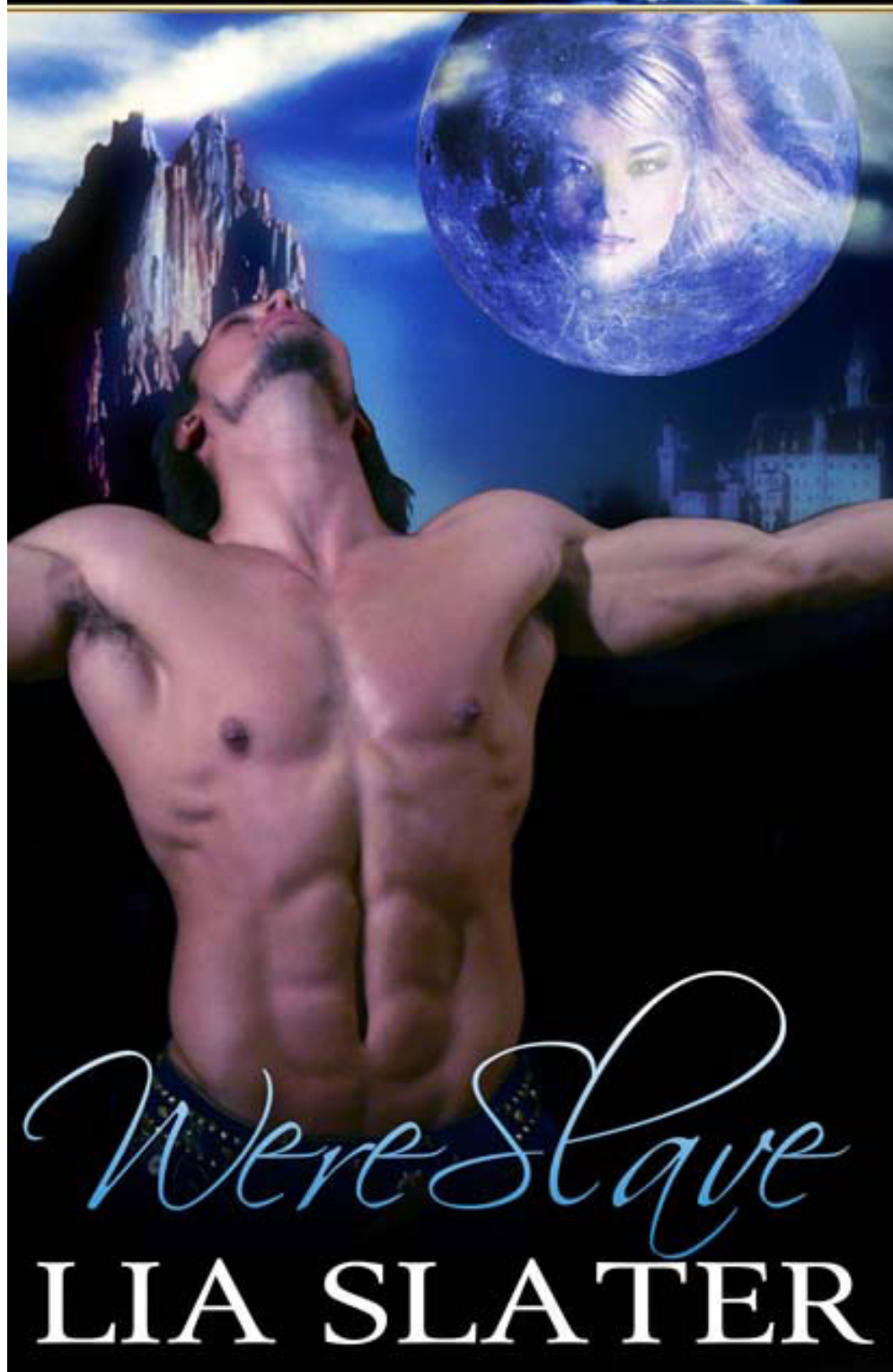


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Were Slave
LIA SLATER

WereSlave

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As the Queen of Paqualette, Nayla is forbidden to have a husband or a human lover. Her life is a lonely and disciplined existence, so when she's given the opportunity to choose a Were from her dungeon as her sex slave, she takes a chance. Werewolves, she knows, are nothing but senseless monsters, but after the one she selects to be her WereSlave turns out to be more of a man than she's ever known, she must question her beliefs.

As the alpha leader, Mace is responsible for his pack. He'll do anything to keep them alive, even give in to the Queen's sexual demands. But not unless he's in control. Turning his enticing captor into the submissive is the only way to show her he's more man than she realizes. Falling in love is out of the question...but so is leaving her behind.

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WereSlave

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WERESLAVE

Lia Slater

Chapter One

In a faraway land

*Six years after the great war between Werewolf and Human
Nothing was settled.*

His intense gaze from across the crowded, rancid dungeon sent a strange shudder down Nayla's back. Why he stared at her so heatedly, she had no clue. He was her prisoner, a subordinate. Many like him filled the room, but most lowered their eyes, evading her scrutiny. Most of those remaining didn't have the energy to make the effort.

But the one with the blue eyes that shimmered from between the caked-on dirt and god-knows-what didn't even bother to blink when she looked his way. And she did so now, with curiosity...and a tinge of fear.

Her awareness of him couldn't be helped. He was a peculiar one, somewhat larger and apparently bolder than the rest of the werewolf pack her guards had captured just a month ago.

Was he their leader? Were they organized enough to have a leader?

She cocked her head as she moved toward him, stepping over the remains of some poor rodent that had dared enter the dungeon. The rat had probably been a nice treat for the beasts. She pushed the thought from her mind and tried to ignore the muffled groans and labored breathing surrounding her. Her stomach churned but she refused to give them any of her pity. A species that had proven to be dangerous and unpredictable wouldn't get mercy from her. It was best for the people of her kingdom to keep these savages shackled and...human. If you could call them that. And she didn't. Wouldn't.

They needed moonlight to change into their animal state and they certainly weren't getting that in this dungeon. No, here they would remain until starvation or dehydration took them.

Or until her guards made an example of them in front of the town's people.

She stopped in front of the blue-eyed Were and met his gaze. His body shook like the rest of them but instead of lying feebly on the floor, he sat up on his knees. His broad, muscled shoulders were straight and his strong chin jutted toward her. Pride? Was it pride she sensed?

Couldn't be. Weres were savages in any state. They had two sides: kill or be killed. Sink their teeth into an innocent human or run away with their tails between their legs. She knew firsthand just how brutal they could be.

How could this one be any different?

"Do you not realize you're about to die?" she asked him, half hoping he wouldn't answer. Lord only knew if he had enough wits to form an intelligible response.

"Not..." He cleared his throat, causing himself to cough. "Not today, my lady." His voice was startlingly deep. The heady masculine tone stirred something in her belly and sent a surprising surge of warmth and yearning through her womb and inner thighs.

She sucked in her stomach and straightened her posture, frustrated and confused by her physical response. "No? How do you know this?"

His gaze swept down her body and back up again. "Because you don't look like a killer to me, my lady."

She laughed, but even to herself, she sounded stilted. Unsure of herself. Damn. Would she ever stop feeling like an imposter in her own skin? Stop it, Nayla. She pursed her lips and quickly reminded herself that her insecurities were unwarranted. She'd done something good here. A Were pack was captured and her kingdom was safe for another day.

She met her captive's forceful gaze, unwavering under its heat. "That's because I'm not a killer. You are. That's why you're here..." She let her words drift off, realizing too late she'd been looking for a name to call the beast.

"Mace Quinton." His husky voice echoed against the stone walls. "Call me Mace. And I'm not a killer, my lady. You've got that wrong."

"I'll call you whatever I please."

He blinked once and his enormous body swayed, proving to her no matter his level of strength, he was still vulnerable. And at her command. She'd need to remember that and her reason for visiting this dungeon.

She had to choose one of these beasts as her WereSlave. Her lover. All of her predecessors had followed this same path and she refused to be the first to break the tradition, although the thought of a Were touching her intimately had churned her stomach up to this point.

"Would you like this one, my Queen?" her loyal guard, Saul, asked over her shoulder.

"Queen?" the prisoner murmured. "You're the Queen?"

Nayla ignored his question. She had a difficult enough time proving to her people that she was capable of running a country. Why should she have to explain her age to a Were? Besides, she wasn't a child. She was a grown woman of twenty-five years.

Old enough to protect her people from these vicious, volatile creatures. They deserved to be in this dungeon, dying a painful death.

And this one—she looked into the Were's vibrant blue eyes—this one deserved to be used by her. Just like the Queens before her, she'd acquire a WereSlave to soothe her sexual needs and help ease the loneliness.

As the chosen Queen, she would dedicate her life solely to the country and its people. Doing so meant she'd obey Paqualette law and not take a husband. The people expected their Queen to offer a life of devotion and extreme discipline. Nayla wouldn't debate the law that had served her country for centuries.

There were gray areas between the black and white lines of the Palequette decrees, though. No, she couldn't have a husband, or even a human lover. But owning and

using a WereSlave was a Queen's right. Much like wearing the finest gems or living in the largest castle.

A WereSlave was for the purpose of her pleasure alone.

Pleasure from a Were? She let her gaze fall over the prisoner who kneeled in front of her. Although his naked body was covered in filth, she could still make out the strong set of his jaw and the cool, attractive color of his eyes. She noticed the toned muscles on his chest, arms and stomach. Curiosity had her looking down farther to his long, thick cock hanging impressively between his powerful thighs.

She hated that her skin heated and the area between her thighs grew moist. But an attraction was necessary if she was to share a bed with him.

This Were was a pleasing sight in his human form, no doubt. She hadn't thought she'd find one amongst the mongrels who wouldn't nauseate her, let alone make her quiver with anticipation.

"Do you like what you see, my Queen?" he asked as his body swayed again.

Weak. He was very weak. Good.

"Do not speak unless I ask it of you."

He needed to learn his place if he were to be hers. She didn't know how this meeting was supposed to go, or how the Queens before her had chosen their WereSlaves. She only knew that the Were before her piqued her interest on so many levels, enough to want to touch him. Unable to help herself, she leaned forward to glide a finger down his angular jaw. But he jerked away from her and lost his balance, falling back onto his rear.

Hmm... So he wasn't as powerful as he made himself seem.

Masculine but vulnerable.

He'd be perfect.

"Yes, I'd like to take him." Nayla pointed at her new WereSlave and looked over her shoulder at Saul. "Please clean him, feed him and then secure him in the transition cell."

"Yes, my Queen."

The Were rose up to his knees again. "Where do you think to take me?"

She couldn't help but smile. "Don't worry, slave. Just as you'd guessed, you won't be dying today."

* * * * *

Nayla rushed through her obligatory dinner with the visiting duke and duchess, holding back a grimace each time they reached for each other's hands or leaned in for an affectionate kiss.

She'd never have the love of a husband or children and no matter how often she'd told herself it didn't matter, that her position as the Queen was so much more important, she still felt the sting of loneliness. She would live this life on her own.

The Queen before her had left her notes, stating the use of a WereSlave would alleviate some of her weariness. Nayla doubted it. She certainly wasn't expecting miracles. After all, he was merely an animal. Sure, he could speak and he looked and seemed human but he was nothing more than a barbarian.

One that undoubtedly needed to be tamed.

She said her goodbyes to the Duke and Duchess and then anxiously took the castle stairs up to the transition cell. Once outside the door, she adjusted her silk dress and combed her fingers through her disobedient curls.

Why do you care what you look like, Nayla?

She clamped down the nervousness growing in her chest. Who was she trying to impress anyway? He was her property, not her companion.

This was his punishment, not his reward. She wasn't to treat him as an equal.

Holding her head high, she pushed open the heavy wooden door and stepped inside. Five of her guards surrounded a bed where a large naked man lay shackled. Each chain was bolted securely to either the brick wall or floor.

Saul stepped in front of her, blocking her view before she had a chance to see how well the WereSlave cleaned up. "My Queen." He bowed. "He's been washed and fed, as you requested."

"Why so many of you?" Nayla asked, her cheeks warming as she realized her guards were more than aware of the point of all this.

To satisfy their Queen's sexual urges.

But she refused to show her embarrassment. Not when it had taken her four years to gain their respect.

