, so she stayed alert and focused.

Noting the time, she headed into the kitchen to make lunch for everyone. Feeding such a large crowd, she had been making casseroles for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. One day a week they would order pizza and on Saturdays they ordered Chinese food to help break up the monotony and give Kiera a break.

Pulling two large casserole dishes from the cabinet, Kiera began gathering her ingredients. She was going to make chicken with cheesy rice for lunch. It was simple to make and filling enough to feed twelve werewolves and herself.

Kiera hummed as she cooked. She looked forward to lunch because Gabriel always came home. It was hard to have alone time with someone when there were always so many people around. Their love life had slacked off a bit, mostly because of her. She was embarrassed to make love to him while there were strangers in the house. With their sensitive hearing, she knew they picked up on every little thing.

Once the dishes were in the oven, she pulled out the paper plates and plastic forks. It hadn't taken long for Kiera to realize that doing the dishes three times a day for so many people just wasn't possible. Now they stocked up on disposable things, including cups.

She set the timer on the stove for forty minutes and went back into the living room. Picking up her book, she decided to

do a little reading. It allowed her to escape from reality for a short time. At one time she had enjoyed books filled with suspense and mystery. Now she just wanted a simple, light-hearted tale with a happy ending. She had enough suspense in her own life without adding to it with her books.

She had barely read four chapters when she heard the timer go off in the kitchen. Putting her book back down on the coffee table, she walked back to the kitchen. She turned off the timer and opened the oven door. Grabbing two potholders, she removed the casserole dishes and placed them on top of the stove. The chicken looked nice and juicy; the meal should appease all of the hungry werewolves roaming around.

Closing the oven and making sure it was turned off, Kiera headed for the garage across the street to get Gabriel and Michael for lunch.

As she opened the front door, a tall dark headed werewolf turned to face her. She smiled and nodded.

"I'm just heading across the street to get Gabriel for lunch," she explained.

He slid his dark sunglasses down his nose and peered at her over the top of them. "I'll walk with you."

She sighed, knowing to expect such a response. She could barely go to the bathroom by herself and she figured that if any female werewolves had responded to Connor's plea for help that she would have found herself with company even then.

Walking beside the stoic man, Kiera made her way across the street. Although, she had to admit he was rather yummy looking; they all were for that matter. She may be happily married, but she wasn't blind.

As they entered the garage, she looked around for Gabriel. It was unusual for her to not see him working on a car.

"He's in the office," a voice said.

Looking to her right, she saw Michael under a car. "How do you do that?" she asked.

He slid out from under the car and grinned at her. "I recognize your scent and the way you walk. Who else would you look for other than your husband?" he asked.

“Good point,” she said with a grin. She had grown rather fond of Michael since joining the family. Although she had noticed that when Cole and Marin were around, Michael seemed rather distant. She wondered if he was wondering where *his* mate was now that both of his brothers were married. Not that he would ever admit to such a thing! It hadn’t taken her long to notice that he flaunted his “player” lifestyle to his family. She often wondered if it was just a smoke screen to hide his true feelings.

Kiera walked into the office and perched on the edge of the desk. Looking down at her husband she smiled. “Are you ready for lunch?”

“You know I am,” he replied with a grin. Standing, he reached for her hand. He pulled her close for a kiss, but kept enough distance between them to not soil her clothes with oil. He loved his job, but it definitely wasn’t the cleanest profession in the world.

“Then again, maybe I want dessert first,” he murmured against her lips.

Kiera pulled back and smiled at him. “You know you have to clean your plate to get dessert.”

Gabriel grinned at her. “Does this mean that if I’m a good boy I might get dessert later?”

Kiera looked hesitant for a moment. She really did want to be intimate with Gabriel again, but she just felt so self-conscious about it. Things had been different when it was just the two of them in the house.

Gabriel sighed, practically reading her mind. “Kiera, we can’t put our lives on hold just because we have guests.”

“I know; it’s just... I know they can hear *everything* that happens in the house. I don’t feel comfortable making love with you when I know we have an audience,” she said, giving him a pleading look, begging for his understanding.

“What if I banish all of them from the house tonight? I’m sure that Connor and Colin could put up a few more of them for a night or two.”

“What about having a guard in the house?” she asked.

Gabriel shrugged. "If we have all ten wolves outside, I don't see how anyone could get inside. If they do, everyone is just a shout away."

Kiera threw her arms around him and kissed him. "You'd really do that for me?"

Caressing her cheek he smiled at her. "Honey, I'd do anything to make you happy."

Kiera blushed and got off the desk. "I guess we'd better go across the street. Otherwise, you might find all of the food gone. You have to keep up your energy for later," she said saucily.

Gabriel chuckled and followed her out of the garage. The guard was still standing by the door and nodded as they passed. Kiera had a valid point. The werewolves *could* hear everything that happened in the house. He could understand her tentativeness when it came to making love under those circumstances. It wasn't exactly ideal for him either, but he had missed feeling her naked body next to his, missed being deep inside of her, missed watching her climax. He decided to change the direction of his thoughts before they got him into trouble. As it was, his pants were starting to get a little snug.

As they stepped through the front door of the house, the guard closed the door behind them, resuming his position on the porch. Gabriel believed his name was Ramsey. So far he had found him to be competent in his duties. He was mild mannered and usually on the reserved side, mostly speaking when spoken to.

In the kitchen, several wolves had filled their plates and were eating with gusto. His brother was just sitting down at the table when they walked in.

"There's not much left," Michael said, nodding toward the stove.

"We figured as much," Gabriel replied.

Kiera and Gabriel walked over to the stove. They filled their paper plates, grabbed some forks and some water, and sat down to join Michael. It seemed to be an unspoken rule

amongst the guards that the table was reserved for family, as no one ever sat at the table during their meals.

"You know, I've been thinking about something," Michael said. "What if the vampire has stayed away because of the massive amount of werewolves running around?"

"Wasn't that the idea?" Gabriel asked.

"Yeah, but what if he's just biding his time? He has to realize that the werewolves can't stay here forever. What if he's just waiting on them to leave before he tries anything?" Michael asked.

Kiera paused in mid-bite. "He came at me before when a werewolf was in the house. What's stopping him now?" she asked.

Michael shrugged. "Probably easier to go up against one werewolf instead of ten, or maybe he's just waiting on us to give up, believing that he's gone."

Kiera gave Gabriel a troubled look. "Do you think that's what he's doing?"

Gabriel studied his wife a moment. He knew she was scared, but she deserved the truth. "Yeah, I think he's just waiting us out. He figures that either the other werewolves will leave or that we'll get sloppy."

Kiera took a deep breath and let it out, trying to steady her nerves. She licked her lips as they suddenly felt dry. "What if we make him think he's right?"

Gabriel narrowed his eyes, not liking the sound of her question. Was the foolish woman going to put herself into harm's way? "What do you mean?"

"Well, what if the werewolves back off just enough that he thinks they've left?"

"His sense of smell is probably better than ours, Kiera. Half the patrol would have to leave in order to pull it off, possibly more. I'm not willing to risk your safety by lowering our numbers," he responded.

"But Gabriel..."

"No buts," he interrupted. "I'm not going to take any chances. Do you know what he'll do to you when he gets his hands on you?"

She shivered, remembering her encounter with him before, the threats he'd made when he'd found her in the bathroom. "I know, but we can't spend the rest of our lives looking over our shoulders either!"

Gabriel sighed. "I'll give it some thought, but I'm not making any promises."

She gave him a small smile, feeling as if she'd won. She knew that he would come around. It was the only way to end this thing once and for all.



Later that night, all ten guards patrolled the outer perimeter of the house, giving the couple their space. Several grumbled that a little embarrassment wasn't worth the risk, but Gabriel stood firm. He wasn't willing to lower the number of guards as Kiera had suggested, but he *could* make sure she felt comfortable in her own home at night.

After locking up the downstairs and checking all of the windows on the second and third floors, Gabriel walked into their bedroom. Kiera had already dressed for bed and was wearing a long satin nightgown. The top barely covered her breasts and Gabriel had to stop and catch his breath.

"Do you like it?" Kiera asked, not sure how to take his silence.

"You're beautiful," he said.

She smiled at him and beckoned for him to come over to the bed.

Gabriel shook his head, "Not yet. I need to shower and get all of the dirt and grease off of me before I join you."

Kiera sighed, but nodded her head. "I'll be waiting right here."

Not wasting any time, Gabriel entered the bathroom, stripped off his clothes, and started the shower. Once the water was warm, he got in and started scrubbing away the grime from a hard day's work.

In the bedroom, Kiera reclined back on the pillows, listening to the sounds of Gabriel showering. She briefly contemplated joining him, but decided she'd rather wait in the bed. It had been over a week since they'd made love; she refused to accept a quickie in the shower.

The closet door slowly creaked open.

Kiera tensed and looked over at the partially open door. She couldn't see anything in the dark interior. She sat up, anxious at what had made the door open. Her heart was pounding in her chest and she could hear its beat in her ears.

Just as she started to relax, a white hand with long white fingers gripped the door and opened it further.

Kiera felt a strangled scream in the back of her throat, but she couldn't seem to force out a single sound. The vampire slowly stepped from inside the closet, leering at her.

"Did you really think that a bunch of werewolves would keep me out of your house?" he asked.

Kiera opened her mouth, but no sound came out. She glanced toward the bathroom door, but could still hear the shower running.

"Your wolf won't be any help to you right now. He has no idea that I'm here," the vampire said.

Kiera whimpered and gripped the sheets so tight that her knuckles turned white. She knew that fleeing was out of the question. He was much too fast and would catch her in a second.

"What do you want?" she whispered.

He arched an eyebrow and looked her over from head to toe. "I want you, of course. Did you think that had changed since our last time together?"

"I had hoped you were gone," she answered.

The vampire chuckled low in his throat. "No, I don't ever give up on my prey."

He stalked toward the bed, looking over her hungrily. His tongue flicked out to lick the tip of a fang and wet his lips. He could see her pulse beating out of control and wanted

desperately to sink his teeth into the plump vein running through her neck.

Kiera was shaking uncontrollably, but stayed her ground. She met his stare and controlled her urge to bolt. When he reached out an icy finger and trailed it down her arm, she flinched.

"It's just a pity that I have to drain you," he said. "You're much too pretty to be dead."

The vampire leaned onto the bed and pulled Kiera closer; pressing his nose against the skin of her neck he inhaled her scent. It was intoxicating! He drew his tongue along the line of her vein, feeling the blood pulsing through it.

He groaned and pulled back. "Do you realize that I could have you right now? I could sink my teeth into you and suck your blood at this very moment and no one could do anything about it."

Kiera bit her lip to keep from crying out. She watched him, hoping he wouldn't bite her, but wondering what he was up to just the same.

The vampire trailed his hand down Kiera's leg, from knee to ankle. "Maybe instead of draining you completely, I should just make you a vampire. Then I could have your delicious blood and still have you by my side."

"I'd never stay with you," she answered, repulsed by his suggestion.

He laughed, showing her his fangs. "Oh, I believe you would. Do you really think your wolf would want you after your dead?"

Kiera hesitated. It was only for a second, but it was long enough for the vampire to take notice.

"Ah, not quite so certain, are you?" he asked. "Has he not confessed his undying love for you?"

"That's none of your business," Kiera replied stiffly.

In the other room, the water shut off, alerting them both that Gabriel was finished with his shower.

The vampire sighed. "It looks like I'll have to postpone this conversation for another time."

Without another word, he opened the bedroom window and vanished into the night.

Kiera couldn't hold back her tears another moment. Shaking, she sobbed non-stop until Gabriel came into the room.

He briefly noted the open closet and rushed to Kiera's side, wearing nothing but a towel.

"Honey, what's wrong? What happened?" he asked.

Kiera couldn't stop crying long enough to talk. She threw her arms around Gabriel and buried her face against his neck.

"Kiera, I need you to talk to me, sweetheart. I have to know what happened."

She sniffled and fought back her tears. In a wobbly voice, she said, "The vampire was here."

Gabriel stiffened. "Here? In our bedroom?"

She nodded and looked at the open closet door.

"He was hiding in the closet?" Gabriel asked, trying to pry information out of her.

"Yes, he said that no matter how many werewolves we had that he would always find a way into the house," she said.

Gabriel walked over to the closet and slammed it shut. Glaring at the open window, he stalked over to it. Leaning out, he surveyed the area. All he could see where the werewolves patrolling below and the woods beyond the house. The vampire was nowhere to be seen.

Slamming the window shut, he locked it and turned to face the bed. Kiera was still shaking and sniffing. Sitting on the bed, he pulled her into his arms.

"So much for our romantic night," he murmured.

Kiera pulled back to look up at him. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm not going to make love to you after everything you just went through," he answered.

"Not even if I want you to?" she asked.

He looked at her intently. "Do you? Do you want me to make love to you?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I want you to wipe the memories of him from my mind. I don't want to think about anything other than us."

Gabriel cupped her jaw and kissed her. The moment his lips touched hers and he inhaled her sweet scent, he was lost. Pulling the towel from his waist, he dropped it on the floor. Grabbing Kiera around her waist, he hauled her into his lap.

Kiera buried her fingers in Gabriel's hair and pulled him closer. She wanted to feel his body pressed against hers; wanted the memory of him to be etched into her mind.

Gabriel placed his hand on her thigh, enjoying the silky material of her nightgown. He slid his hand down her leg until he reached the hem. Slipping his fingers under the hem, his fingertips explored the skin of her calf. He trailed his fingers up to the sensitive skin at the back of her knee, lightly skimming the surface of her skin. When his hand reached her thigh, he felt her indrawn breath and knew she was turned on by the experience.

When he reached the top of her leg, his fingers skimmed the edge of her panties. His finger gently ran the length of her lips, feeling the moisture through the material. He groaned into her mouth and pressed his body against her, forcing her to lie back on the bed.

Gabriel pushed her nightgown up to her waist. Reaching between her legs, he cupped her. Her clit was already engorged and he could feel it through her panties. Flicking it with his thumb, he grinned with satisfaction when Kiera arched her hips off the bed.

He trailed kisses down her throat to the slope of her breast. Nudging the material aside with his nose, he found her nipple, hard and begging for attention. He gently lapped at it, drawing a gasp from Kiera. Sucking her nipple into his mouth, he continued to rub her clit with his thumb.

Kiera whimpered and arched against him. She wasn't sure how much more she could stand. It had been so long since she'd felt him inside of her that she wasn't feeling very patient.

"Gabriel, I want you," she whispered.

Releasing her nipple, he leaned back and grasped the sides of her panties in his hands. Sliding them down her legs, he

dropped them to the floor. Helping her sit up, he slipped her gown over her head and tossed it aside.

Kissing her, he pushed her back down onto the bed. Reaching between her legs, he continued to tease her.

“Gabriel, I mean it! I want you and I want you now,” she said.

He chuckled. “I know you do, sweetheart. Just lie back and relax.”

Leaning down, he took her nipple into his mouth once more. As his thumb circled her clit, his fingers teased her opening. She was so hot and wet, begging for him to take her. He slipped his index finger inside of her, gently stroking her. Adding a second finger, he plunged deep inside of her.

Moving to the other nipple, he licked and nipped it. His fingers continued to slide in and out of her body as his thumb stroked her full, sensitive clit. He felt her hips meeting his thrusts and knew she was close to an orgasm. Curving his fingers a little, he found her g-spot. He felt the hot liquid gush around his fingers as she gasped and arched off the bed, her inner walls clenching down on him.

Removing his fingers from her body, he quickly kissed her on the lips. “Why don’t you roll over,” he murmured.

Kiera felt limp, but did as he suggested. When she sat up on her knees and turned around, Gabriel put an arm around her waist and drew her back against him. She felt the long, hard length of him brushing against her, begging for entry.

“Spread your legs, sweetheart,” he whispered in her ear.

Kiera spread her legs a little further and felt the head of his shaft slip inside of her. She groaned and tried to press back into him, trying to draw him further inside.

Gabriel, holding her firm with one arm, reached around with his other hand, sliding his fingers down into her curls, finding her clit once more. As he gently rubbed her, Kiera thrust her hips back, trying to take more of him side of her. He allowed her take a little of him into her, but not all of him. As he played with her, he felt get getting hotter and wetter. Knowing she was near her climax, he thrust into her hard and fast.

Kiera cried out as her orgasm broke over her. Gabriel held her tight and continued to thrust in and out of her, going deeper and harder with each thrust. As she felt his warm seed spread through her, she climaxed again.

Gabriel kissed her shoulder and her neck. Pulling from her body, he turned her to face him.

Staring at his beautiful glowing wife, he wondered what he would ever do without her. No matter the cost, he had to make sure she was protected, that the vampire wouldn't get to her.

"What is it?" she asked, noticing his intent stare.

He shook his head. "Nothing, I was just admiring my beautiful wife."

Kiera smiled and lay back on the bed, pulling Gabriel down with her. "Well then... after you rest, why don't you show me just how beautiful you think I am?"

He chuckled. "Again?"

"Mmm-hmm. And again, and again, and again..."

"I think I get the picture," he murmured, kissing her.

Chapter Thirteen

Two weeks later

Kiera paced back and forth in the bathroom, staring down at the counter. She had missed her period earlier in the week and had bought a pregnancy test. The proof was now staring her in the face in the form of two little blue lines – she was pregnant.

She had called Gabriel at the garage and asked him to come home. That had been ten minutes ago. Where was he?

Would he be happy about the news? Kiera chewed on her lip. The thought of having Gabriel's baby filled her with a happiness she hadn't known existed, but she wasn't sure if he would feel the same. They hadn't really discussed children during their short marriage.

Running her hands through her hair, she glanced at the test stick again before looking at her watch. According to the kit, the results would disappear within an hour. She wasn't sure if Gabriel would believe her if he didn't see the results for himself.

Footsteps thudded up the stairs and Kiera stilled, knowing that Gabriel was finally answering her call. She watched the door in anticipation.

Gabriel opened the bedroom door. Not seeing Kiera, he headed for the bathroom. Her face held a million emotions.

"What is it, Kiera?" he asked.

She swallowed and glanced nervously at the counter. Looking back at Gabriel, she took a breath to steady her nerves.

"I know we haven't been married long, but I have something I need to tell you," she said.

Gabriel stilled and his heart froze in his chest. Had Kiera decided she didn't want to be with him? What was going on?

"You can tell me anything, Kiera," he assured her.

She hesitantly walked over to him. Looking up in his eyes, she said, "I'm pregnant."

Gabriel thought he'd misheard her. "You're what?"

"Pregnant," Kiera said, her heart pumping over-time. She couldn't tell if he was happy, unhappy, or just indifferent. The suspense was killing her.

Gabriel swallowed and digested that tidbit of information for a moment. "I... I, um... Wow, I'm not really sure what to say."

Kiera reached out to him with a shaky hand. "You aren't upset, are you?"

"Upset? Why would I be upset?" he asked.

"Because the baby could be a werefox or just be normal; because there's a chance you won't have a little boy who takes after his daddy and can take over as pack alpha some day."

He gave her a gentle smile and pulled her into his arms. "Is that what was bothering you?"

She nodded.

"Honey, I don't care if we have a girl, a boy, a fox, a wolf, a fairy, or just a plain ol' everyday human child. As long as the baby is happy and healthy, that's all I could ask for," he assured her.

Kiera smiled and hugged him. "I'm glad to hear that. I was so scared when I saw the two little blue lines this morning."

Gabriel rubbed her back. "I'm sorry you were scared and worried. We probably should have talked about kids a bit more than one brief moment on our honeymoon, but there just hasn't been time."

"I know. I don't blame you for my feelings. I'm just happy that you're okay with me being pregnant," she said, snuggling into him.

"As much as I hate to ruin this happy moment, I need to get back to work," he told her, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

"Okay. I'll see you at lunch."