Saul cleared his throat. "He put up quite a fight, my Queen. I'm afraid we had to use force to get him to settle."

"A fight?" She peeked over Saul's shoulder and noticed blood trickling from the Were's nose and a cut on his cheek. His eyes were swollen and bruises and contusions covered his naked body. "Oh, my. What've you done to him?"

Nayla pushed passed the guards and stood over the bed. The WereSlave's breathing was even, at least. And he looked so much different now that he was clean.

Like a man.

Strong, feral, masculine. Muscles curved along his arms, chest and legs. They rippled along his stomach. She leaned closer. He smelled like a mixture of blood, soap and something she couldn't pinpoint. Something animalistic, but not in the way she'd thought.

Not in the way she'd remembered.

This Were's scent was musky and alluring. Seductive. She wanted to reach out and rake her fingers through his long, raven hair as it spread out over the white sheets. But even in his sleep his tanned, athletic body flexed with warning.

She licked her lips and let herself fantasize how he would feel on top of her, pumping inside of her as she spread her legs for him. He was hers to do with what she wanted. The mere thought of it forced a wave of heat up her chest to her neck. This glorious man belonged to her. Man? No, he was a Were. A beast. She would have to remind herself of that.

"He should be fine, my Queen," Saul said from behind her.

"What?" Her voice cracked as she spun around to face the guards. "Oh, yes. I'll see to it his wounds are taken care of. But now that he is the property of the Queen, I ask that you treat him gingerly." Right as she said the words, she wished them back. What was she saying?

An echo of chuckles filled the room. Even her loyal Saul couldn't hold back a smile. "Yes, my Queen, we will try."

"Do you find something funny?" she asked them, annoyed with their lack of decorum.

They each shook their heads no.

"Good. You're dismissed."

"My Queen." Saul stepped toward her as the other guards shuffled out of the room. "I'm afraid I can't allow you to be alone with him just yet. He hasn't been tamed. The guards who washed and brought him here are in the infirmary as a result."

"My God. Are they all right?" Instant guilt consumed her. She hadn't thought of anyone being hurt by this.

"They'll heal. I only wish for you to take precaution. The chains give him enough slack to, well, to complete his purpose but I fear he may have enough leeway to harm you. As your majesty's chief guard, I must object. Your safety is my main concern."

If she hadn't respected Saul's opinion, she'd have been offended by his candor. The man had been her devotee since the day she'd walked into this castle. Though he'd been

acting strangely since she'd ordered the trespassing Weres to be captured and imprisoned.

She watched him closely, noting his reddened cheeks and the light perspiration on his forehead. Then decided to forgive his frankness, thinking he must truly be concerned for her wellbeing. "Thank you, Saul. I'll be fine. You can go now."

"Yes, my Queen. Just know that I'll be right outside the door if you need me." He turned on his heel to leave but changed his mind and faced her again. "You, uh, you don't have to do this, you know. With your past and all. People would understand if you decided not to take a WereSlave. A Vampire would also—"

"No." God, she did not want to discuss this with Saul or anyone else. Her memories were her own and she wanted to keep them locked hidden in the back of her mind, where she didn't have to think of them. "Enough, Saul. While I appreciate your concern for my safety, my word is final and not open to debate. There will be no further discussion about this matter."

"Yes, my Queen." The middle-aged man nodded and exited the room.

Nayla drew out a breath and turned toward the bed. Excitement and anxiety and that annoying tinge of fear sat heavy in her stomach. First things first, his wounds needed to be cleaned.

The maids had left a washcloth and a basin filled with water on the bureau, so she grabbed the cloth, soaked it and wrung it out. She sat on the mattress next to him, probably too close, but she needed to be able to examine his wounds. She took in the sizeable length of his body and was surprised to see the cuts and bruises begin to heal before her very eyes. He stirred again and a growl rumbled in his chest.

"It's all right," she whispered, desperately trying to ignore the terror burning her eyes and making her woozy. Yes, he was a dangerous creature, but he would need to learn to trust and obey her if this was to work. When he realized it was either her or decapitation, she was sure he'd make the right choice. She could only hope he was intelligent enough to be reasonable.

And to not harm her.

With a trembling hand, she gently wiped the blood caked under his strong nose and on his lips. She curved the damp cloth over each lip, outlining the ridges of his mouth as it rounded slightly fuller at the bottom. Then she angled it along his cut jawline, clean-shaven as she'd requested.

His skin was warm, almost hot, as she ran the cloth down his neck to his broad shoulder, over his muscled chest.

He was a gorgeous man. It was difficult to keep thinking of him as a killer. But just as she thought this, the slack chain attached to his arm rattled and he grabbed her wrist, his large calloused hands firmly holding her in place.

She gasped and tried to lurch from his grasp and out of his reach, but he was too quick and powerful. He gripped her waist with both hands and pulled her to the bed. Too fast for her eyes to follow, he pinned her on her back with the weight of his body. Once there, he easily held her wrists with one of his hands above her head. The loose chains were useless.

A scream lodged in her throat as he looked down at her, his lips only centimeters from hers as his long locks of black hair encompassed her face. She should have struggled but fear paralyzed her. Her breath halted as she stared dumbly up at him.

How stupid was she for sitting too near him, allowing him to capture her.

"What were you doing?" he growled and strengthened the hold on her wrists.

"I...I was cleaning your wounds." Nayla wondered how long he'd been awake, lying there and allowing her to run that washcloth over his body.

"You mean the wounds your men caused?" His sapphire eyes gleamed as a wicked smile twitched at his lips. "They told me I would be your slave." He moved against her body, pressing his cock into the valley between her thighs. "I'm no one's slave, my Queen."

"Then you choose death? Those are your two choices." Her voice came out as a whisper, making her threat useless. Her body shook with anger, fear and curious desire all at once. She'd never responded to a man like this before. Equal parts of her brain wanted to kick him and taste his tongue in her mouth. Feel his shaft slide deep inside of her or scream bloody murder as she fled from the room.

His solid cock wedged harder against her thigh and she swallowed.

"Where are your protectors now?" He dropped his mouth to her ear and his hot breath rushed against her cheek, prickling her skin. "Are they so foolish, to leave their fragile Queen alone with a monster?"

"It was my choice to be alone with you." She kept her voice soft, a small attempt to show him how being her WereSlave wouldn't be such an agonizing task. She could be an enticing partner even if she was his master. If he found her attractive, that was. "What would you do with me?" she dared ask.

A husky chuckle rumbled into her ear. "You've imprisoned my pack and reduced us to dogs. I should throttle your thin neck until you're breathless."

"If I so much as let out a yelp your pack will be put to immediate death by decapitation." The only way they could die besides starvation and dehydration.

"Damn you," he growled. "Damn all of you."

"I don't wish you to die, Mace." She used his name to soothe him but it felt odd leaving her lips. As if she'd said it a million times before. "I only wish your company." Slowly she caressed his calf with her foot, gently running it along the solid muscle.

The first time wouldn't be so bad. Oddly enough, she wanted him. A Were. The same sort of creature who'd made her life a living nightmare. But she wanted him because he was hers. No matter that he was on top of her, pinning her down, she had the power. She was in control of his destiny, not the other way around.

He lifted off her and looked down with narrowed eyes. "My company? You wish..." Realization dawned on his face.

So he wasn't an imbecile. No, he wasn't that at all.

Chapter Two

Mace ground his teeth, loathing that his body responded to the way she slid her soft, delicate foot up and down his leg, how her thighs moved to spread for him. How he felt her heat even through her extravagant, golden silk dress. His cock stiffened as he lay naked on top of her lush body. She stared up at him with her sensual eyes, while her pink tongue slid over her full lips.

The Queen of Paqualette was asking for trouble.

If she hadn't reminded him of someone dear from his past, he'd have killed her by now. Left her dead and rescued his pack, or tried to anyway. But she looked so much like Elizabeth. He stared into the same green eyes and watched the same sumptuous lips part as she exhaled a sweet breath.

His body reacted with a burning desire.

What was the catch? He knew nothing of this country, of their culture. His pack had been passing through, looking for a place to call home, a place where they weren't feared or hated by humans or Vamps.

Then they'd been ambushed, captured in the light of the day and imprisoned like rabid dogs. What had they fought for during the Great Were War if they were still to be treated this way?

The mere thought enraged him. The woman underneath him seemed both intelligent and naïve. Both fragile and imperial. And she looked so much like the wife he'd had when he was full human a lifetime ago.

Elizabeth.

But this woman wielded power enough to ruin his entire pack with the nod of her head.

“Mace?” She pressed her sweet lips to his. “I want you. Do you want me?”

Air gushed from his lungs. She didn’t know what she was asking.

His body tensed as his defiant cock throbbed. Yes, he wanted her. He’d wanted her the moment she’d walked into the dungeon. Her petite body with abundant breasts that nearly spilled out of her dress. Wild blonde ringlets of hair that fell over her shoulders. Large green eyes perfect for seducing. Rosy lips that bowed, pouted and begged to be nibbled.

So much like his late wife, but not her at all. No, this woman didn’t deserve his respect. She didn’t deserve his gentle touch.

What she deserved was to be fucked.

* * * * *

Nayla waited anxiously, attempting to smooth her ragged breathing. She wasn’t sure what to expect next as he lay stiffly against her. She’d think she disgusted him if she hadn’t felt his weighty erection pushing between her thighs.

Relief flooded her when he finally released her wrists. His chains rattled as he sat up and straddled her. She eyed his shaft, which stood high and proud, arching toward his rippled stomach. It was as impressive as the rest of his lean, muscled body. Long, thick and beautiful. Her fingers itched to touch him. Her mouth yearned to taste him.

Yes. He was hers. She’d chosen well.

But she drew in a calming breath and allowed her WereSlave to make the first move.

His gaze drifted over her body for what felt like a century, from her lips to her eyes to her chest then back up to her lips. Would he kiss her? Did he desire her enough to give her that?

Slowly, he edged his rough hands over her shoulders and down to cup her sensitive breasts.

"Oh," she said with a breath. She was no virgin. She'd had a casual lover before she'd been chosen to be the next Queen, but it had been over four years since a man had touched her this way.

Mace massaged her through her dress, capturing her breasts with his large hands. She arched into his firm grasp and watched him as his gaze roamed over her body. Her tingling breasts swelled at his attention. Her aching nipples beaded as the coarse graze of his thumbs swept against the thin silk.

God, it all felt so good. So right. And she hoped he wouldn't come to his senses any time soon.

"Let's get rid of this, shall we?" he said, huskily. He grabbed the V of her bodice and ripped it down the middle, exposing her gauzy, see-through underdress.

He was a powerful man, there was no doubt. She held back a gasp, not wanting to show any protest. This was what she'd wanted, wasn't it? To have a man yearning for her.

It was so easy to pretend he was a man rather than Were as he ran his hands over her body. As he gazed down at her with longing. Adoration. Affection.

Her heart fluttered.

Oh, Lord, where was her head? To think she was allowing herself to imagine anything other than animalistic lust.

But this was nothing like her awful memories of the Were from her youth.

She had the power this time, she reminded herself. And, she had to admit, there was nothing vile about Mace Quinton. No, he was a beautiful sight, every inch of him.

To hell with her dress or any other material possession that stood in their way.

He easily ripped the underdress open, exposing her bare breasts. Cold air met her feverish skin, cooling her only for a moment. She met his gaze again and saw that apprehension lurked in his eyes, as if he expected an objection to what he'd done to her dress.

He wouldn't get one.

Her heart sped and her pussy ached for more. For his hands all over her. For his hardened cock inside of her.

His gorgeous lips turned up to a smirk as he grabbed her upper arms and lifted her to his body to press her against his chest. The useless chains had so much slack there wasn't much of a point to them. Not here on this bed.

The danger of it thrilled her. God, what was wrong with her? She didn't know. This was insane. He was an animal and could kill her with his bare hands. Yet, the possibility that unbound pleasure was near forced her to silence.

He lowered his mouth to her neck, just below her jaw, and kissed her ever so softly before whispering, "Now you're at my mercy, my Queen."

She gulped down the fear rising inside her throat as he used the torn dress as a tool to confine her arms behind her back, twisting the cloth with her arms still tight in their sleeves.

"Wait." Her mind blurred and her body hummed. This wasn't what she had planned. To be controlled? To lose her power?