Later that afternoon, Kiera was still daydreaming about the baby growing inside of her. She'd let the time slip past her and suddenly realized that the guys would be getting hungry. Picking up the phone, she ordered eight large pizzas for delivery. Hopefully the guys wouldn't mind.

Pacing through the downstairs, she waited for their food to be delivered. Her eyes roamed over the old-fashioned wallpaper in the entry and she remembered her task of

renovating the upstairs rooms. She would have to switch gears and begin work in the baby's room before she finished the others.

Rubbing her belly, she wondered if they were going to have a boy or a girl. She'd have to pick neutral colors for the room if she started on it this early.

Hearing a car in the driveway, Kiera opened the front door and peered outside. The pizza guy was heading her way when three large werewolves suddenly blocked his path. The poor guy looked scared to death.

"Guys, let him through if you want to eat," Kiera called out.

Ramsey looked over his shoulder at Kiera. Nodded his head and motioned for the others to back away.

The delivery guy practically ran to the front door. "Man, who lives here? The president or something?" he asked nervously.

"I'm afraid my husband is just a little over-protective," she answered.

"No kidding!"

Kiera smiled and handed the money to him, making sure to include a nice tip for his trouble. "Thanks for getting here so quickly!"

He nodded. "No problem. Next time you might want to tell the person taking your order that your house is guarded."

"I will. Sorry again," she said.

Ramsey stepped forward and took the pizzas from Kiera, who couldn't even see over the top of the boxes. She followed him into the kitchen, where he sat the boxes down on the counter.

"Ramsey, would you please let the others know it's time for lunch? And maybe send someone over to the garage?" she asked.

Ramsey nodded and left to do as she asked.

Kiera got out enough plates, napkins and cups for all of the werewolves. She lined the pizza boxes up around the kitchen and opened one of each kind. She had everything from cheese to supreme.

Fixing a plate for Gabriel, one for Michael and one for herself, she placed them on the kitchen table. As she was getting their drinks, the werewolves started gathering in the kitchen.

Placing the cups on the table, Kiera pulled out a chair and sat down just as Ramsey came into the kitchen with Gabriel and Michael trailing behind him.

Gabriel stopped by Kiera's chair long enough to lean down kiss her cheek. "I'm going to wash up and then I'll join you."

"Okay, I already fixed your plate," she said, nodding to the place beside her.

"So is this one for me little sis?" Michael asked, pointing at the other place setting.

"Of course; you didn't think I'd fix a plate for your brother and not make one for you, did you?"

Michael grinned and followed Gabriel out of the kitchen to wash up.

When they returned a few minutes later, Kiera couldn't help sneaking glances at Gabriel. Michael noticed and wondered what was up between the two. He knew that Gabriel had come over to the house a few hours earlier, but he didn't know why. Usually Gabriel shared things with him, so he figured it was a domestic issue and none of his concern.

Gabriel smiled at Kiera, bursting to tell everyone their good news. "Should we tell them?" he asked.

Kiera blushed. "I guess so. Michael needs to know for sure, but shouldn't Cole and Marin be here too?"

Michael shifted in his seat, his attention focused on Kiera. "Tell me what?"

Kiera looked at Gabriel and nodded her consent.

The proud papa, beaming, announced, "Kiera and I are going to have a baby."

Michael was stunned, but elated for his older brother. "Congratulations! That's excellent news!"

Gabriel hugged Kiera to his side and gave her a kiss. "We'll have to tell the others soon."

Kiera wasn't sure she was up to making a huge meal, but what if the whole pack, and guests, went out to dinner? She'd have to mention it to Gabriel before he went back to work.

Ramsey stepped over and hunkered down beside her chair. "I couldn't help but overhear and I wanted to congratulate you both."

Kiera smiled at him. "Thank you, Ramsey. That's very kind of you."

Ramsey nodded and stood. "I'm returning to my post now. Let me know if you need anything."

Kiera nodded and watched him walk out the door. He was a very quiet man, but also very kind. He'd been diligent in his task of watching over her.

Michael watched the whole thing with a thoughtful look. "You know, I have a feeling that Ramsey may decide to stick around."

Gabriel raised a brow. "So now you're a psychic?"

Michael shook his head. "It's just a feeling I have. The others keep their distance for the most part, but Ramsey seems to be more in tune with our pack."

"You may be right. If he decides to stick around, I wouldn't mind having him join us," Gabriel answered.

Once everyone was finished with their pizza, Kiera began picking up the trash. With the kitchen back to some sort of order, she headed upstairs for a quick nap. She would have loved to shift into her fox form, but didn't dare now that she knew she was pregnant. She wasn't going to take any chances with the baby being injured in any way.

As she stepped into the room, her eyes caught sight of something on the bed. Upon closer inspection, she noticed a folded note with a blood red rose.

Opening the note, she read;

So my dear fairy, you are carrying the wolf's pup. A minor set-back at best. You will still be mine before it's all said and done. Can you still feel my lips against your neck? Feel my teeth grazing your skin?

I will see you soon...

Kiera dropped the note as if it had scalded her skin. She backed away from the bed and scanned the room, looking for any sign of the creature that had left it.

Her nap now forgotten, she grabbed her purse and scurried down the stairs. Bursting through the front door, she ran into Ramsey.

"Easy now; where are you running off to in such a hurry?" he asked.

"I... I don't know. I just need to get out of the house," she said in a rush.

"You're not going anywhere alone, Kiera. You know that Gabriel would have my head," he replied.

She sighed. "I know, I guess I wasn't thinking."

"Now, why don't you tell me what happened?"

"What happened?" she asked.

"Don't play innocent. You were flying out of the house as if the hounds of hell were hot on your heels. Now, what happened?" he asked again.

"I found a note, on my bed," she replied.

"A note?"

"Yes, from the vampire. I threw it away, along with the rose he left with it. I found them on my bed when I went upstairs," she answered.

"You mean right after lunch? After you had a house full of werewolves?" he asked, trying to get the facts straight.

She nodded.

"He's braver than I thought," Ramsey muttered. "Well, you certainly aren't going anywhere by yourself."

"I take it this means you're going with me?" Kiera asked.

Ramsey nodded. "I'm going to grab Hunter as well."

"Do you really think I need two guards to leave the house?"

He gave her a small smile. "I'm not taking any chances with the wife and baby of the pack's alpha."

Her shoulders slumped. "Go get Hunter. I'll wait in the car."

Ramsey chuckled. "I thought we'd take my car."

Kiera glanced up at him in surprise. "Your car?"

He nodded his head toward the street. "It's the black Hummer."

Kiera looked in the direction he had indicated and saw a large black SUV that she assumed must be the Hummer. It was massive and reminded her of a tank. "Do you really think something that heavy duty will be required for an afternoon on the town?"

"With you, anything is possible. Now, wait here and I'll go grab Hunter," he told her.

Ramsey headed around the side of the house. He came back a moment later with a large, bulky werewolf in tow. Hunter and Ramsey were two of the largest werewolves who had come to help them.

Ramsey was about six-feet, six-inches tall with green eyes and dark brown hair. Hunter was just as tall and even broader with blond hair and blue eyes. The two would stop traffic for sure, of the female variety anyway, and quite possibly some of the male variety.

As they approached Kiera, she gave them a smile. "Thanks for heading out with me. I know its short notice, but I just couldn't stand to be in the house for another moment."

Hunter and Ramsey exchanged looks.

"You filled him in on the note, didn't you?" she asked.

Ramsey nodded. "It's important for him to know. We should tell Gabriel as well."

"No! Not yet," Kiera said.

"Kiera, this isn't something we should keep from him. Do you know the repercussions for keeping something of this magnitude from the alpha?" Ramsey asked.

"Ramsey, do you really think Gabriel would do anything to you?" Kiera asked patiently. Surely the man didn't think Gabriel had it in him to harm someone over something so small.

"While he's milder than most alphas, I wouldn't doubt anything when it comes to his woman and child," he responded.

"Ramsey, please don't tell him. He'll only worry more than he does now," she pleaded.

Ramsey shook his head. "Sorry Kiera, but you aren't going to win this one."

Ramsey marched across the street to inform the alpha of the latest news. Once he had done his part, he would take Kiera where ever she wanted to go. He had pondered sticking around and didn't want to get on the alpha's bad side.

Chapter Fourteen

Kiera sat in the passenger side of Ramsey's large SUV. Hunter rode in the back, keeping watch out of both the passenger side and driver side windows.

"You never did tell me where we're going," Ramsey said, keeping his eyes on the road.

"How about the mall? Maybe I could do a little baby shopping," she answered.

Ramsey nodded. "The mall it is."

They rode in silence. Kiera wasn't sure what to say to them. After Ramsey had told Gabriel about the note, her husband had rushed across the street, anxious over her well-being. Once she had assured him that she was fine, he had allowed her to leave the house.

When they arrived at the mall, it took Ramsey a while to locate a spot big enough for the Hummer. Most of the vacant spaces were next to someone who had parked over the line or right on top of it. Finally, they located a spot toward the back of the parking lot.

Ramsey and Hunter flanked her as they walked to the mall entrance. More than once Kiera noticed envious looks from women going to their cars or heading into the mall. Little did they know that both men were up for grabs; or at least as far as Kiera knew they were. She realized that while Ramsey had been guarding her for the past few weeks, they hadn't really talked.

"So are both of you from California?" she asked.

Ramsey glanced down at her, "I'm from the Denver pack, but I was originally born in South Carolina."

Hunter continued to scan the area, but answered her. "I'm from the Los Angeles pack, born and raised."

"Do either of you have girlfriends that you had to leave behind when you came to guard me?" Kiera asked.

Ramsey grinned. "Nope, I'm free as a bird."

"Is that by choice or have you just not found your mate yet?" she asked.

Ramsey shrugged. "A little of both I guess; I've dated over the years, but I haven't found my mate."

"What about you Hunter?" Kiera asked, turning to look up at the blonde werewolf.

"I had a girlfriend until I came here," he answered.

"Is she not waiting for you at home?" Kiera asked.

Hunter shook his head. "I'm not sure I'm going back and she won't leave California."

"I'm sorry. I feel somewhat responsible," she said.

Hunter stopped scanning the area long enough to look down at her, "Don't. It isn't your fault that you needed a guard; and no one forced me to come here. The pack is small enough that I feel I can be of better use here than back home, where our numbers are in the hundreds."

Kiera nodded. She could see the logic in that, but she still felt bad that he was losing his girlfriend in the bargain.

"If it makes you feel better, she wasn't my mate," Hunter stated.

Kiera smiled. "That does make me feel a little better. It still sucks for your girlfriend though."

Hunter shrugged. "Now she's free to find her mate. What sucks about that?"

"Nothing I guess. I hadn't really thought of it like that," she responded.

They reached the mall entrance and Ramsey opened the door for her. When they stepped inside, Kiera went straight to the large map to locate the store she wanted.

After a moment of looking through the directory, she chose two different baby stores and a maternity store. It was way too early for her to start showing, but she figured it wouldn't hurt to have one or two things on hand for the day she realized her clothes no longer fit.

When she entered the first baby store, she felt a little overwhelmed. Ramsey was kind enough to grab a hand basket for her as she tried to figure out which direction to go in first.

Kiera headed for the aisle marked "blankets." She had never realized there were so many sizes, textures and colors of baby

blankets. Some were solid colors, some had prints. Some were soft and fuzzy while others were thin and slightly rough.

One in particular caught her eye. It was sage green with satin trim. The rest of the blanket was a soft chenille type material with a wolf pup embroidered in the middle. It was perfect! Grabbing it off the shelf, Kiera placed it in the basket.

"I think the alpha will be pleased with your choice," Hunter told her.

She smiled and moved on to the toy aisle. Kiera looked at plush toys, rattles, toys that crinkled; toys that lit up, toys that moved... She finally selected a plush bear that jingled and a green and yellow caterpillar that rattled. Adding them to the basket, she looked around the store, unsure of where to go next.

"Do you want to see what the other baby store has before you buy anything else?" Ramsey asked.

"That sounds like a good idea. Thanks, Ramsey," she said with a smile.

The trio headed for the check out area and Kiera paid for her purchases. Ramsey offered to carry the bag for her and they walked down to the next baby store.

The second shop was smaller, but carried adorable clothes. She ended up selecting a cute sleeper that was white with yellow ducks all over it and a yellow sleeper with paw prints on the bottom of the feet.

Before going to the maternity store, she decided to stop and grab a bite to eat.

"I'm sure the guys at home are just going to love me when they realize no one's home to make their lunch," she mumbled.

"Kiera, we've all been fending for ourselves for quite a while. It's nice that you make lunch for us all the time, but it isn't necessary," Ramsey said.

"I should have at least let someone know I might be gone for lunch today," she responded.

"I'm sure they'll manage. Now, what do you want to eat?" he asked.

Kiera looked around the food court. There was a pizza place, a place that served Chinese, a sub shop, and two fast food chains. "What about a sandwich?"

Ramsey headed in the direction of the sub place with Kiera and Hunter trailing behind. The line was relatively short and they didn't have to wait long to place their order.

Once they were seated, Kiera pulled out her cell phone and called Gabriel. She was a little surprised he hadn't called to check on her already. He'd seemed tense when they had left. Granted, he had a good reason to feel that way. The vampire seemed to get braver and braver. Kiera had a feeling it wouldn't be long before their game came to an end. She just hoped her life didn't end as well.



A few hours later, Ramsey pulled to a stop outside of the Victorian. Hunter climbed out of the back and opened Kiera's door while Ramsey grabbed her packages.

Once they were in the house, Ramsey lifted the packages, "What do you want me to do with these?"

Kiera motioned to the stairs. "I was going to put them in my room for now. The baby's room hasn't been decorated yet so I don't really have a place for anything right now."

"I don't feel right going into the alpha's room. What if I just leave them on the landing on the third floor?" he asked.

Kiera nodded. "That would be fine. Thank you, Ramsey."

He headed upstairs, taking the stairs two at a time, leaving Hunter and Kiera downstairs.

As he stepped onto the third floor landing, he started to put the bags down, but something caught his attention. The door to the alpha's room was slightly ajar and a shadowed crossed the room.

Ramsey's gaze sharpened, waiting to see if it happened again. An elongated shadow in the shape of a man crossed the open door again. Stealthily, Ramsey approached the door, careful to not make a sound. Sniffing the air, he couldn't smell anything out of the ordinary.

Slowly opening the door, he took in every nook and cranny, looking for a possible intruder. Taking a step into the room, he peered into the bathroom, but didn't see anyone reflected in the mirror. Of course, if the intruder was the vampire, there wouldn't necessarily be a reflection.

Cautiously approaching the open bathroom door, he looked inside. Empty. Just as he was about to turn, a cold hand gripped him and slammed him against the wall, face first.

"So delightful that someone finally came to play," the vampire said. "I was starting to despair of anyone ever coming up here."

"What do you want?" Ramsey asked.

"The alpha's wife. Call her to you," the vampire ordered.

"Never; I'll die before I let you have her," he said.

The vampire turned him around so he could look into the werewolf's eyes. "That can be arranged," he said with a cold smile.

Looking into the bloodsuckers black, dead eyes, Ramsey had no doubt he meant what he said. Regardless, his job was to protect Kiera, and he would fight to the death to make sure she was safe.

Shifting his weight, Ramsey threw his shoulder into the vampire's ribs, knocking him off balance for a moment. It was just long enough for Ramsey to shift into his wolf form.

With a blur of reddish brown fur, Ramsey launched himself at the vampire, aiming for his throat. The vampire threw up his arm, blocking the werewolf and knocking him to the floor.

With a hiss, the vampire leapt onto the wolf. Ramsey bucked and arched, trying to break free. Slamming the vampire into the doorframe, he managed to get free long enough to let loose a short howl.

Moments later, the clatter of nails sounded on the stairs as two more werewolves came bounding up the stairs.

The vampire quickly assessed the situation and realized the odds weren't in his favor. With a snarl, he made a run for the window, jumping out and disappearing.

The werewolves returned downstairs in wolf form to check on Kiera. Just because the vampire disappeared didn't mean he wouldn't double back, hoping to catch them off guard.

Kiera was in the living room huddled in the corner of the couch with Hunter and another werewolf standing guard.

Gabriel, having heard the howl, came bursting through the front door with Michael hot on his heels. "What happened? Is everything okay?"

"Ramsey went upstairs to leave Kiera's packages on the landing for her. The next thing I knew, I heard a scuffle and a moment later Ramsey let out a howl," Hunter replied.

Kiera stood up and walked over to Gabriel. Wrapping her arms around his waist, she leaned into him.

Holding her close, Gabriel looked at the three werewolves in wolf form. "Ramsey, stay with Kiera at all times when I'm not here. The other two of you, patrol the outside."

The three wolves nodded their understanding.

Deciding to call it a day at the garage, Gabriel turned to face Michael. "I think it's time to close-up shop for the day, possibly for the week. I don't want to leave Kiera alone anymore than I have to until the vampire is dealt with."

Michael nodded. "I agree. Do you want me to stay here?"

"I wouldn't mind having you around, but you have your own place now. I'll add a few more wolves the patrol outside and make sure a few more are inside at night," Gabriel answered.

Chapter Fifteen

Later that night, Kiera snuggled up next to Gabriel in their bed. Her head rested on his shoulder and her leg was draped across his thigh.

Ramsey was in the hall in his wolf form; a wolf was on the second floor landing, and two more were on the main level. There were also two werewolves in human form patrolling the house.

Outside, the crickets chirped and a cool breeze blew through the trees, making the leaves rustle. The sky was clear with hundreds of stars shining brightly against the midnight black sky. Pale moonlight shone down, illuminating the guards outside of the house.

In the woods, the vampire watched the house patiently. It was almost time for his move... almost, but not quite. He wanted to snatch the woman when her mate wasn't around. He wasn't worried about the alpha, but knew his task would be easier without the wolf involved.

He watched the multitude of werewolves patrolling the grounds in both human and wolf form. It was amazing how easy it would be to slip past them. He had already done it several times.

A sinister grin formed on his lips as he thought of the beautiful fairy hiding inside. Her scent was still with him, driving him crazy, making him thirst for her blood and her fear.

Not much longer. If he still had a heart, it would be pumping tons of blood through his body as adrenaline raced through his system. The thrill of the chase, there was nothing else like it. Not even sex had ever been this good.

The vampire withdrew, slipping further into the shadows. If he wanted to stay focused, he needed to find a snack. Nothing to fill him up, but just enough to take the edge off; heading into the more populated area, he went hunting.



On the third floor of the Victorian, Kiera jolted awake. She scanned the room, trying to figure out what had disturbed her

sleep. Nothing looked out of place; everything was the same as it had been when she had fallen asleep earlier.

Looking out the window, the moon shone brightly in the sky. Pushing aside the covers, she slipped out of the bed and walked to the window. Peering out into the darkness, she watched the werewolves below. Her eyes scanned the woods, but didn't see anything out of the ordinary.

Was he out there? Was the vampire watching her this very moment? Her eyes lingered on the woods once more, looking for hidden threats; or more accurately, *a* hidden threat.

Sighing, she climbed back into the bed. Lying back on her pillow, she rolled to her side and watched Gabriel sleep. His chest rose and fell with each breath he took, deep and even.

Kiera smiled. He looked so peaceful. She reached out and gently traced the contours of his chest and stomach with her fingers. It amazed her that someone so strong could be so gentle with her.

Maybe she should tell him how much she loved him. What if the vampire came back and took her and she'd never told Gabriel what he meant to her?

Rolling to face the window, she stared at the moon. Her thoughts were in a whirlwind. A million scenarios played through her mind. When she told Gabriel she loved him, what would he do? Would he balk and avoid her? Would he tell her that he loved her too?

After a lot of tossing and turning, sleep claimed her for the second time that night.