No.

"Why should I wait?" His voice was deep and sensual, soothing her.

"I...I don't know. I'm not sure I want to be tied."

With gentleness unbecoming a monster, he turned her onto her stomach. Her entire body shook with need as he propped up her bottom and nudged himself between her thighs.

"You want to play slave and master?" His deep voice seemed a mile away as he ground out the words. "Then I will be the master."

She wanted to tell him that she was the Queen. She'd worked too hard to gain the respect she deserved and to be called a slave by her property was both humiliating and...

And freeing. Liberating.

This time alone with Mace could be just what she needed to break away from all her responsibilities. She didn't have to put up her protective wall to show everyone that she was strong and able to run an entire country without fail.

No, here she could be anyone, any fantasy. She breathed out a sigh of relief, a mountain of tension rolling off her body.

If she could just keep thinking of him as a man, rather than a Were. She could imagine him as her lover, as her husband. Someone who didn't turn into a vicious beast with the moon's light. Normal. No, better than normal. The man was magnificent.

She felt his hands on her back, warm and confident as they glided over her skin, touching her as if she weren't his enemy. They settled on her hips and pulled her close enough for her to feel his erection against her backside.

His calloused hand reached through her thighs, skimmed across her quivering stomach and then cupped her mound. He murmured something in a language she didn't recognize. The drawling dialect was honeyed and sensuous.

"What are you saying?" She spread her legs a little farther and tilted her bottom higher, waiting for more.

"I said I'm going to fuck your pretty pussy."

Her thighs trembled at the sound of his heated voice and bold words. "What...what language is that? I've never heard of it."

"It's the dialect of the Weres. You don't need to know any more."

Before she could respond he slid a long finger inside her wet pussy, making her gasp. Her tight slick walls spasmed around the welcome invasion. It had been so long since someone had touched her there. Her body ached for release, for a sweet orgasm to take hold of her and thrust her into oblivion. She longed to feel that ecstasy and to forget her worries, if only for a moment. She clenched down and arched up farther, wanting so much more from him.

“Have me, Mace. Have my body.”

He slid his finger in and out, loosening her, while his thumb rubbed against the sensitive skin above her pussy, just below her anus. She pressed her forehead against the mattress and reveled in the tingling sensation building up. She listened to his uneven breathing and the sound of his finger dipping into her slick juices and she knew she wasn't the only one enjoying this.

It was working. Mace would be her lover. He would be tamed.

He inserted a second finger and she released a pent-up moan. He eased them into the depths of her tight, aching pussy and then out again. His fingers were slick with her juices as he ran them over her sensitive clit, circled, then drove back into her heat. A full sweeping, all-possessing movement that made her shudder with need. Then he drew them out to slide them up over her sensitive anus and then back into her again.

With his other hand, he held her waist, keeping her steady. In his grasp, she felt secure, yet her better judgment told her he could kill her in an instant if he so chose. If he wanted, he could make the sex hurt.

But this was her WereSlave. This was her lover. She had the power. And Mace's touch so far told her she was in safe hands. Gloriously safe, warm hands. With long, lean fingers that worked her most sensitive area.

“More, Mace. I want more,” she said just as heat thundered through her, eliminating her every worry. She bit into her lip as the sensation coursed from her womb to her thighs, to the tips of her toes.

Swirling. Warming. Tingling. Burning. Aching.

“Yes. Oh, God, Mace!” Her body spasmed uncontrollably as the orgasm jolted her body. Mindlessly thrilled, she collapsed to her belly, reeling in the aftershocks.

God have mercy, where had that come from? Who knew all that was built up inside her? She breathed in heavy breaths. The room was silent for several minutes as she lay there, gathering her wits.

“Did that satisfy you, slave?” He lightly swatted her bottom. “Or do you have a name I can call you besides Queen?”

Her heartbeat calmed and reason returned. So he wasn’t quite as tame as she wanted. Not yet. “In bed you may call me Nayla. Amongst others you must call me Queen.” She peered up at him from the corner of her eye, now disliking that she was in such a vulnerable position.

He grinned. “Nayla, after I finish fucking you, I don’t plan to call you anything at all.”

How dare he? She dug her fingers into her palms, wishing she could free herself. Enough with the games. The fabric of her ruined dress was bound so tightly she could barely move her wrists. “Free me now. We’ve had our fun.”

* * * * *

Mace didn’t intend to untie her anytime soon. He knew he was asking for a speedy and certain death for himself and his pack, but what other chance would he have to pay back the woman who held them all captive?

Her rounded bottom begged to be palmed, squeezed and spanked. Hard. He gave in to his desires and took one cheek into each hand, molding her creamy flesh in his grasp and parting them to take in the glorious view. Her tight little anus puckered and her beautiful rosy folds swelled before his eyes. He breathed in deeply, inhaling the tangy natural scent of the juices that still flowed from her pussy. Her cum. His animal senses called out to him, begging him to explore. How would a Queen taste?

How would Nayla taste?

Not to be denied, he dipped his head and licked a path over her velvety pussy. So soft, warm and the musk rich taste didn’t disappoint. He licked her again and then inserted his tongue inside her clenching passage. Mmm, she was a succulent creature.

Her body quivered as she sobbed, “Mace. Please.”

He kissed her bottom before speaking. "Tell me you don't want my cock inside of you and I'll release you." Hell, he had no intention to do any such thing, but he was curious to hear her answer.

She kept silent, but stared up at him from the corner of her eyes. Seductive, dark green eyes that held a thousand stories.

None that he cared to know, he reminded himself.

"Well?" He gripped her hips and propped her luscious ass against his swollen cock. He slid it against her wet clitoris, teasing her. "If you want me, then I shall do my best to give you my all."

"I'd like to be untied," she whispered. "I'd like to be able to touch you." Her last words were a low mumble; he expected she hadn't wanted him to hear them. Did she not know Weres had excellent hearing? Did she know anything about them?

What a naïve thing she was. She'd put herself at her captive's mercy. She must be lonely and desperate to handpick a strange Were from her filthy dungeon and take him as her lover. But why? She was stunning and pampered, from her soft hair and skin to her painted toes. Why didn't the Queen have a slew of men to choose from?

He almost felt bad for her. He almost wanted to free her to save her some humiliation.

But no.

He prodded her tight pussy, only allowing the head of his cock to enter her. She was slick and welcoming, hugging and luring him in. His cock throbbed and begged for release. But he resisted. Here, he would wait until she pleaded for more.

She whimpered and nuzzled her forehead into the mattress. If she told him no, he wouldn't persist. He wasn't a savage, regardless of what they thought. During the light of the day, he was as human as the next.

He was a man. A man who had been tempted to the point of no return by this woman.

Her tattered breathing and whimpering almost did him in. Why did she fight it? Did it bother her so much that she wasn't in control, that her slave was her master?

Her hands were fisted at her back, white from clenching tight. Perspiration soaked her blonde ringlets, pressing them to her rosy cheeks. "Fine." She peeked up at him again. "Continue, if you must."

"You're acting as if this was my idea, Nayla." He grinned at her and inched a little farther into her wet heat. "Are you second-guessing yourself?"

She let out an earthy moan and clenched down on his pulsating erection.

He gulped and steadied his urge to fill her with his seed. "Are you?" He forced out with a growl.

"No, damn you." Her voice shook. "I said I wanted you and I stand by my word."

Mace couldn't help but chuckle at her defensive behavior. It told him more than words could.

"Nothing is funny." She glared up at him. "I don't appreciate your teasing. You can see how much I want you. My body shakes from it. Do you wish to wait until my hands are numb from this damn restraint?"

"Why not? The chains that shackle me bite against my wrists and ankles. The blisters can't heal as fast as they form." So he was exaggerating some. Teasing this woman seemed to come as second nature. It couldn't be contained, he thought, biting back a smile.

"Oh. I didn't realize." Her eyes softened and she began to sit up.

"Wait." He held her still. Damn his selfish desires, but he didn't want this to end until they were both satisfied. He'd had many women since his wife, at times more than one or two at a time. Were women were insatiable at times and when his pack celebrated the full moon, an orgy transpired, allowing them to enjoy each others' bodies as wolf or as man.

Those nights had sated him physically but he'd never known a true sexual connection since his wife. No, never once since Elizabeth.

He forced his mind clear of the forlorn memories. Right now he craved this woman—in spite of her evil intentions. “I’ll be fine if we do this my way,” he said.

Grudgingly, he slipped from her heat, instantly missing her welcoming hold and made quick work of shredding the cloth from her arms. She sat up with her back pressed against his chest and rubbed her wrists.

“Your way? Is that a joke?” She looked over her shoulder, allowing Mace to see the flecks of gold in her forest eyes.

His heartbeat stuttered, but he kept a stern face. “If I’m your lover, you’ll do as I say and not the other way around.” He nodded to the padded upholstered headboard. “Up against there so I can fuck you properly.”

Yes, he’d be her lover tonight—and he’d gain more insight to this Queen and her country. Then tomorrow he’d think up a plan for his pack’s release. His people wouldn’t suffer any longer.

Chapter Three

Nayla wiped the perspiration from her brow and crawled to the head of the bed. She'd allow Mace to have this night. Yes, she was the Queen and when the lovemaking was over, she would leave this room and he would stay. Imprisoned until he realized his place.

He had pride, she understood that now. And intelligence. He wasn't like the rest of the mongrels in the dungeon. Or like the one who had murdered her parents and wounded her body.

But he still wasn't human and God only knew how savage he became when he transformed into full werewolf. She had no doubt he needed to remain secured in irons, for the safety of her country.

At this moment, though, all she cared about was how he was going to satisfy her lonely body. She crushed her breasts up against the red silk padded headboard and braced her hands atop the wooden frame.

The chains rattled menacingly as he followed behind and sandwiched her between his body and the headboard. His erection was fierce and moist from her juices as he pressed himself against her back. What was he waiting for? The foreplay part was over. She wanted more.

He scooped her hair from her cheeks, gathered all her long locks into his hands and placed them over one shoulder. She shivered from the intimacy of his gentle actions and how they contrasted with his rough exterior, deep, penetrating voice and enticing animalistic scent.

His breath was hot against her ear when he said in a low voice, "You're mine," and wedged his leg between hers, spreading them apart. "After tonight," he continued, "you'll understand that I'm more man than any you've had or ever will have."

Her heartbeat sped but she remained composed. "Don't make promises you can't keep." She turned her head and met his heavy gaze. The blue seemed to have disappeared from his eyes, leaving only the black of his pupils. As black as his thick mane of hair that hung past his broad shoulders.

His lips twitched up to a slow, sexy grin and Nayla's entire body heated. He was more alluring than any man she'd ever laid eyes on, that was for sure.

"Brace yourself, Nayla," his deep murmur warned.

She quickly turned back to the headboard and pressed her forehead to the padding. He butted his legs up underneath her. With one arm he lifted her and pulled her backside to rest against his stomach. His other reached around, skimming her inner thigh. Curious, she peeked down to see him grip his cock and guide it to her pussy. Every inch of him was stunning and she couldn't wait another moment for him to be inside of her body.

He held the hard head of his cock against her clitoris and then slowly slid it to her passage and out again. "You're so fucking wet for me." His husky voice rumbled against her neck. "How badly do you want me?"

"Like no one before and no one after. I swear." Her honesty startled her but she quickly pushed it from her mind when he allowed her to sink down on him.

She relished each inch as he slipped inside of her, slick and taut, until his thick cock filled her channel. "Aah," she moaned and her eyes rolled back, mesmerized by the instant warmth crawling up her middle. She clenched tighter to the wood but her palms were clammy.

"Don't let go." He clasped a hand over hers. His other arm still wrapped snug around her waist as his lean, muscular body lodged more firmly against the silk pad. He encompassed her as he held her there, as if nothing else in the world existed but him and this moment of passion.

With a feral grunt, he lifted her higher with his hips. His cock rammed farther in, caressing her innermost walls. He leveraged her there as he slid out of her just an inch,

then thrust back in. Again and then again, faster and harder, he fucked her from behind.

Warm, tingling pressure built inside her pussy, up to her womb. Her legs were useless, but she didn't need them anyway as she was so tightly sandwiched.

"Oh, God, Mace. Fuck me." Her tight nipples slid against the silk as he drove into her, adding to the pleasure.

He was relentless as he filled her to the hilt, pushing deeper each time. His force was fierce and unrestrained, as if he wished to punish her.

But it felt too good to hurt.

His long, slippery shaft arched up and into her heat, burning hotter as the friction hastened and deepened. This wasn't lovemaking. No, it was pure lust-driven sex. There was no admiration, no sweet kisses, just a selfish hunger.

Nayla didn't care.

Nothing mattered. Not when his steady, rapid movements were setting a fire ablaze in her core. She was losing control. Her mind blurred as her thighs quaked. The smoldering inside of her had built up too long and now it was bursting free. She released the dam, allowing it to erupt in her belly and surge down her legs, rushing through her blood, popping her nerve endings, slicing off her anxiety and fears. Finally letting go of years of frustration, of loneliness.

Joyous tears welled in her eyes as a piercing cry filled her ears and she realized too late it was coming from her mouth.

So what? she thought and smiled to herself. She dropped her head back against Mace's shoulder as her entire body slackened against his hold. He held her up, his cock still engorged inside her tingly channel.

"Good girl," he said low beside her ear. He bracketed her against the headboard as he thrust twice more. A primitive groan escaped his beautiful lips before he pulled out and released his warm seed against her bottom.

They fell back onto the bed, their bodies entwined as they lay on their sides. She listened to his jagged breathing as her senses returned. She'd miscalculated him. Each second longer she spent with him proved that more and more.

As he eased her soaked hair from her shoulder and kissed her tingling skin...as his hand drifted down to her bottom and lathered his cum across her backside...she knew she couldn't make the mistake again.

No, Mace could never be underestimated.

Chapter Four

"Next order of business." Nayla kept her posture straight and her face solemn as she looked around at the table of men, hoping they wouldn't guess what—or who—was on her mind.

Mace.

She shifted on her throne, her pussy moistening from the mere memory of how he'd pleased her the night before. After he'd tied her up and claimed her with his beautiful cock, he'd softened to her touch. And now she wanted nothing more than for this day to be over so she could visit him again.

To imagine a Were had captured her desires so thoroughly that she could think of nothing else. She pictured him in her mind as she'd said goodbye, leaving him tangled in bed sheets. She remembered clearly how in between the glimpses of anger, he'd looked at her as if he'd known her a hundred years.

Even though there was an obvious war in his mind, his taming had been easy. She only hoped he wouldn't regret the passion they'd shared. She hoped he wouldn't regress and give in to the rage.

"My Queen?" Fenton, her appointed councilman from the lower valley, broke her thoughts. "The coven of witches I warned you about has threatened to stop the flow of the river that leads to Webster's Farm. They insist Webster owes them monetary compensation for services rendered."

Nayla held back a sigh. Was there ever a session when Fenton didn't bring up the witches? Like many of Paqualette's residents, he feared the power of the coven but for all Nayla knew, the witches stayed to themselves and never caused any trouble.

"What services?" she asked, more curious than anything else.

"They insist they're the reason Webster's fields are thriving with wheat." Fenton cleared his throat. "He'd allegedly gone to them during the drought and asked them to cast a spell for precipitation."

"Ah. And Webster denies this claim?"

"No, my Queen, he doesn't deny requesting the spell, but he does deny the coven was the reason the drought was broken."

Nayla tapped her foot on the floor. Webster always was a cheap son of a bitch. "If the coven wishes to stop the river from flowing to Webster's Farm then so be it. But I ask that they allow it to flow beyond the farm so no others are harmed."

"My Queen, the coven has no proof—"

"Please, Fenton, the drought lasted for weeks. I'd wondered myself if the witches had any part in the recent rain. Whether it's true or not, they'll have to work it out amongst themselves."

"But—"

"But nothing. Is there any other business before I adjourn?"

"My Queen." Saul stepped from the shadows in the corner of the room.

"Yes, Saul?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but we have a problem with your WereSlave."

The image of Mace's naked body popped into her mind. Defined muscles, tanned skin, sleek build, enticing cock. She tilted her head down, trying to hide the heat that crawled up her neck to her cheeks. Then she guided Saul to the corner of the room, for some privacy. "What of him?" she asked, keeping her voice low.

"He allowed us to move him into your personal chambers as you requested but he has refused to eat or allow us to properly contain him." Saul drew his salt-and-pepper eyebrows together. "We've tried to respect him as your property, my Queen, but it's nearly impossible. He's said he won't eat until the prisoners in the dungeon are given proper care. And he wants proof of it."

"Well," Fenton muttered, clearly having heard Saul's words. Murmurs from the men worked their way around the table.

Wonderful. Nayla shot them a warning glare. "Continue on with the meeting, gentlemen. This conversation is none of your concern."

The men bristled but they obeyed and began discussing the next order of business. When she was certain everyone, including Fenton, had given their attention elsewhere, she turned back to her guard.

"Thank you for coming to me with this, Saul." Lord, how would she deal with this? "Have any Queens from the past had this problem?"

"No, my Queen. This is new. I'm afraid you may have chosen the alpha male of the pack. I've heard they're more resistant to taking orders and are difficult to tame."

"I see." So Mace was their leader. He'd certainly proven to her he was a clever being. His tongue was sharp and his mind quick. But what did that say of his pack? Even if they were all intelligent beings, did that stop them from killing? Or did their intellect help them from being caught? If the Great War had proven anything, it had shown how savage the Weres could be. They'd attempted to take over the entire continent, but humans, with help from the Vampires, had thwarted their efforts and nearly exterminated them. Now, only a minute number of packs roamed the continent.

Nayla pressed her fingers to her temples. Yes, Weres were dangerous. She'd experienced that firsthand. But Mace hadn't hurt her last night. She couldn't deny that. He'd pleased her and then he'd let her slip from the bed without a scratch.

In any case, she couldn't be certain she was making the right decision by starving the prisoners. She jutted out her chin, satisfied with her decision. "Until I'm confident the Weres in the dungeon are a threat, I want them to be fed and cleaned, starting with the women. If any cause trouble, their privileges will be revoked. Understood?"

Saul nodded. "Yes, my Queen."

"My Queen?" Fenton stood, interrupting again. The room grew silent and all eyes looked to her. "I couldn't help but overhear. I don't mean to speak out of place, but—"

"Then don't, Councilman." Why did the man continually question her?

"The people will not like your decision, my Queen. Surely, you must know that."

"I'm aware the people are frightened of the Weres but I'm not wavering on this ruling. If you want to take issue with it, bring it to the next session. This one is adjourned." Nayla took a deep breath. She rarely went against her country's popular opinion but her gut told her she needed to do it just this once.

And she refused to even consider having Mace taken away from her. No, not after last night. Not after she realized what she'd been missing. If the country didn't allow her to have a husband, fine. But she wouldn't give up her new lover now, or possibly ever.

* * * * *

Nayla put her ear to the door but couldn't hear a sound. What was he doing in there? In her bed chambers. And what the hell had she been thinking when she'd requested he be sent here? A moment of temporary insanity, she supposed. There was a lot of that happening lately.

In her post-orgasm haze, she'd asked Saul to move him to her room, which was usually her safe haven, not to be shared with anyone. In fact, she'd rarely even allowed the maids to enter. If it hadn't been for that fleeting fantasy of having Mace's warm body share her bed every night he would still be locked up in the transition cell.

Oh well. What's done is done.

Besides, Saul had assured her they'd shackled his ankles to the floor. But they hadn't restrained his wrists. He was too powerful. Thankfully, they'd been able to board up the windows so he couldn't transform. At least there was that.

She held tight to the food tray the chef had prepared for Mace and nodded to one of the three guards standing nearby. "Could you open the door for me now?"

"Yes, my Queen. Will you need assistance inside your chambers?" the red-headed young man asked, his cheeks blushing with each word spoken.

"No, thank you. I'm sure I'll be fine, just as I was last evening."

He nodded and removed the multiple locks from the door before pushing it open. Nayla stepped inside her room and immediately recognized the new musky aroma mixed in with the usual mild lavender scent. Something wild and alluring. Something a lot like Mace.

She closed the door behind her and let her eyes adjust to the dim room. To the left, a lit oil lamp sat on her bedside table. Her bed was empty, sheets rumpled. Where was he? Wouldn't her guards have chained him to the bed?

Her heart sped as she took in the rest of the room, only to feel him, too late, come up behind her and cup his hand over her mouth. His other arm held her close to his hard body, forcing her to drop the tray of food.

She gasped and tried to wriggle from his grasp, but his grip was unyielding.

"My Queen," the guard yelled through the door. "Are you all right?"

"Tell them you're fine and I won't hurt you," Mace whispered roughly in her ear and slowly lifted his hand from her mouth.

Nayla swallowed any rising fear, hoping the Were would be as reasonable as he'd been the night before. "Yes, I'm fine, thank you. I, uh, merely tripped."

"Are you sure, my Queen? Would you like any assistance?"

"No! No, everything is fine. I have everything under control." She hoped. She waited for the guard to say more but heard nothing but silence.

"Very good, Nayla." Mace slid his searing hand down her neck and rested it on her shoulder. "Now, I don't have to hurt you," he took her earlobe into his hot mouth and gently pulled it between his teeth, "much."

A shiver rolled down her spine, but she ignored his attempt to rattle her—and the growing need to feel his mouth on other parts of her body. "I brought you some food. You must be hungry."

"I told your guards I'm not eating until my pack is cared for. Didn't they pass the word or are they as obtuse as their Queen?"

"I beg your pardon?" She jerked away from him and realized he'd let her go too easily. What was his game?

He stood before her naked with a roguish grin on his face. She'd almost forgotten how stunning he was. Almost. Her heart thumped and her temperature rose a few degrees as she searched his lean, muscled body for any type of restraint. But there were none.

"What? Are you feeling shy all of a sudden?" He gripped his beautiful cock. "Did you forget how this felt inside you?"

"That's not an appropriate way to speak to me." Her voice squeaked when she spoke and perspiration dampened her skin. Yes, she remembered exactly how he'd felt inside her. And she wanted it again.

"No? I'm simply beginning from where we left off last night." He took a step closer. "No 'fuck me, Mace' tonight? No 'have my body as you wish'?"

"That was in the throes of passion." She stepped back.

"Be honest, Nayla. You want me chained. That's what heats your blood, isn't it? A WereSlave to fulfill your perverted desires." His smile broadened.

"I'm not a pervert. Many Queens before me have chosen a Were as a lover for...for our needs. It's very common."

In a fluid motion, he closed the distance between them and lifted his hands to cup her face. "What if I don't wish to be chosen as your sex slave?" Frowning now, his gaze lingered on her lips. "What if I choose to kidnap you? What if I tied you up and used your body whenever I had needs? Would that make me an animal?"

Finally, his somber eyes met hers. She wasn't sure what to think. He seemed so human, yet everything she'd ever learned about werewolves had told her they were animals.

And what they'd done to her parents — and to her.

She shook her head as resentment rose back to the surface, but thought she'd better not argue. Not when he was unchained. How much would it take for him to snap and kill her? She needed to soothe him. "I, uh, I ordered my guards to feed and clean the members of your pack." She gestured toward the mess on the floor. "That's why I brought you food."

"How thoughtful of you." He dropped his hands from her face and Nayla hated that she missed their warmth. "How do I know you're not lying?"

"Right." She remembered he'd asked for proof. "If you're chained I can escort you to the dungeon."

He lifted a dark eyebrow. "What is it with you and the chains?"

"How else can I trust that you won't escape or try to hurt anyone?"

He chuckled. "Trust me? You're alone with me in a dark bedroom. Last night, I penetrated your body and made you scream my name. Do you know how many chances you've given me to hurt you? To kill you?"

"You wouldn't dare." God, she hoped not.

"And yet you don't trust me. Why is that?" A wild spark glinted in his eyes and his gorgeous lips curled up to a half-smile.

Nayla stood speechless. She didn't know how to answer his question and she didn't know how to stanch the raw need surging through her body. Her fingers itched to touch him, despite the ill will she held for his species. He was so close and... She glanced down to his solid erection. He wanted her too.

She licked her dry lips. "I trust us. Together."