Chapter Sixteen

When Kiera woke up the next day, the clock beside the bed read eleven o'clock. She yawned and stretched. It didn't really surprise her that she had slept so late.

Getting out of bed, she headed for the bathroom. Turning on the shower, she brushed her teeth while the water warmed up. She ran a brush through her hair, getting rid of the tangles before stepping under the warm spray of the shower.

Letting the warm water cascade down her body, she felt the kinks in her neck loosen. She leaned against the shower wall as the water sluiced down her back.

"Need some help?" Gabriel asked from the doorway.

Kiera yelped and turned to face him. "You scared me to death! I thought you were at work."

He gave her a lazy grin and his eyes roamed over her body, from the tips of her toes to the top of her head, lingering on the parts in-between. "Sorry, honey. As for work, it's Saturday."

"You've been working on Saturdays," she pointed out.

He shrugged. "It turns out that two of the guards are mechanics when they're home. I'm letting them work on Saturdays to earn some extra cash and give me more time with you."

She smiled and beckoned to him. "Then what are you waiting for? Come on in."

Stripping out of his clothes, he climbed into the shower and pushed Kiera up against the wall. Tipping her head back, he leaned down and brushed his lips across hers.

With his erection pressing against her belly, Kiera had no doubt what Gabriel wanted, and she wanted it too. Wrapping her arms around his waist, she pushed up on tiptoe and kissed him back.

Gabriel cupped her breasts with his palms, flicking her nipples with his thumbs. He trailed kisses across her jaw and down her throat. Nipping her shoulder, he thrust against her belly.

"I want you," she murmured, desperately wanting to feel him inside of her.

Sliding his hands down to her waist, he lifted her. With her legs wrapped around his waist, she was open for him, open and ready. Reaching between their bodies, he gently rubbed her clit, making her whimper with need.

"Please Gabriel... I want you now," she whispered, throwing her head back in ecstasy.

"Not just yet."

Gently rubbing and flicking her clit, he continued to torment and tease, making her wiggle her hips, trying to draw him inside of her. She was so slick and swollen that Gabriel knew it was only a matter of moments before she would find her release.

He cupped her breast with his free hand and flicked his thumb over her nipple, drawing a gasp from her. Slipping a finger into her heat, he stroked the inside of her. As his finger pumped in and out of her, his thumb rubbed her clit. Bending his head, he took her nipple between his teeth and nipped her. Sucking the hardened nub into his mouth, he laved it with his tongue.

He was on fire for her and wanted to bury himself deep inside, but knew it wasn't time yet. He wanted to make her scream, make her beg...

Kiera bucked against Gabriel's hand, meeting his strokes, seeking her release. Her fingers twined in his hair, holding him to her breast. His fingers and his tongue were doing delicious things and she didn't want him to stop. Pumping her hips in time with his strokes, she screamed out his name as her orgasm came crashing down upon her.

Panting, Kiera reached between their bodies and grasped Gabriel's long hard shaft. The ache between her thighs momentarily satisfied, she wanted to explore new territory. Unwinding her legs from around his waist, she slid back down to the floor.

"Tell me what you want, Kiera," Gabriel said in a husky voice.

Giving him a mischievous look, she dropped to her knees in front of him and drew her tongue across the length of him. His

indrawn breath said far more than words could. Opening her mouth, she drew him between her lips, her tongue sliding against his warm hard flesh.

“Oh god Kiera, I think you’re killing me.”

In response, she took all of him into her mouth and sucked on him long and hard.

Gabriel groaned and grabbed the wall for support. To say that Kiera had surprised him would be an understatement. “Honey, if you don’t stop, I won’t last much longer.”

Giving him one last lick, Kiera stood and looked up at him. “If I can’t do that, then what can I do?”

“You can beg and scream,” he said, grabbing her hips and forcing her legs around his waist. Pressing her back to the wall, he pressed his length against her.

“I want you!”

“I don’t think you’re ready just yet,” he said, reaching between them and playing with her clit again.

Kiera rubbed her moist folds against him, wanting to feel him inside of her, stretching her, filling her. “Gabriel, I want you... now!”

He nudged her opening with the head of his dick, “Are you sure?”

Kiera tried to press forward, desperately wanting more of him. “Yes, I’m sure.”

He eased into her a little more. “Like this?”

She whimpered. “More...”

Thrusting into her hard, he asked, “You mean like this?”

“Yes... oh yes, just like that.”

Thrusting in and out of her, Gabriel drove both of them to the brink. Rubbing her wet, swollen clit, he thrust harder and faster.

Kiera grabbed his shoulders for support and threw her head back in ecstasy. She cried out as she climaxed.

Once Gabriel felt her muscles spasm around him, he let go, thrusting as deep and hard as he could until he found his release, shooting his hot seed deep into her.

Leaning against Kiera, he panted, trying to catch his breath.

"I can only hope that was as good for you as it was for me," she murmured.

He chuckled and kissed her. "It was better."

Gently setting her down on her feet, he slipped out of her. He caressed her cheek and smiled down at her, wanting to tell her how much he loved her, but not daring to bring it up so soon into their relationship. Married or not, it still seemed a bit early.

"We should probably get cleaned up and get some lunch," he said, reaching for the soap.

"Are you going to wash me?"

He smiled, "That was the plan."

"I don't think we'll make it to lunch if you wash me," she said with a wicked grin.

"I'm willing to take that chance," he replied, letting his soapy hands slide over her breasts.

Kiera instantly felt an ache between her legs and wanted him again.

Recognizing the glint in her eye, Gabriel soaped her stomach and reached for the curls between her legs. The moment his slick fingers touched her clit, he knew they were going to miss lunch.

Chapter Seventeen

One week later

Kiera had noticed the backyard was a little barren when it came to plants. Thanks to Ramsey and a few of the other guards, she now had a plethora of flowers.

Starting with the flower bed closest to the backdoor, she planted snapdragons, hibiscus, marigolds and columbine. When she was finished, there was a myriad of color on either side of the back stairs.

The werewolves had cleared grass around the trees, making a ring shaped bed, trimmed in stone. Kiera planted more marigolds, columbine, and moss roses around the trees. It took several hours to get all the flowers planted and watered. By the end of the morning, the backyard was awash in color and Kiera's back was aching.

Dusting the dirt from her clothes and hands, she climbed the back steps. Just as her hand touched the knob to open the door, rough hands grabbed her from behind, wrenching her from the stairs. Before she had a chance to cry out, her attacker was flying through the woods with her grasped in his arms.

If she had any doubts previously of who had grabbed her, she didn't now. Only the vampire could move so quickly, making all of the trees blur as they sped past them.

He ran for what seemed like hours, but finally stopped and set Kiera down on her feet. He turned her so that she had no choice but to look at him.

"I told you that it wouldn't be long before I saw you again," he told her, his cold eyes staring down at her.

"Well, you have me now. Just get it over with," Kiera said with more bravado than she actually felt. Inside she was quaking, but she hoped she was projecting a façade of calm and acceptance.

The vampire chuckled. "All in good time, all in good time. Did you ever think I might want to savor the moment? I've watched you, hunted you for months now. It would be rather anticlimactic if I were to just kill you right away."

Kiera swallowed, trying to hide her fear. "What do you plan on doing with me?"

He trailed an icy finger down her cheek. "I think the first thing I'll do is take a little sample," he said, bending his head to her neck.

Kiera felt his cool lips touch her neck right before she felt the prick of his fangs as they punctured her skin. She cried out in pain, feeling her life force flow from her and into him.

The vampire forced himself to stop. He didn't want to take too much at once; he wanted to make this last all night. Her warm blood flowed across his tongue like nectar from the gods, warming his cold dead body. As it slid down his throat, he fought the urge to take more, to take it all. Releasing her, he stepped back and watched her.

Kiera grabbed her neck, covering the wound. Silent tears trailed down her cheeks, her skin a shade paler than before from the loss of blood. She stumbled to her knees, sinking into the soil, unable to stand any longer.



On the other side of the woods, Gabriel and over twenty werewolves were searching for Kiera. Ramsey had seen her vanish into thin air, or so it had seemed, and had immediately reported the event to Gabriel.

"She has to be around here somewhere," Gabriel growled, terror gnawing at him from the inside out, tearing him to pieces.

"We tried to follow them, but the vampire moved so fast we couldn't even see him," Ramsey assured the alpha. "We want to find him just as much as you do. Kiera has come to mean a lot to all of us."

Gabriel sighed. "I know, I'm sorry if I snapped at you. I'm just worried about her."

Ramsey nodded. "We'll find her. Several of the wolves are tracking her now. I'm sure it won't take long to pick up her scent."

"If he was carrying her, she might not have left any scent," Gabriel said, not even wanting to admit that small truth to himself, much less to anyone else.

Ramsey knew the alpha was going crazy worrying over his mate. He wished there was something more that he could do.

Gabriel and Ramsey joined the men in the woods, searching for any small clue as to where the vampire had taken Kiera. A broken branch, a scent, a footprint... anything!

Almost an hour later, someone called out, "Over here! I've got something!"

Gabriel, his brothers and cousins, Ramsey, and Hunter all rushed over. It was light, but there was a footprint. The scent matched that of the vampire. They finally had a lead on Kiera!

"Excellent work; now we at least know in which direction to start searching," Gabriel said.



The sun was setting and Kiera was starting to think no one was coming for her. Since the vampire had sampled her blood earlier, he had mostly left her alone. He paced the area, listening to the woods. More than likely, waiting for her rescue crew... assuming there was going to be one.

"Why me?" she asked.

"What do you mean, why you?"

"What's so special about my blood? I know that I'm part fairy, but what exactly is so wonderful about that?" Kiera asked, trying to figure out why he wanted her so much.

"The blood of a fairy, in particular a royal fairy, will make me invincible. Stakes won't be able to harm me; no one will be able to kill me."

Kiera digested that bit of info. "So I'm part of the royal family?"

He smiled. "Didn't your mother tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

He chuckled. "That she's the granddaughter of the fairy king and queen."

"What?" Kiera was stunned. Why hadn't her mother told her?

"Yes, my dear. That means that you're the great-granddaughter to the fairy king and queen – their *only* great-granddaughter it just so happens."

"If I'm so important, then why haven't the fairies come to rescue me? Are they just going to let me die?" she asked in a small voice.

The vampire hunkered down in front of her. "In all fairness, they're probably staying away because they can't take me. It would be suicidal for them to show up here."

Kiera stared at him, incredulous. "Are you trying to make me feel better?"

The vampire grimaced. "Maybe; I don't know. I guess I just thought our future would go smoother if you learned to trust me a little."

"What future?"

He smiled. "Don't you remember? I told you that I had new plans for you; to be one of us... to walk for an eternity with me."

Kiera laughed. "As if I'd stay with you for an eternity! You kidnapped me, bit me, and you're keeping me away from my husband. What on earth would make me stay with you?"

He gripped her neck and pulled her close. "What makes you think I'd give you a choice? It's either join me, or die."

"I think I'd prefer death," she said. "Either way, whether I'm a vampire or you kill me outright I'll lose my baby and my husband. Without them, I have no reason to live."

The vampire snarled and pushed away from her. She was making this more difficult than he had expected. Sure, he could drain her and just be done with it, but that would take away the fun. The vampire could picture the alpha's face when he realized that his beloved mate had turned into a vampire, a child of the night.

Pacing, he thought about what she'd said. He knew that she wasn't going to willingly become a vampire. Whether he wanted to do it or not, he would have to kill her.



From the bushes, Gabriel watched the vampire pacing in front of his wife. He had heard their exchange and was proud of her. Even knowing that it would mean her death, she had stood her ground.

Now it was just a waiting game. He knew that Kiera's life, and that of their child, hung in the balance. He wanted to rip the vampire to shreds, but he had to wait for just the right opportunity. If he moved too soon, it could cost them all.

When the vampire approached Kiera and hauled her to her feet, Gabriel tensed. As he watched, the leech bent his head to Kiera's neck, clearly intent on biting her.

With a nod of his head, the werewolves converged on the clearing. Their mission was to keep Kiera safe, while Gabriel took care of the vampire once and for all.

Gabriel reached them first and pried the vampire off of Kiera.

Snarling, the vampire turned to face him, "You weren't supposed to find us so soon."

Gabriel gave him a menacing grin, "Sorry to spoil your fun. Guess our tracking ability was better than you thought."

The vampire lunged for him. Gabriel leapt toward him, shifting mid-air. His furry body landed solidly against the vampire's chest, knocking him backwards, but not completely off his feet.

Coiling to strike, the vampire lunged at him once more, fangs bared. Grabbing the wolf by his shoulder, he flung the beast to the ground.

Gabriel whimpered when he hit the ground. He felt a rib crack, but got right back up, ready to fight. Circling the vampire, he lunged and managed to bite down on the leech's leg.

With a savage growl, the vampire shook the wolf loose. Spinning, he tackled the wolf to the ground. Leaning in, he bit down on the wolf's neck. The blood of the alpha was intoxicating.

Gabriel scrambled against the vampire, digging in with his hind claws, trying to break free. Writhing, he fought against the jaws clamped down on him, but to no avail. Just when he thought he would die, the vampire let go, a look of shock and surprise on his face.

Gabriel was too weak to stand, but lifted his head. The sight before him was truly amazing. His beautiful wife stood behind the vampire, a broken tree limb in her hand.

The vampire looked down at his chest and the gaping wound Kiera had inflicted. He opened his mouth, but before words could come forth, he burst into ash, his remains carried away in the breeze.

Gabriel shifted back to his human form. Weak, he held his hand out to Kiera.

"My warrior princess," he whispered.

Tears streamed down her face. "I couldn't stand to watch him hurt you another moment."

Gabriel gave her a weak smile and winced. "Kiera, there's something I should have told you..."

She placed her fingers over her lips. "Shh. Don't you dare say goodbye to me. You're fine! You're going to be just fine."

Kiera stepped back, allowing the werewolves to gather Gabriel and carry him back to the house. She was shaking and her heart was racing. All she knew was the he *had* to be fine... she wouldn't let herself think otherwise.

Chapter Eighteen

When they arrived at the Victorian, Kiera asked the werewolves to take Gabriel upstairs. She knew he would be more comfortable in his own bed. It wasn't like they could take him to a hospital. How would they explain two puncture wounds to the neck and loss of blood?

"Get Connor, Colin, Cole, and Michael; one of them will know what to do," she told Hunter.

Ramsey remained with her. "Is there anything you need, Kiera?"

She looked at him and smiled. "Thank you, but I'm fine Ramsey. Right now, I'm just worried about Gabriel."

Ramsey nodded. "He'll be fine, Kiera. He's a strong alpha, and he has a lot to live for."

She opened her mouth to respond, but Gabriel's family trooped into the room.

Connor walked over to the bed and looked down at his cousin. It was hard, seeing an alpha laid low. "He's going to need foods high in iron and protein if he's going to recover. And a little magick wouldn't hurt..."

"Magick?" Kiera asked.

Connor looked at her, "Aren't you half fairy?"

"Well, yes, I suppose, but..."

He shook his head. "No buts... Crawl onto the bed beside him and see if you can heal him."

"But I don't know what to do!"

He gave her an encouraging smile. "You'll figure it out."

Kiera climbed onto the bed beside Gabriel. She took his hand in hers and leaned over him, brushing a kiss against his cheek. "If I could heal you, I would," she said, as a tear slid down her cheek.

Leaning her forehead against his, Kiera wished she had told him that she loved him... why hadn't she told him weeks ago? Now it might be too late. She could feel his heart beating; it was weaker than usual and slower. She knew he was dying and felt helpless to stop it.

"Kiera, has there ever been anything you wanted and it suddenly happened, as if by magick?" Connor asked.

"Well, one time... but I have no idea how I did it," she answered.

"Just think about how much you want him to wake up, to be healed... wish with all of your heart. If you have to, visualize the bite marks closing," Connor said.

Kiera sighed and closed her eyes. She focused all of her energy on Gabriel. She did as Connor suggested and imagined the wounds closing up, imagined his neck smooth and whole again. She felt warmth radiating from her hands and opened her eyes. Shocked, she realized that her hands were glowing... even more shocking, the puncture marks on Gabriel's neck were closing!

She gasped and watched as her husband was healed. Maybe being half-fairy wasn't so terrible after all. It felt amazing! Knowing that she had the power to heal, the power over life and death... it was a heady experience.

Gabriel coughed and opened his eyes, to see his beautiful, glowing wife. "Kiera, what happened?" he rasped, feeling like his mouth was full of cotton.

"Gabriel!" Kiera threw herself down across his chest, soaking him with tears of happiness. "I'm so glad you're okay."

He rubbed her back, trying to comfort her. What the hell had happened? He remembered fighting the vampire, but then nothing... his mind was blank after that.

"You were bit," Connor stated.

Gabriel reached for his neck, but didn't feel punctures on either side. "If I was bit, wouldn't I have marks?"

Connor grinned and nodded his head toward Kiera. "You're wife healed you."

"Healed me? What are you talking about?"

"It seems her fairy side is stronger than we thought. She was able to use fairy magick to heal your wounds," Connor answered.

"Kiera, is that true?" Gabriel asked, a little stunned.

Kiera lifted her head. "Yes, I was able to heal you, but I don't know if I could do it again."

Gabriel chuckled. "Honey, I'm hoping you don't ever have to heal me, or anyone else in the pack, ever again. Between Marin's exciting entrance into our lives and then yours, I think we're due for some down time."

"There's something I should have told you long before now, but the timing just never seemed right. But when I thought I'd lost you today... Gabriel, I love you."

He caressed her cheek. "I love you, too."

Kiera's smile lit up the room. "Really? I had hoped you would come to love me, but I never dared hope that you already did."

"Yes, honey, I already love you. I think I fell in love with you the moment you walked into my garage."

"So what happens now?" she asked.

"Now, I take a day or two off to get one hundred percent back on my feet, figure out what to do with all of the guards we have running around here, and then life goes back to normal."

She grinned. "What's normal around here? Ever since I met you I've been running from a vampire."

He laughed. "I guess that does put a different slant on things."

Ramsey cleared his throat. "I can't speak for everyone, but Hunter and I have decided to stick around, if that's okay with you."

"We would be honored to have you stay," Gabriel told him. "You'll just have to decide which pack to join."

"Um, I've actually been meaning to talk to you about that," Connor said.

"About what?" Gabriel asked.

"About two packs in the same area not even ten minutes apart. It's a bit ridiculous."

"So what do you suggest?" Gabriel asked.

Connor rubbed his jaw. "Well, think we could handle dual leadership? Small things could be business as usual, but major things, like this vampire attack, could be a joint effort."

"Sounds like what we've been doing anyways," Gabriel answered.

Connor grinned. "That's what gave me the idea. Anyway, you don't have to decide right away, but I thought I'd throw that out there."

Gabriel nodded. "I don't really need to think about it. I'd love to merge the two packs together."

"I guess I'll go share the news then," Connor said. "Unless you want me to wait on you and we can tell them together?"

Gabriel shook his head. "You go right ahead. I think I just want to lay here and relax for the rest of the night."

Ramsey, Connor, and the others all left the couple alone. When they reached the first floor, they assured everyone the alpha was fine and just wanted to be left in peace for the duration of the evening.



Upstairs, Kiera snuggled close to Gabriel. "Don't ever scare me like that again. I don't think I could handle it."

Gabriel hugged her to him. "I don't plan on it."

Kiera kissed his cheek. "Want to go wash up?"

He chuckled. "Is that a kind way of telling me I stink?"

"Well, I don't know about stink, but you still have dried blood on you. I thought you might want to wash it off," she answered.

He nodded. "Let's go then."

"As in together? Are you sure you're up for that?"

He drew her down and kissed her hard, delving his tongue between her lips. When Kiera whimpered, he broke the kiss. "I think I'm up for it," he said, dragging her hand down to the covers and across the hard length of him.