* * * * *

Mace raked his gaze down to the lush cleavage spilling from her dress. He gave up trying to fight the attraction. It was an impossible mission. The wolf inside of him, the part that was difficult to control, was clawing to be released, weakening his human

side. It had been too long since he'd transformed, too long since he'd felt the moon's empowering glow.

He gritted his jaw. How simple it would be to break through the boarded windows and run into the night. But leaving wasn't an option as long as his pack was imprisoned. Which wouldn't be for much longer if Nayla was honest about agreeing to feed them. If it were true, soon they might have enough strength to overpower the guards.

With his naïve Nayla occupied, they might have a better chance.

"Do you trust me, Mace?" She stared up at him, her eyes glossy against the dim light of the oil lamp. "I promise I'll make your life pleasant. And I'll be loyal to you." She brushed her fingers down the center of his abdomen and her voice dropped to a sensual whisper. "If you continue to satisfy me, I'll give you my all."

His stomach clenched against her touch as pressure built in his groin. No, he'd not be so foolish as to put his life in this woman's hands. But he'd gladly allow her to satisfy him for now. And, damn it if he didn't want to give her more pleasure.

Like an addict reaching for his drug, Mace seized her wrist and pressed her hand against his erection. His blood coursed through his body, rushing toward her touch as she wrapped her cool, soft fingers around his cock.

He inhaled a rough breath and guided her up and down his shaft. With his hypersensitive Were senses on overload, he caught the musky scent of her pussy as she grew moist for him.

His balls knotted achingly tight. "Have you ever had a man in your mouth, Nayla?"

She shook her head and looked up at him. "No. I'd like to try it, though. I want to taste you. Every part of you."

He swallowed any hope of denying her this evening, wondering how he'd found himself in this predicament, yearning for a beautiful woman who was also his captor. The same woman who'd starved his pack and imprisoned them in filth. If he hated her, all this would be simpler, but every nerve in his body deceived him by craving her.

He brought his hand up to brace the back of her neck. With a firm hold, he pulled her with him as he found a wall to lean against, then eased her down to her knees. She went willingly but pursed her lips, probably holding back a scowling remark about how she, the Queen, shouldn't be treated this way. But he didn't give a damn. He refused to be her whipping boy. If she wanted this affair, it would be on his terms.

Her hands trembled as she held his base. "I've seen it done and I know I can be good at it."

Not the response he'd been expecting. He released her neck and used his hand to sweep the tip of his cock across her parted lips. With her kneeling in front of him, looking up at him with glossy eyes, all he desired was to be deep in her mouth.

She licked the path he'd made with his pre-cum. "Mmm," she said so softly he barely heard.

But he did hear it. And it ignited him. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead and his balls tightened, begging for release. "Please, Nayla."

A mischievous smile curved her moist lips before she gripped the base of his cock with both hands and slowly twirled her pink tongue around his engorged head.

"Oh, God." He pressed his palms against the cold, solid wall behind him.

She took his head into her mouth then, soaking him in her warmth. The sight of her lips wrapped around him was breathtaking. Her sweet, innocent appearance colliding with crude passion as his dick corrupted her virgin mouth.

"More," he said coarsely and braced her neck again. "Please take more." He nudged his erection farther into her mouth and she moaned against it, swirling her slippery, velvet tongue along each side.

One of her hands grabbed his hip as the other continued to squeeze his shaft. Her lips tightened around him as she grew hungrier, greedily sucking him in until he was snug against the roof of her mouth and the back of her throat.

"Nayla, you're so good. So very good." He thrust his hips forward, wanting desperately to fuck her lush mouth.

She sucked harder as her tongue ran against the bottom of his cock. The pressure was fierce and growing inside him. He dragged breaths of air into his parched lungs as all blood rushed to his groin. She was relentless and oh-so eager to please him, to taste him.

He cried out a violent sound and jerked against her mouth, shooting his hot cum into the back of her throat. She released him and swallowed, wiping her swollen lips with the back of her hand.

His rough breathing calmed as she stood before him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Her body was soft and the scent of lust was even stronger, causing his cock to stiffen again.

"I think I deserve a kiss now." She bit into her bottom lip.

What? He swiped the sweat from his brow. "A kiss?"

"You haven't kissed me yet. Did you realize that?"

Ah. He was well aware he'd avoided that type of intimacy, something he'd left behind with the memory of Elizabeth. A fuck was a fuck but a kiss led to emotions. Or at least it had with his late wife.

"I don't kiss," he said simply.

"Ever? Or just me?"

He shook his head, ignoring the irrelevant question. "When do I get to see my pack?"

"When will you kiss me?" She looked straight into his eyes, not allowing him to avoid her question.

He couldn't help but smile. "Are we bartering?"

"I do what I must to get what I want and I very much would like your lips on mine."

“Let me get this straight. All I have to do is kiss you and you’ll take me to my pack without chains.”

“Yes. It’s a simple request, don’t you think?” She nuzzled up against his neck and licked a spot below his ear.

Bold woman, but, God, so irresistible. “All right.” What could it harm? Besides, he wasn’t as weak as he’d once been. He had a strong mind and body. And, he admitted to himself, he’d wanted to taste her full red mouth since he’d laid eyes on it.

“Yes?” She smiled and crushed her soft breasts harder against his chest.

With a breath, he summoned all his strength. “Don’t get excited. It’ll mean nothing.”

“Oh. I...well, that’s fine with me.” Her smile faded and he almost regretted being cruel to her.

His gaze dropped from her eyes to her lips. They were plump and smooth and they were drawing him in. Not since Elizabeth had he wanted to kiss a woman more. And as soon as he gave himself permission, need overtook him. He ducked his head and took her sweet mouth.

Fervent and fiery, their lips met but it wasn’t enough. He gathered her closer with one arm around her tiny waist and a hand to cup her jaw. Her tongue surprised him by flicking out and into his mouth. He quickly obliged her by meshing it with his own. She tasted like his earthy scent but sweetened with her own pleasing flavor. Nectar-sweet, like a peach he could bite into. Rich and tempting.

He wanted to consume her, lick and nibble her body from her lips to her ripe pussy. He wanted to possess her, make her his.

No, that was just his reignited hard-on speaking for him. Or his need to protect and dominate. Having this delicate woman in his arms was confusing him. Her soft, supple curves molded to his hard male lines, diminishing the small bit of command he had left.

He told himself to pull away from her intoxicating mouth but it was useless. She tasted too good, felt too right.

Damn her. He wanted more.

Impatience, anger and desire fueled him as he raised her skirt and tore away the fabric that separated her from his need to fill her.

“Mace.”

He silenced her with a firm kiss, pressing hard against her lips, entangling his tongue with hers. His fingers dug into her hips as he pulled her with him to the floor, lifting her and setting her on top of his lap.

Not a moment passed before his cock found the entry to her taut, wet pussy. He guided her down, stretching her inch by slow inch until he filled her completely. Encompassing, snug and warm. So fucking perfect.

A small sound of satisfaction escaped her throat and she nipped his bottom lip with her teeth, drawing blood.

He didn't care. His attention centered on her muscles clenched tight against his throbbing shaft. With his help, she rose slightly and sank back down. Up and then down. He dug his heels into the floor and thrust up to meet her each time. Their shared groans of rising pleasure seemed to draw them closer, into their own bubble of ecstasy. Nothing else mattered but their inevitable release.

Her juices trickled from her pussy onto his testicles and he knew she was close to coming.

Oh, hell.

He dropped his bloody mouth from hers and kissed and licked the valley between her ample breasts, tasting his coppery blood mix with her salty skin. Her breasts bounced with her steady up-and-down movements. So lovely. He only wished he'd taken the time to shred the dress from her body, like he had the night before. He

wanted her naked and vulnerable. From memory, he knew every inch of her was exquisite. And his. She was his.

Nayla belonged to him.

No man would ever have her like this. No man would ever make her whimper and sweat with passion. Not if he could help it.

Her fingernails bit into his shoulders and she moaned softly against his ear. "Come inside me, Mace. Please."

He shook his head but continued, grasping her supple ass and quickening his pace. Thrusting his hips up faster and harder while he held her flesh in his hands.

So damn good.

But not enough.

The wolf inside him begged for more. Her kiss, the taste of her mouth, had twisted something inside of him and he was losing control. A growl ripped through his throat and he found himself jumping to his feet, holding her tight to his body.

She wrapped her legs around him as he turned and pushed her against the wall. "Mace, what are you doing?"

Hot blood pounded against his temples and in his groin, making him crazy. What was wrong with him? It didn't matter. He'd give in to his wolf side. He had no choice. He only hoped he wouldn't lose Nayla's trust, if he ever had it.

And the chance to visit his pack.

* * * * *

The cold brick wall scraped against Nayla's back but she didn't complain. She'd gotten her wish. A kiss. A heart-stopping kiss. His taste was much like his alluring scent, wild and magnetic. It reminded her of her walks through the forest and the rush of the creek. Crisp and fresh and untamed.

She pressed her lips to his again and pushed her tongue inside. She could drink from him if he let her. Nibble on his lips, suck on his tongue. Now that she knew how he tasted from his mouth to his delicious cock, she would never let him go.

He groaned as she devoured him with her desperate kisses. Mercilessly, he began thrusting his hard length into her pussy. His hips ground into her and his steel chest crushed her against the rough wall.

She tightened her legs around him and tried to meet his thrusts, ignoring the pain in her back. One of his hands gripped her bottom and the other clawed at her breast, ripping at her fabric. Yes. God, yes. She wanted to be free of her clothes so she could feel him against her, bare and exposed for his touch.

Like animals. Yes, just like an animal. He could have her that way. He could have her any way.

He wrenched away from her mouth and dipped his head to her beaded nipple. His teeth were sharp as he took her flesh into his mouth. Nayla watched him, unable to tear her eyes from his beauty as he sucked, then nibbled, then scraped his teeth across her flesh, nicking her skin.

A drop of blood ran down the curve of her breast and he licked at it. "Sorry," he murmured and lapped his tongue over the path again. "I'm losing control. You make me lose control."

"It's fine." She constricted her pussy walls. "Keep going. I can take it."

He groaned again, but this time the sound rumbled through his body, coming from somewhere deep inside him. His pupils blackened, eating away any trace of blue.

Then, deep inside of her, she felt his cock swell, stretching taut against her channel. She bit into her lip and grasped his rigid shoulders as warmth shot through her belly and down her thighs. "Ah," she gasped. "What's happening?"

She didn't hear if he answered her. Her mind could only concentrate on the rush of pleasure surging through her body. She closed her eyes and reveled in the way he began to slowly move his thick length inside of her. Her thighs and pussy pulsed with

heat. A cry stuck in her throat and finally broke loose when he quickened his pace, ramming her into raw oblivion. "Yes. Yes! Oh, oh, Mace. Oh, God!"

Control was no longer an option as she dropped her head on his shoulder and released every balled-up nerve in her body. They all sang and tingled and then gushed with bliss.

He held her up as her legs went limp, his hands clasping her thighs. Then he grunted and drove into her two more times before giving in to his own release with a fierce, painful-sounding growl. His hot liquid shot inside of her, causing her to shudder again.

"Ah," she moaned and pressed her lips to his neck.

Her mind was in a haze as he carried her to the bed and laid on top of her, his swollen cock still inside of her.

"You're hard," Nayla whispered against his ear. "But I felt you come."

A devilish grin cut across his lips. "I thought you could take it."

"I can. It's just I thought men needed to rest afterward. My ex-lover always —"

"I don't want to hear about another man." He avoided eye contact while making quick work of ripping the torn dress from her body.

Was that jealousy? She bit back a grin. Was it possible that this Were was starting to have feelings for her? Or was this simply his dominant nature? Saul had said he was the alpha of his pack. The leader. Always in charge and never anyone's second.

In any case, he demanded respect. Which posed a huge problem. How would she ever keep him here with her, as her companion, as her WereSlave lover if he couldn't be tamed? There wasn't a submissive bone in his body.

She gulped down the question as he spread her naked thighs and thrust his hips forward. Her pussy quivered with aftershocks. He felt so good. So right.

He slid his slick cock out halfway before driving himself back in. Then again and again. He was unquenchable and she so very much wanted to please him. Anything to make him realize he'd be happy here with her.

Grabbing her knees, she pulled up her legs and opened wider for him. The movement made her passage exceptionally taut. More important, it made him moan with pleasure.