"Then I guess I'll go start the shower," she said, sliding off the bed.

Kiera was grinning when she entered the bathroom and turned on the water. While the shower warmed up, she brushed her teeth and her hair. Looking in the mirror, she could still see a faint glow around her. Her fairy heritage had

definitely been a blessing tonight. If not for her ability to heal Gabriel, she had no doubt that he would have died.

"You look beautiful," Gabriel said from the doorway.

Kiera turned to face him. "I think you'd say that even if I were wearing burlap."

"I'd prefer to say it with you naked," he replied.

Kiera gave him a saucy smile and slowly drew her top over her head, dropping it onto the floor. Reaching behind her back, she unclasped her bra, letting it slowly slide down her arms to join her top at her feet.

Gabriel gulped. Kiera hadn't been shy in telling him what she wanted when they made love, but this was a first. Her little striptease was driving him crazy.

She unfastened her shorts and let them fall down her legs to pool around her ankles. Kicking free of them, she turned her back to Gabriel. Looking over her shoulder, she made sure he was watching the show as she dipped her fingers under the string that ran along the top of her hip. Dragging her bikini panties down her hips, she bent over to slide them all the way down her legs.

Gabriel growled and stalked across the bathroom. Lifting Kiera into his arms, he stepped into the shower. Setting her down on her feet, he pressed her against the wall.

With her back pressed against the tiled shower wall, Kiera was faced with her husband in all his naked glory. She pressed her hands against his chest and went up on tiptoe to kiss him. Slipping her tongue into his mouth, she pressed her body close to his.

Gabriel knew he wouldn't last long. His brush with death had him on edge. Lifting Kiera's legs around his waist, he thrust into her. She was so wet and so tight that he groaned in pleasure.

Kiera hadn't expected Gabriel to take her so quickly, but her body was more than ready. As she felt him plunge into her over and over, she got closer and closer to her release.

"I love you, Gabriel."

Taking her mouth in a savage kiss, he thrust into her hard and deep; withdrawing, he thrust into her again, and again. Sliding into Kiera's tight, wet, heat was going to drive him mad. He'd never felt anything so amazing before. No woman could ever compare to her.

Driving into her over and over, he pushed both of them to the edge. As Kiera cried out her release, he gently bit her shoulder, growling as he climaxed, thrusting into her, shooting his seed deep inside of her.

Kissing her neck, Gabriel eased from her body and set her back down on her feet. "I love you, Kiera."

"I kind of figured that out," she said with a smile on her face.

His hand brushed against her belly, "I'm still amazed there's a tiny life growing in there."

Kiera covered his hand with hers, "I know. I never got a chance to show you the baby things I bought when Ramsey and Hunter took me to the mall."

"Have you thought about where you'd like the baby to sleep?"

She nodded. "I thought we could turn Michael's old room into a nursery, if that's okay."

He smiled down at her. "That sounds great. Why don't we finish up in here and then we can go to the Baby Depot and pick out the décor. Maybe even buy a bed?"

Throwing her arms around his neck, she kissed him. "I'd really like that."



Kiera and Gabriel had shopped for several hours. They'd called Cole and Connor to bring their trucks over to the Baby Depot. Kiera had fallen in love with a bedroom set for the nursery that consisted of a bed, changing table, and dresser. The store had sold out of that particular model, but had allowed them to purchase the display as it was being discontinued. On the plus side, Gabriel was happy he didn't have to put anything together when they got home.

Kiera had been torn between a Winnie the Pooh theme or a Celestial theme. In the end, they had selected the moon and stars, thinking it would be more fitting.

Once the furniture was loaded into the trucks and the bedding and matching rug stored in the back of the SUV, they headed back to the Victorian. The three werewolves made short time in getting the furniture into the nursery. Since it still had to be painted, they set the furniture away from the wall.

Ramsey and Hunter had offered to paint since Kiera couldn't. They had even assured her they would finish off the downstairs bedrooms she had started before finding out she was pregnant. Once Kiera had the colors she wanted, she would definitely be giving them a call.

Connor and Cole headed back to their homes, leaving Kiera and Gabriel alone in the house for the first time in a long while. The visiting werewolves had headed home with Connor and were all staying in duplexes until they could get back home. All but a few, a select few, had chosen to remain behind, joining the Ashton Grove pack.

Kiera leaned against Gabriel and looked around the room. If she closed her eyes, she could see the finished product. Blue walls with yellow stars and crescent moons, a darker blue on the ceiling with glow in the dark stars, the furniture in just the right spot, and the rug in the middle of the room... a sweet baby snuggled up in the bed with toys scattered around the room. She smiled to herself.

"So, now that we have the house to ourselves, what would you like to do?" Gabriel asked.

Kiera turned to face him, smiling. "I'm sure I can think of something."

With a grin, he lowered his head to hers. "I'm sure you can," he said, right before claiming her lips in a kiss.

Epilogue

Early September

It had been a few months since Kiera had first found out she was pregnant. So much had happened during that time, the most important of which was discovering that Gabriel loved her as much as she loved him. Their marriage had blossomed once the vampire was out of the picture; now they had nothing but good times ahead – a baby on the way and a long, happy life together.

Kiera was in the kitchen when she heard the doorbell ring. Scurrying to answer the door, she saw a petite redhead on the doorstep.

“May I help you?” she asked the stranger.

Chloe, in a hesitant voice, asked, “Is Michael here?”

“Oh, I’m afraid he doesn’t live here anymore,” Kiera answered, wondering who the young woman was and why she was searching for Michael.

Gabriel came up behind Kiera and wrapped his arms around her. “Everything okay, sweetheart?”

Kiera smiled up at him. “Just fine; this young woman is looking for Michael.”

“I’m sorry to have bothered you, I should go,” Chloe said.

“Why don’t you come in for a minute?” Kiera asked.

Chloe shook head and lifted a hand. “Thank you, but I couldn’t impose.”

The movement had shifted her cardigan, showing her pregnant belly. Gabriel noticed the bump and realized why she was looking for Michael.

“I think you need to come in,” he said in a authoritative voice.

Chloe sighed. “Alright, but just for a minute; I really do hate to impose.”

Kiera and Gabriel stepped back, allowing the woman into their home. Kiera led her into the living room and made sure she was comfortable.

"Would you like some tea or something?" Kiera asked. Being three months pregnant, she knew that tea helped reduce her stress and soothed her baby.

"That would be nice, if it isn't too much trouble," Chloe said.

"Not at all! I'll just be a moment," she said, shooting a look at her husband that clearly said 'come to the kitchen.'

Once in the kitchen, Kiera looked at Gabriel. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"That Michael knocked her up?" Gabriel asked.

Kiera laughed. "Something like that. I don't think he knows about the baby though. Why don't you call him while I take the tea to our guest?"

Gabriel nodded and picked up the phone.

Kiera disappeared through the door, hoping to keep their guest entertained long enough for Michael to arrive. She could only imagine what his reaction would be. Not once had he mentioned a woman to any of them. Was she just a one night stand that had gone wrong? Or was she someone special and Michael just wanted to keep her to himself. It was odd that the woman hadn't realized Michael didn't live here anymore. He'd been gone for almost five months. More than likely, he'd moved out within a week or two getting the poor woman pregnant.

Kiera shook her head. It was all such a mess, but hopefully it work out for the best. It wouldn't take Michael long to get here. Maybe he could shed some light on things.

"Here you go," Kiera said, handing a cup of tea to the woman. "You know, I don't think I caught your name earlier."

"Chloe... my name is Chloe," she said, accepting the tea.

"Well Chloe, it's nice to meet you. I'm Kiera and my husband Gabriel will join us again in a minute."

Chloe nodded. "I didn't mean to intrude on the two of you. I thought Michael still lived here. Otherwise, I wouldn't have come."

"I'm glad you did. I'm sure Michael will be delighted to see you."

Chloe gulped her tea. "I'm sorry, what do you mean?"

"Well, he's on his way ... I thought you'd be happy since you came here to find him," Kiera said.

Chloe's hands started shaking. "I'm afraid he might not be so happy to see me."

Kiera's face softened. "He doesn't know about the baby, does he?"

Chloe shook her head.

Kiera sighed. "It will work out. I'm sure of it."

Chloe gave her a small smile. "I certainly hope so."

Gabriel stepped into the entry at the same time the front door burst open. Michael came rushing in.

"What's the emergency?" he asked Gabriel, terrified something had happened to Kiera.

Gabriel nodded toward the living room.

Michael turned to face the living room and stopped dead in his tracks. Chloe was sitting on the couch with Kiera. He hadn't seen her in months, but she was still breathtaking.

"Chloe, what are you doing here?" he asked.

She stood and started toward the door. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come. It was a mistake."

As she tried to brush past him, he noticed her swollen stomach. Reaching out a hand, he grabbed her arm.

"Are you pregnant?" he asked. "Is it mine?"

Chloe lifted her chin. "Yes and yes."

Michael swallowed and slowly let his hand drop to his side. He was stunned and in shock. Without realizing it, he allowed Chloe to slip past him and out the door. By the time he shook it off, she had disappeared down the block. Running out the door, he jumped in his car and went after her.

He had pushed Chloe out of his life before, but now they were bound together. One way or another, he had to make things right. He had to show Chloe how much she really meant to him.

When he had left Chloe's that last time, he had been running scared, overwhelmed with emotions he hadn't wanted to name. Now he had to make things right. No matter how long it took, he had to make Chloe realize that she belonged by his side.

Jessica Coulter Smith

Moonlight Guardian

Ashton Grove Werewolves, Book 3

Written by Jessica Coulter Smith

AN EXCERPT - UNEDITED

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Chapter One

Chloe sighed as she trudged up the walkway toward her apartment. It wasn't much, but it was all she had left at the moment. She had lost her job over a month ago. Last week the bank had sent someone to repossess her car. So far, her job hunting was going nowhere. She only had enough money left in her account for another week's worth of groceries. She was behind a month in her rent and had no idea how she was going to pay it.