His body trembled and with a jerk and one last thrust, he released and collapsed on top of her.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and combed her fingers through his silky dark hair. His body was warmer than usual, which was a nice comfort in the nippy room.

"Thank you," she heard herself say before she could stop. Gratitude for sex? How pathetic was she?

"Did I hurt you?" he mumbled against the mattress.

"No." She smiled. "Were you trying?"

"Trying not to kill you, maybe." He rolled over onto his back and off Nayla. "I try to show you I'm like any other man and the wolf in me laughs at my attempt."

She sat up and looked into his now-blue eyes as they glistened from the soft oil lamp light. Her heart fluttered but she reminded herself again that he wasn't what he appeared. "You didn't change into a wolf."

"No, but he's still here, lurking. And he's angry that he hasn't been freed. Hell, I'm angry."

"Why?" What a stupid question, Nayla. Of course he's angry. You're keeping him captive. And for good reason.

He didn't answer her. And she was glad. What was the point in debating?

Instinctively, she turned toward him and admired his handsome profile as he stared up at the ceiling. With strong bone structure and powerful lips, he was any

woman's dream man. But he was hers. She'd never allow that fact to change. Hearing him talk about the wolf inside him should have terrified her. But he hadn't made an attempt to pull the boards from the windows and transform. Maybe he wanted to be here with her. Just a little. It was all she could hope for.

Chapter Five

Mace passed through the dungeon gate, looked out among his pack and stifled the urge to smile.

Two weeks had passed and they were rapidly gaining back their energy. Nayla had allowed him to visit them an hour each day. With guards present, of course. Even if the woman was somewhat naïve, she wasn't stupid. But he could tell her attitude toward Weres was changing, slowly but surely.

She'd ordered her servants to bring in cots with blankets and down pillows. Most of his pack still slept on the floor. A hard surface was what they were used to, but her actions weren't overlooked. She'd also kept the pack fed with three large meals a day, including fresh-baked desserts. And wine.

He grinned at the thought. Would they ever want to leave here?

Kaige, his second-in-command, had informed Mace that Nayla had even stayed to chat with them during a meal or two. His friend had told him she'd asked questions about Mace. Of course, Kaige hadn't answered. He was loyal to Mace. Always had been. And Kaige had always been a bit of a roguish flirt, as well, so Mace was sure he'd been interested in other topics of conversation with his Nayla.

He wouldn't blame his friend if that was the case. Nayla's beauty was undeniable. His weak heart deceived him by thumping in his chest as he pictured her vivid image in his head. Wild golden hair to run his fingers through, large green eyes to bore into his soul and rosy lips sweet enough to nibble on. And a soft, innocent voice that could convince him to forgive her of any crime. Almost.

Each moment he spent with Nayla, she gave a little more of herself to him. In the privacy of her bed chambers, they were equals, enjoying each other's bodies. Giving

each other boundless pleasure. He'd grown acquainted with every inch of her body as she had his.

Outside her chambers, she kept her distance. Probably afraid of what her precious country would think of her if they saw her give an ounce of respect to him. To her WereSlave.

To hell with it, he thought. Why did it matter what her actions were? As long as his pack was taken care of. They'd soon be free of this bondage and of this country.

And Mace would be free of Nayla.

He tightened his jaw and reminded himself, yet again, that she was the enemy.

Saul, the guard who smelled curiously like wolf, stood beside him. "I'm afraid your hour is up for today."

Mace nodded to Kaige. It was a silent assurance that the pack wouldn't be forgotten. No, Mace would die a thousand torturous deaths before he allowed his pack to perish in this god-forsaken dungeon.

He followed Saul up the dark, cavernous stairway, through the servants' quarters, the kitchen and into the main foyer. There was an unusual bustle around the castle today. Mace stepped out of the way while large flower arrangements were carried through the door and into the grand ballroom.

Saul looked to him. "The Harvest Ball is tonight. It's a grand affair."

"I see. Nayla hadn't mentioned it." Mace used her given name freely, refusing to call her his Queen. The formality was ridiculous considering she'd sucked his cock just that morning and every day since he'd taken residence in her chambers.

Saul didn't seem to care. "I'm sure the Queen would have liked for you to attend the Ball. Though, the council would never agree to something so daring."

"Really?" He hardly believed it. "Because I'm a monster?" Mace continued to follow the guard's lead through the castle.

After a pause, Saul looked back at him and smiled. "I know better than that."

"You would. Does Nayla know you're part wolf?"

The middle-aged man stopped at the end of the hall and glanced around to make sure no one was listening. "No one knows," he said in a low voice. "How did you figure it out?"

"Your wolf scent is weak but I can still smell it when you're near me like this. Where did you come from, brother?"

Saul shook his head. "I'm no one's brother. I'm the bastard son of the late Queen Beatrice and her WereSlave. She gave birth in secret and handed me to the servants."

Mace's jaw twitched. And Weres were considered the animals? "Have you ever changed with the moon?"

"A few times when I was a boy." He looked around the room again. "I've learned to control it."

"You should tell Nayla. She respects you and might think differently of me and the other Weres if she knew her own guard is one of us."

Saul smiled. "Do you want her to think differently of you? Is it important to you?"

"Of course. It would mean my pack could have a home. With your country's acceptance we would no longer be vagrants." Mace smirked, realizing how ridiculous he sounded to his own ears. "But that would be asking for a miracle." He slapped Saul's shoulder. "Were brother, your secret is safe with me."

Saul nodded. "The country's hatred runs deep, especially after the war. I'm not sure peace among humans and Weres is possible." He grinned. "Well, I wasn't until I noticed how you've affected the Queen. Look what's happened in the short time she's known you. Your pack is treated as if you're guests to the castle and you're without chains."

Mace remained silent for the rest of the trek to Nayla's chambers. It was foolish to hope for peace. Even more foolish to entertain the idea that Nayla would ever want him

to be more than her WereSlave. He clenched his fists at his sides as renewed anger built inside of him. If only he didn't crave the woman's touch.

* * * * *

Nayla had greeted each of the castle's guests as they made their way into the ballroom. Everyone, including Stephen. He looked as good as he did when he'd been her lover just over four years ago. Broad shoulders, a lean waist and a smile that could flatter any woman. Though, oddly, her heart didn't pitter-patter like it usually did whenever she was around him.

He'd always held a special place in her heart, as the only man she'd ever given herself to before her bloodlines forced her into being the Queen. He'd courted and pursued her for months and she hadn't seen a reason to deny him. Her destiny of solitude had inspired her to be a little naughty while she still could. And it had been worthwhile at the time.

She looked at her ex-lover, who stood amongst the other bachelors. Rightfully so, she thought. No woman would ever be good enough to claim his heart. That was why he'd been such a fine choice back then. There'd been no chance of either of them falling in love. Sure, Nayla had come close and it had hurt to say goodbye. But Stephen had made it easy. He'd moved right on to the next woman without a complaint.

Across the room, he met her gaze and flashed her an intimate smile that told her he remembered every minute of the wicked nights they'd spent together. Nayla averted her attention away from Stephen and to the elaborate food table. Somehow the memories of him weren't as exciting as they used to be and she had no desire to fantasize about what could have been.

Not tonight.

A clear image of Mace entered her mind and she hid a giddy grin behind her gloved hand. Although Stephen had been a respectable lover, he didn't compare to her generous Were. Their time in bed rarely consisted of sleep. Not when Mace lay naked

beside her underneath the sheets. She couldn't resist running her hands over his rigid muscles, through his silky black hair, over his powerful lips.

His lips. Oh God. The man knew how to kiss. And lick. And suck.

She sighed and wished she were with him now instead of at this ridiculous ball. The extravagant event cost her country far too much money. Yet her council voted for it every year. A night of free food and liquor for the country's elite. How could they resist?

"Penny for your thoughts," a familiar voice said too close to her ear.

Nayla didn't bother looking up at Stephen as he rested a hand on the armrest of her throne, allowing his finger to lightly brush her bare forearm. Still as bold as ever.

She made sure no one could hear her words before saying, "Wasting your time with the celibate Queen, are you? I'd think you'd spend your energy on one of the many single women lurking about."

He leaned in closer. "I've heard a rumor that you're not all that celibate as of late."

Her cheeks heated. "Have you?" She refused to dignify his insinuation with an answer. Her private time with Mace was no one's business but her own.

"I must admit I'm a bit jealous, even if he's only a WereSlave."

"Mace is more than that," she blurted out before she had time to filter her words. She couldn't help herself. She'd grown to realize Mace deserved more respect than most of the humans she came into contact with. The conversations they'd shared in the privacy of her room had been engrossing and titillating. His wit and intelligence had surprised and delighted her, and his passionate lovemaking never ceased to amaze her. She found it easy to forget he was a werewolf, an animal with the ability to kill. As long as he didn't turn, well, everything was perfect.

Mace was perfect.

The mere thought of him made her legs wobbly and her heart pound. "I've found that the Weres aren't what they seemed," she said, realizing Stephen was looking at her as if questioning her sanity.

"Really?" He raised his eyebrows higher up his forehead and white lines formed around his pinched lips. "Is that so?"

She smiled up at him and patted his arm. "But why would you be jealous, silly man? You're the most eligible bachelor in Paqualette. You know as well as I do you have your pick of any woman in this room."

The tight line of his lips softened then quirked up to a playful grin. "What good is any of it, Nayla, if I can't have you?"

She couldn't help but laugh at his bold flattery. He'd always been an expert charmer, whether he believed his words or not.

"You laugh?" He brought his hand up to his chest. "My heart is broken and you laugh."

"You'll live, I'm sure." She nodded toward a group of attractive women. "Who's your pick tonight?"

"Trying to get rid of me so fast, are you? Want to get back to your Were?"

"Simply saving you precious time."

"I have all the time in the world, sweet woman. Might the Queen spare my feelings just this once and grant me a dance?"

"Oh, for God's sake." She laughed again. "You always were a stubborn man."

"Be that as it may..." He held out his hand for her to take.

"Fine. One dance." It would make the time go by faster at least. And she was sure she was doing dear Stephen a favor. Dancing with the Queen was considered an honor among men. The dance floor would be cleared and all female eyes would be on him.

Yes, he was one heck of a charmer.

* * * * *

Mace gritted his jaw as he watched Nayla dance with the human. He stood behind the massive column at the rear of the ballroom, hidden from the guests. He'd dressed in clothes meant for walking the castle, plain pants and a linen shirt, not appropriate attire to wear to this sort of festivity, he could tell.

The guards had expected him to be good and stay in Nayla's chambers for the evening, but curiosity drew him here. The cheery music, the ornate clothing, the dancing, the spread of food—he'd never seen anything like it.

And he'd wanted to keep an eye on Nayla, apparently for good reason.

The man who held her in his arms was like all the rest of the pampered humans in the room, well-groomed and spoiled by wealth. Mace couldn't help but wonder if Nayla found him attractive. She didn't look uncomfortable as one of his hands held hers and the other pressed against her mid-back.

No, she appeared at ease as she gazed up at him with those seductive green eyes, while keeping a proper distance from her dance partner. How she could pull off both regal and wanton at the same time was beyond him.

The dance floor was clear as the couple swayed to the sweeping rhythm of the string ensemble. All eyes were on them as the man whispered in her ear, causing her to giggle.

Mace swallowed the growing lump in his throat. He'd never seen her laugh like that. Open and free. Without caution. Without fear.

Who the hell was this man who could make her seem so cheery and carefree? The man's greedy hand slid slowly down to her lower back as he drew Nayla closer. Too goddamn close. Mace's chest tightened when she didn't object. Her face didn't show any discomfort at all. Obviously, her companion was no stranger.

Mace glanced around at the people gathered about the ballroom floor. None seemed to mind the intimacy of the dance. Although some whispered and pointed.

Mainly the women. But no one did anything to stop this transgression. Didn't they care that this bastard was taking advantage of their Queen?

He had to do something. Anything to get those bloody hands off of her. He took a step forward but stopped when the music ended. The man ushered her through the crowd and Mace lost sight of her for a moment as a new dance began.

Laughter, voices and music filled the air. People scattered, blocking his view. There. He spotted them as they stepped out through a pair of balcony doors. It was of little solace to see one of Nayla's guards follow behind them.

Unwanted jealousy burned in his chest as he wondered who this man was to Nayla. Would she allow him to touch her? To kiss her?

Ah hell. It bothered Mace more than ever that he didn't have her respect. Bothered him more than it should. As a Were, he was only considered her bed companion. And this man, the man who had made her laugh with a joy he'd never seen, was far more than that. Or at least he must have been at one time.

Mace cursed under his breath. He needed to get out there before anything happened. He took another step forward but someone grabbed his arm and yanked him back.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" A large man with short blond hair and a mustache stood before him. Mace remembered seeing him walking through the dungeon, thinking he must be one of Nayla's councilmen. Mace also remembered he hadn't liked the looks of him. Devious and malignant. He'd protested Mace's appearance in the dungeon as well as the fair treatment of the Were prisoners.

Mace easily jerked his arm free. He might have to play WereSlave to Nayla for the time being but he refused to allow anyone else to put his hands on him. "Who are you?"

"You may call me Councilman Fenton. I've been looking for you everywhere. What are you doing out of the Queen's chambers, boy?"

Boy? Mace hadn't been a boy in over a hundred years. But he didn't have time to argue with this ass. He turned and started toward the balcony again.

"Wait." Fenton grabbed Mace's shoulder. "I have a plan to help you and your pack."

"My pack?" The reminder stopped him from taking another step and he turned to give Fenton his attention. "What sort of plan?"

"I've made it clear that I don't agree with keeping you and your dogs alive and treated like they're guests at this castle. It's a crime against humanity."

"You're losing me, Fenton," Mace said through his tight jaw.

"I want you all out of this country and I'll do anything to make it happen. The Queen has lost focus since the moment you stuck your filthy cock inside her. Nothing is getting done and the country is suffering for it."

Mace fisted his hand, ready to knock the man out. "You should be careful how you speak of her, human. You see there are no chains on me."

"Hear me out." Fenton held his hand up and lowered his voice. "The Ball will last another two hours at least. I'll go to the dungeon, dismiss the guards and loosen your pack's chains enough for them to break free."

Mace tilted his head in interest. "What's the catch?"

"I need your word that you'll leave the country—every one of you—and you'll never come back." Fenton's face paled and perspiration dampened his pasty forehead. "And I ask that you take Nayla with you."

Mace would've thought it was a joke but Fenton couldn't look any more serious. "You want me to abduct your Queen?"

"Yes." Fenton jutted his chinless jaw in a sad attempt to appear superior. "I'll have her called to her chambers in one hour. Do whatever it takes. I don't care if she's dead or alive, as long as her body goes with you."

The idea of people like this surrounding Nayla sickened him. "I'd never harm her. What kind of man are you?"

"The kind who's had his fill. My reasons are none of your concern. When the clock strikes midnight, I'll visit Nayla's chambers. If she's still there, I'll call the guards' attention to your pack's absence and you'll be hunted down and decapitated on the spot." He paused and glanced around. "And I'll get rid of her majesty with my own hands. Believe me, there are more than a few others around here who wouldn't mind helping me do away with her."

Blood boiling with rage, Mace grabbed Fenton's neck and threw him up against the wall, pinning him there. "If you lay a hand on her I'll tear out your goddamn heart with my bare hands." The wolf in him begged to be free at the thought. What he wouldn't do to sink his teeth into this man's throat and rip out his airway. The bastard wouldn't be a threat to Nayla if he were dead, would he?

Fenton scratched at Mace's hands, attempting to free himself but there would be no escape for the fool. "Please," he choked out. "You need me."

"Hearing your last breath is what I need," Mace said, but forced himself to loosen his hold on the man's neck. For his pack's sake. Whether he liked it or not, Fenton could be their only hope to be free again. Mace had to take this opportunity, afraid there might not be another.

Fenton inhaled a breath and coughed, like the weak human he was. "Good choice, Were."

Mace growled and dropped his hands. "I'll be watching out Nayla's balcony. If I see that my pack is released, I'll take her with me, if only to protect her from the likes of you."

Did Nayla have any idea of this mutiny? Probably not. She was too trusting and he hated that he worried for her safety. He loathed that he cared for her but it was pointless to deny the raw truth. Fenton or no, Mace never would have left her. She belonged to him. He only hoped she wouldn't fight her destiny as his mate.

Fenton nodded and straightened his collar. "Like I said, whatever it takes."

Chapter Six

Nayla rushed up the steps as fast as her feet could take her, the music from the Ball becoming a distant sound. As soon as Fenton informed her of Mace's dire injury, she'd shucked her impractical shoes and started running.

How could he be injured? With his strength and immortality, she thought he could withstand anything. But Fenton had seemed so grave when he'd whispered in her ear that her WereSlave had tried to take his life. Mace had slit his own throat in an attempt to decapitate himself.

No. It couldn't be. He'd never leave his pack. He was loyal to them. But would he leave me? Her chest constricted and she carelessly stumbled on the hem of her gown at the top of the stairway, scraping her hands on the hard ground as she fell. Damn it. She didn't have time for her clumsy ways. Mace needs me. Not bothering to dust herself off, she pushed to her feet and continued to her chambers.

No guards were present, but Nayla didn't find it odd since she'd given most of them the night off. The evening of the Harvest Ball was a jolly time for all of Paqualette, whether one was invited to the Ball or not. She assumed the remaining guards were downstairs, watching over the event.

In any case, she'd ordered Fenton to send three up along with the castle's physician. She wouldn't allow Mace to die. He meant too much to her. She only wished she'd seen this coming.

A lock of her hair fell from its tight bun and into her eyes. She shoved it behind her ear and pushed through her door, silently praying that Mace was okay.

The room was dark except for the light of the moon shining through the opened terrace door. Nayla warily stepped inside and searched for any sign of Mace, or, God

forbid, his blood. She saw nothing unusual except for that damn door. The boards had been pulled from it and thrown onto the floor.

What was going on here? And where was Mace? Had he needed to change in order to heal? Or had he finally decided to attempt an escape?

She took a few steps forward but stopped when she heard something much like the scrape of paws on the floor. Her breath halted as fear paralyzed her. A large black werewolf with round, radiant blue eyes stepped through the terrace door and into her chambers.

"Do not fear me." Mace's husky voice came from the beast's mouth. "I won't hurt you, Nayla."

His enormous presence was ominous, as well as the shadow he created, like a nightmare come true. One of these monsters had murdered her parents, tearing out their throats and mercilessly clawing at their bodies. She'd witnessed it all with her own eyes and the memory made her ill.

She couldn't run, she couldn't move at all. Her voice caught in her throat, keeping her from screaming. She'd never felt more helpless and she hated Mace for it. For all of it.

The room was silent except for her gulps of air breaking through her clogged airway. What was he waiting for? Would he kill her now or would he torture her first?

The jet-black wolf stood on its hind legs then, standing as tall as a grown man and Nayla watched, petrified, as his limbs grew longer and his torso shorter. His hair all but disappeared, leaving the long mane on his head. And his face took on a human form. The room filled with the sound of bones grinding and breaking, blood swishing and veins popping.

Until what stood in front of her was the man with whom she'd spent the past fourteen nights. Not a killer, but her lover. A man she'd grown to trust with a degree of intimacy she'd never shared with anyone else, including Stephen.

Even as he frowned, he was the most gorgeous creature she'd ever seen. Solemnly, he walked to her and braced her face. His thumb followed a single tear that had leaked down her cheek. She cringed at first, with the clear image of the wolf still fresh in her mind. How were they one and the same?

"Is this why you dance with another man and not me? Because I frighten you?"

Nayla couldn't tell if he was angry or sad. She was confused, frustrated and she said the first thing she could pull from her muddled thoughts. "Fenton said you attempted to take your life."

"Fenton is evil. Don't ever believe a word he says, do you understand?" His hands lowered to her shoulders and he shook her lightly. "I'm the one you can rely on. Not your councilman and certainly not the man who held you in his arms on the ballroom floor."

"You were there?" Could this get any more perplexing? She detested being misled.

"Yes. Who is he? I need to know." Mace's callused hands slid down her arms and he gathered her against his naked body. He smelled of the cool evening air and pure man. No trace of the wolf was present, making her wonder if she'd hallucinated the entire event.

No. It had been as real as him standing before her now.

She shuddered. "He—he was an old friend."

Mace bowed his head and stared into her eyes, as if searching for something. "Do you love him?"

"No, of course not. Why would you ask me that? What's going on, Mace?" She brought her trembling fingers to his neck to check for any sign of injury. "Did you try to take your life? Answer me now."

He shook his head and peeled her hand from his neck. "I told you Fenton was lying to you." He changed the subject. "Did you kiss that man? When he escorted you outside? What did you do with him out there?"

"Nothing. We walked around the garden and chatted about nonsense. What does that have to do with anything?" Her temper boiled. Obviously she was being deceived, but why? Something was amiss and she needed to know what. "Damn it, Mace, what is going on here?"

"Did he hold your hand? Did he make you laugh?"

"I asked you a question and I need to hear your answer. I was told you tried to take your own life and you clearly did not." Thank God.

Instead, he was standing before her, passion in his expression, interrogating her about another man. How strange that she'd been thinking about him the entire evening? Even as she was dancing with Stephen, she imagined being in Mace's arms, warm and secure. Free from the worry of what anyone thought of her, what her country needed from her. She didn't have to think about any of that when she was with Mace. With just one touch, he made her feel like the center of the universe.

None of that changed the fact that she was lied to, made to believe Mace was dying, when really he was transforming into a beast. What was Fenton's game? And why was Mace playing along?

"Did you want him, Nayla?" he growled. "Too bad if you do. You won't be seeing that man again."

"Your jealousy is illogical and unwarranted." Though she couldn't help but want to calm his worries. She met his piercing gaze and continued. "Not that I should have to explain myself to you but Stephen hasn't meant anything to me for years."

"Don't lie to me, Nayla. I saw how you looked at him, how he made you smile." He grabbed her wrists. "I feel like an idiot for thinking you'd ever see me as anything other than a monster."

"I've been nothing but good to you, Mace. How dare you try to make me feel guilty for enjoying an innocent dance." Her pulse pounded at her temples as his grip on her wrists tightened.

He didn't relent. "Admit you're afraid of me."

"Is that what you want? Do you want to frighten me away? Is that why you tricked Fenton to believe you were hurt, so I would come up here and see you like... like that?" She couldn't even say the word.

His jaw twitched as he stared down at her with what could only be described as resentment. "Let me show you something." He took hold of her arm and guided her toward the open door.

"Wait!" God, was he going to change again?

"Relax, Nayla," he said through gritted teeth. "I'll stay in my human form for your benefit. I don't want to alarm the precious Queen." He picked her up by the waist like a ragdoll, took three long strides and set her on the terrace overlooking the castle grounds. "Look closely. What do you see?"

The terrace wall pressed against her waist as his large solid body fit firmly against her backside. At that moment, she didn't know what Mace was capable of. They were two stories above the hard ground and he was obviously furious. Her heartbeat sped as the uncertainty clashed with her need to trust him. Was it naïveté or instinct assuring her he wouldn't hurt her? But there was always that chance... He was a werewolf after all.

She took in a breath. "This is ridiculous. What am I looking for?" The half moon lit the tops of the surrounding forest trees but underneath was nothing but darkness. Closer to the castle, the ward was empty but for one drunken man singing to himself and stumbling about.

"Watch the drawbridge." His breath was hot against her ear. His hands braced her hips, pressing her backside against him.

Nayla's anger slowly fizzled, but she ignored the familiar heat burgeoning in her belly as she focused her eyes toward the lowered drawbridge. The lights that usually lit the way were out but she could see a few large figures running fast out the castle entrance. "What are they?"

"Don't you see?" His voice lowered, transforming to a sensual tone. "Look harder, Nayla. I want you to see what I see." He skimmed his hands over her waist, slowly up her stomach to cup her breasts with his strong hands. "I want you to feel what I feel."

Her body defied her and she leaned back against his hard abdomen and chest, feeling his solid length, thriving and ready.

He drew her earlobe into his mouth before releasing it. "Do you see?"

"No," she said breathlessly, not caring about his game anymore, even though she should. "Just tell me what's going on, Mace. I want to go to bed with you and forget this entire evening. I thought I'd lost you tonight. I want you to show me you're still here with me."