As she approached the building, she noticed a pile of bags, furniture, and other items out on the sidewalk. Upon closer inspection, she realized that it was *her* clothing, furniture and miscellaneous items, or at least what was left of them. It looked as if they had been ransacked already.

Tired, hungry and feeling at a loss, she walked up to the manager's door and knocked. Mr. Marsalis answered almost immediately.

"Ah, Ms. Stevens. I'm afraid the lock has been changed on your door and your items have been removed from the premises. Your rent is now two months past due."

"Two months? But..."

"Yes indeed. As of this morning, you are officially two months past due. I'm sure you'll recall that the lease agreement you signed stated that if you should become two months behind that you would be evicted."

Chloe sighed. She did remember that, but she thought she had another day or two before it was due. Not that it would have mattered. Without a job she didn't have a way to pay the rent regardless of when it was due.

She weakly nodded her head.

"Yes, Mr. Marsalis. I do remember. I'm sorry for all of the trouble, but I lost my job and haven't been able to find another."

Mr. Marsalis gave her a pitying look. He hadn't wanted to evict the petite redhead, but rules were rules. If he let her stay

after being two months behind, he would have to do the same for everyone else.

"I really am sorry, dear. If you find a job and need a place to stay, I'll be happy to rent to you again, but until then I'm afraid my hands are tied. I may manage the property, but I don't own it."

"I understand."

Chloe turned and left the building, dejected and uncertain of what she should do. Absently she rubbed her rounding stomach. She had no one to turn to; her family had been killed years ago. At the time they had been living in southern California. A major earthquake had struck, destroying their house and everything in it – including her family. She had spent the night with a friend; otherwise she wouldn't be standing in the middle of a sidewalk today, pregnant and alone.

Picking up a sack, she put a few items of clothing in it from the sidewalk before walking away. There was no point in staring at the items that had once made up her life. There was no way she could carry it all and even if she could she had nowhere to take it. It was best to not think about it. If she thought about it too long, she knew she'd end up crying. Stupid pregnancy hormones!

Walking aimlessly, she pondered her fate. Where on earth could a broke, jobless, homeless pregnant woman go in such a small town? Her stomach rumbled and she remembered that she had missed lunch. While she didn't have much money left, she did have enough in her purse to get lunch at a fast food place.

She spotted a hamburger place and quickly walked inside. After ordering her food, she chose a table with a window. Chloe gazed out of the window as she nibbled on her food.

It was becoming clearer and clearer that she only had one option left. She had to find Michael.



After her meal, Chloe slowly trudged along the sidewalk. She remembered that Michael worked at his family's garage and that he had mentioned living across the street. She knew

where Andrews Auto Repair was located, which meant his home had to be the large Victorian across from it. Unfortunately for her, both were still several blocks away. She hated to spend money she didn't have, but it was apparent that a bus was in order.

Stopping at the nearest bust stop, she sat on the bench and waited. Before too long, the bus she needed stopped and she got in. Dropping her money into the machine by the door, she took the first vacant seat she came across.

Two blocks from the Victorian, the bus let her out. She slowly made her way along the sidewalk, deep in thought.

What would she say to Michael? Hi, remember me? The woman you knocked up? No, she obviously couldn't say that. Not if she wanted his help. And honestly, what did she expect him to do? It's not like he could make a job miraculously appear for her. She wasn't sure what she expected or what she wanted. Chloe only knew that she was completely out of options.

Standing in front of the large house, she gazed up at it in wonder. It was pretty intimidating up close. She had never been inside of a house this large before. For all she knew, he'd slam the door in her face and she wouldn't get a chance to go inside one now either.

Taking a deep breath, she walked up the steps and knocked on the door. She was surprised when a woman with black hair opened the door. Was this why Michael hadn't been around? Had he not only moved on, but allowed a woman to move in?

Kiera watched the small redhead in curiosity. "May I help you with something?"

Chloe clutched her cardigan a little tighter around her, feeling insecure wasn't something she was accustomed to and she didn't like it.

"I was hoping that Michael might be at home," she murmured, her voice low and husky with unshed tears. Her hormones were working over-time. Just the thought that Michael had replaced her so quickly hurt more than she cared to admit.

"Michael? I'm afraid he doesn't live here anymore," Kiera told her.

Chloe's breath caught in her throat. He'd moved? Now what she going to do? She had no way to find him and she had nowhere else to go.

"I'm sorry to have bothered you," she said in a near whisper and started backing away from the door.

"Wait. Why don't you come in for a minute?"

Chloe shook her head. "I've disturbed you enough for one night, but thank you."

A large man came up behind the woman. Chloe could tell he was related to Michael as their looks were similar.

"What's going on?" Gabriel asked, putting his arms around his wife.

Kiera tipped her head back to look up at him. "This young woman was just looking for Michael. I told her that he doesn't live here anymore."

"No, he doesn't. Would you like to come in for a minute? Maybe have some tea or coffee?" Gabriel asked, wondering who the woman was, and more importantly who she was to Michael.

Chloe let go of her cardigan long enough to hold up a hand. "No, really... I should be going."

Gabriel's eyes widened in shock; he took in the gentle swelling of Chloe's stomach. "Are you pregnant?"

Chloe blushed. "Um, yeah, I am... only about five months though."

Gabriel did a quick mental calculation and came up with the answer for Chloe's visit. It was very likely that his baby brother was going to be a father, and probably didn't know anything about it.

"I think you need to come in for a few minutes," Gabriel told her, his tone brooking no argument.

Chloe sighed and hesitantly stepped into the front entry. She looked around at her surroundings. The walls had been freshly painted and everything gleamed.

Kiera motioned toward the living room. "Why don't you have a seat? I'll keep you company while Gabriel makes us some tea."

Chloe nodded and walked over to the sofa. As she sank into the comfy cushions, a sigh escaped her before she could stop it. Getting off of her feet felt heavenly; the sofa being extra cushy just made it that much better.

Gabriel took his cue from his wife and went to the kitchen, where he placed a discreet phone call. Quickly making two cups of tea, he carried them back into the living room. From what he could see, his wife was doing most of the talking.

"I was just asking Chloe where she was staying," Kiera said as Gabriel walked into the living room.

Chloe's blush had deepened until her whole face was bright red. She was staring intently at something on the floor, trying to hide behind a curtain of hair. It was obvious to the couple that she was ashamed of where she lived.

"I was staying in an apartment over on Walnut Road," she murmured in response, hoping that would be the end of it.

"Was? You mean you aren't now?" Kiera asked.

Chloe really didn't want to answer that question. She hadn't realized just how uncomfortable it would be coming here and having to answer a barrage of questions. Was it too late to leave and figure out something else? She gave a furtive glance toward the front door, wishing it were closer and that she were faster.

"Chloe?" Kiera prompted, still waiting on her question to be answered.

Chloe cleared her throat. "I was evicted today."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Kiera said, placing a sympathetic hand on her arm.

Before Chloe could respond, the front door opened and closed.

"Hey bro, you said you wanted to see me?" Michael said as he walked into the living room.

The moment he saw Chloe, he stopped dead in his tracks. What was going on? Why was she here? He looked to Gabriel with a ton of questions in his eyes.

"Kiera, I think that Michael and Chloe need to talk for a minute. Why don't we go into the kitchen?" Gabriel said, holding his hand out to his wife.

Kiera climbed to her feet and gave Chloe one last look, wishing that she could help in some way. The poor woman looked terrified.

When his brother and sister-in-law had filed out of the room, Michael looked at Chloe with a raised eyebrow.

"I take it you were looking for me?"

Why had she talked herself into this? She wasn't ready to confront him, wasn't sure what to say or do. She stared at the floor, wishing it would open up and swallow her.

"Chloe?" Michael took a step toward her. What was going on?

She glanced up at him. Her mouth went dry. He was every bit as gorgeous as she remembered. For whatever reason, Chloe seemed to lose the ability to think when Michael was around, which was obvious since she was pregnant.

"I shouldn't have come here," she told him, pushing herself to her feet.

Before she could reach the door, Michael reached out and gently took her arm.

"Wait, you had to come here for some reason. Just tell me what you wanted, Chloe."

She shook her head. "No, this was a mistake."

Pulling her arm free, she tried to walk out the door again, only to be stopped – again.

"What was a mistake, Chloe?"

Shaking her head, she tried to go around him.

Michael put his arm out, effectively blocking her path. In the process, her cardigan was pushed aside, revealing her stomach.

Grabbing the edges of the material, Chloe tried to cover the small bump. She wasn't quite fast enough if she was shocked

expression on Michael's face was anything to go by. She sighed, resigned to her fate.

"You're pregnant?" He asked, unable to believe his eyes.

"Yes, five months."

His eyes darted to hers. "Are you sure it's mine?"

Anger filled her, eyes flashing she pushed past his arm and out the front door. She was down the steps and part way down the sidewalk before Michael even registered what had just happened.

How dare he ask if the baby was his? As if she slept around all the time! The nerve of the man! He's the one who walked out on her, who quit calling and coming by. What right did he have to question *her*?

She had just reached the bus stop and sat down when a Corvette pulled up to the curb. Leaving the car running, Michael got out and walked over to her.

Hunkering down in front of her, he tried to catch her attention. Chloe was looking everywhere but at him. "Chloe, would you look at me?"

She stubbornly stared at the ground.

"Chloe, what do you want me to say? I'm sorry okay. You kind of blindsided me."

She had to grudgingly admit that he was right on that point. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner."

"Why didn't you?"

She shrugged. "I'm not sure I had planned on ever telling you. You left and stopped calling. I figured you had gotten what you wanted from me and had moved on."

Michael's heart cracked a little at her admission. It wasn't entirely true, but it was close enough. In all honesty, he had run as fast and as far as he could – not because he didn't care, but because he *did*.

Author Bio

When she isn't writing, Jessica spends her time with her family and her pets. She lives in Tennessee with her husband, two children, and a small zoo of animals. She loves to read, mostly romance and mystery, and enjoys listening to music.

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