"I'm here." He squeezed her sensitive breast with one hand while the other traveled down to her mound. He cupped her there and pressed a finger against the fabric, finding her heat.

"Inside, please, now." Not out in plain view of whoever decided to stroll out into the ward. Lord, what would they think of their Queen then?

"No, here." He leaned forward, forcing her to bend over the guardrail. His knee wedged between her legs, separating them, letting his finger find her sensitive clitoris. "You have to trust me, love."

"I will. I promise." She rocked against his hand, wanting more. If she were quiet, no one would think to look up.

"Good," he murmured and gathered her skirt, inching it up until cool air prickled her rear.

She hadn't worn undergarments for the past several days, after learning he'd tear them off of her each time, anyway. They'd grown to be an annoying barrier, not worth the time. She smiled to herself, wondering what her country would think of her impropriety.

But his warm cock against her backside pulled her from her thoughts. He wedged his soft unyielding flesh between her butt cheeks and slid it against her anus. She whimpered, but remembered to keep her voice down.

“Did that human ever fuck you here?” He wet his finger and nudged it against her taut puckered entrance.

She gasped at how sensitive she was there. “Mace?” She turned her head to see his unsmiling face.

“Did he?”

“No. Never.”

“But he did fuck you.” It wasn’t a question. He didn’t wait for a response as he spread her folds and inserted his finger into her drenched pussy.

Her walls clenched against the abrupt entry. He groaned behind her and slid in farther, pressing up against her responsive channel.

“No one will ever have you here again, Nayla. This is mine.” He removed his finger and quickly replaced it with his hard, thick cock. He lunged forward, lodging himself deep inside her, pushing into her tight passage. “And this is yours,” he whispered against her ear. His arm wrapped around her, encompassing her entire body, possessing her.

Nayla couldn’t hold back a moan any longer. The sweet pressure building up inside her burned and twisted, surging up her belly and down her thighs to her toes. “Ah, Mace. Make me come.”

He slid out halfway and drove back in, filling her to the hilt. With his hands now on her hips, he held her against him, not letting her move as his cock crammed against her uppermost depth.

“Yes, yes.” She held tight to the balcony railing and lifted her buttocks high toward him, allowing him even more of her.

"Ah, love." He moved his hand to her butt cheek and rubbed it, squeezed it. "Your ass is ripe and ready for me. Only me."

Nayla closed her eyes and inhaled in as his wet finger found her anus again. Slowly, he pushed past the incredibly taut entrance. Just an inch but her pussy spasmed blissfully at the bold move. "Oh, God, Mace, what are you doing?" Whatever he was doing sent a ripple of joyous sensations through her womb. She sucked in a breath as wave after wave of sensation rolled down her thighs.

"Giving you pleasure. Do you like this?"

She nodded, unable to speak.

"Yes, that's the way, love. You're loosening for me already." He began to work his cock into her pussy in slow rhythm as his finger penetrated her ass, stretching her, shocking her.

She'd never thought she'd enjoy a man's touch there, in such a personal place, but she put her trust in Mace and he wasn't disappointing her. Her juices trickled down the inside of her legs as his slick thick shaft moved in and out of her channel, deep and slow. The steady movement along with his finger in her intimate, sensitive hole sent a warm tingling wash from her chin to her toes. She held tight to the railing, afraid she'd fall over.

"Let go, love. I've got you." Mace strengthened his arm around her, encompassing her completely.

Nayla sighed at the thought of his strength, how he could give her such immense pleasure and keep her on her feet at the same time. How she could trust him with her body. All of her body.

She cried out his name into the night air as another surge of heat rolled through her. "Mace. Oh, God, Yes!"

He groaned. "Good, that's good. Scream my name to the heavens, love. Let them know you're mine."

Her body jolted as the climax spiraled and twisted, careening to the tips of her toes and back to her core, where it exploded into a million sparkles of heat. Her mind was fuzzy and her body weak with spent pleasure. "Come in me, Mace," she whispered. "I'm yours."

"And I am yours, Nayla." He removed his finger and braced her hips again, thrusting deep into her until he groaned again and released his hot cum inside of her quivering pussy. It spurted deep, filling her sensitive channel.

"Oh," she gasped at the wonderfully intimate sensation and leaned her head back against his chest.

Their combined breathing and the distant sound of laughter and music were the only sounds in the air. Mace gathered her limp body tight against him and kissed her cheek. He was still buried hard inside of her, giving her delightful aftershocks.

"Do you see them now, love?" he whispered in her ear. "They wait for us."

She opened her eyes wide as his words soaked in. Just beyond the exterior walls of the castle, right before the forest began, a dozen pair of glowing eyes watched them.

Chapter Seven

Mace made quick work of washing up, then dressing, jerking on his pants and linen shirt. Nayla's paralyzed state of shock wouldn't last long, he was sure. She sat on the edge of her bed and stared at him with her forehead wrinkled and her lips parted, her palms braced on her knees.

He was glad she didn't fight him yet. After she fully realized his plan for her, it would be a different story. He would be taking her from her home, her friends, her country. Away from this comfortable life with servants and guards and into a life as a homeless drifter, out in the rugged elements.

As of this moment, he made an oath, swearing to himself he'd find some land and build her a worthy home. They'd be a family. She'd bear his children. Nothing else mattered as long as she was with him.

His actions were both selfish and necessary. He couldn't leave her here with her own councilman threatening to murder her. How many more wished to see her gone?

His other reasons were less transparent. Nayla had imbedded herself deep in his heart, he couldn't deny. The sting of seeing her dance with her ex-lover had reinforced his feelings. Leaving her behind wasn't an option.

"Mace?" Her soft voice gained his attention.

He wrung out a wet cloth in the basin and brought it to her, taking note of her puzzled stare.

"You have to tell me what's going on."

He swallowed the guilt eating at his gut. "First things first. Lay back and let me wash you. We've made a mess under your dress." He attempted to smile and fell short.

Hesitation flitted across her beautiful face, but she did as he asked and lifted her skirt.

Mace grew hard again at the sight of her creamy bare legs. He grasped her knees and spread them, revealing her pink folds and entrance, swollen from their love-making. With a tender touch, he wiped the inside of her thighs, removing the signs of their combined juices. The sight was so lovely, it was almost a shame to remove it. He'd thoroughly enjoyed claiming her pussy and her ass at the same time. Seeing how much it pleased her had made him crave more and he looked forward to one day penetrating her sweet, tight ass with his cock.

If she'll ever agree to let me touch her again after I take her from her home.

He shoved that idea from his mind and swept the cloth down her mound to her pussy.

"Your pack is free," she said with a shaky voice she so clearly tried to hide. Even after what they'd just shared, he could still notice the fear under her façade. A façade he wanted to break down so he could see the real Nayla.

Mace tore his eyes from his work and was surprised to see her staring up at him with teary eyes. The Queen of Paqualette wasn't as tough as she let on. Though she quickly swiped the evidence away with the back of her hand.

"Yes, love, they are," he said.

"I—I'm happy for them. If they're anything like you..." Her voice faded.

"They're all good-hearted." He hoped she'd see that when she met them outside the dungeon walls in their wolf form.

Inhaling a breath, he finished cleaning her and then leaned down to press a kiss to her pretty mound. Every inch of her was beautiful. A swell of pride filled his chest at knowing Nayla was his. And would be his forever.

Whether she wanted him or not. He'd fight to keep her. He'd fight her entire country if need be. But something told him no one would come looking for her. The bastard, Fenton, would undoubtedly see to that.

She pushed the hem of her dress down and sat up on the bed. "I'm confused, Mace." Her voice broke so she cleared her throat and began again. "Are you leaving me? Is that what this is all about?"

God, didn't she understand? "No, sweetheart, I'm not leaving you. You're not safe here."

"Not safe? What do you mean by that?"

"Your Councilman Fenton has threatened to harm you if I leave without you."

"He what?"

"There's no time to discuss it now."

Her eyes widened, her mouth dropped open as realization overcame her face.

Here it goes. He must stay strong for them both.

"Nayla, I have no other choice. For your protection, I'm taking you with me. And we don't have time to spare. Fenton will be here in a matter of minutes."

"You want me to leave with you?" All color drained from her cheeks. "With your pack? Are you serious?"

"I am," he said as sternly as possible. He'd wasted too much time already. They couldn't stay here any longer. "Now we can walk calmly out the back of the keep together or, if you choose to fight me, I'll throw you over my shoulder and climb down the terrace. Which way do you prefer?"

"I'd rather we talk this through. There's no need for either of us to leave. You can stay here with me, forever. Your pack is free so you don't have to worry." She stood and cupped her soft hand to his jaw. "I want you to stay."

"I belong with my pack, Nayla." He swallowed the knot in his throat. "And you belong with me."

"No." She shook her head. "I'm sorry. I want you as my lover. I want to fall asleep in your arms every night and wake up to your voice." She pursed her lips and her brow creased, stubbornly. "But I cannot go with you, Mace. My country needs me. I can't simply disappear and leave them without a queen."

Heat rose up his neck as anger overtook him. If all she wanted him for was to be her pathetic WereSlave, she was in for a whopping surprise. He would prove to her he was more man than any of her precious humans. He'd find a way to provide for her, to keep her safe, to make her his mate.

He moved in closer to grab her waist.

She tried to step back but he tightened his grip. "What are you doing?"

"We're going down the terrace wall then. Fight me and you'll regret it."

* * * * *

Rain misted down through the trees as Nayla shivered and clung to Mace's neck, taking in as much heat from his body as she could. She'd fought him with every ounce of her energy before giving up. She'd kicked, punched, scratched and bit him but he hadn't showed any pain. He'd only held her tighter and quickened his pace. She'd been furious and frightened and he'd done nothing. He stayed emotionless and cold.

Now, as he ran through the thick forest side-by-side with his werewolves, her only hope was to survive. She knew firsthand what these Weres were capable of. With their large bodies, sharp teeth and fierce claws, there was no stopping the ferocious beasts. She thanked God Mace had remained in his human form. To carry her, she supposed, so she wouldn't escape.

Damn him. Why had she trusted him? She'd been foolish to not see this coming. Well, in the back of her mind, she knew he and his pack would find a way to free themselves. She'd expected that and had wanted it for them at times, when the idea of letting Mace go wasn't overwhelming. But she never thought Mace would force her to go with them.

What could he possibly expect from her? She was only human. How did he think she could live like this?

Another chill coursed through her numbed body and she trembled. She was soaking wet from the rain and the creeks and puddles Mace had run through in the past few hours.

She readjusted in his arms and stiffened her legs around his waist. She pressed her face to his warm neck and breathed in the heat emanating from his body. But it wasn't enough. The wind whipped at her back as he easily kept up his pace with the wolves.

"So cold," she whispered, hoping he'd take mercy on her. He'd ignored all of her pleas thus far.

"We're almost to our destination. Hang on." He surprised her by answering this time, his deep voice delivering a calming effect.

Damn it. He didn't deserve calm. He deserved her anger but a part of her was relieved she didn't have to say goodbye to him. Not when her heart longed for him and her body craved his touch. And she was too exhausted and miserable to work up anything other than a sigh of relief.

She gave in to the overwhelming urge and closed her eyes.

* * * * *

Panic pulsed at Mace's temples when Nayla grew limp in his arms. Hell. Had he pushed her too hard in this weather? He and his pack had run as far and as fast as they could from the castle and now, he slowed them to a stop at the outlying forest of Paquette, deep in the valley, next to the river.

The sun was slowly rising over the horizon, giving them at least one more hour of the moon's energy, but this was as far as he'd take Nayla. She needed to get out of her wet clothes before hypothermia set in. If it hadn't already.

He swallowed his guilt and looked around for shelter. The base of a nearby bluff held a shallow, cave-like opening. It would have to work.

Kaige transformed to human form and approached. "Why do we stop? We still have the power of the moon."

His second-in-command was also his good friend, had been ever since Mace had rescued him from a Vampire slave ring. Kaige had had a torturous life before joining Mace's pack and sometimes it was difficult for his friend to fully give up control to the alpha.

That was when Mace needed to remind him who was in charge. "We stop because I say so," Mace snapped, not in the mood for Kaige's defiant ways. "Check the rock shelter over there for anything that may harm Nayla. I need to get her warm immediately."

"Why the human's so important to you is beyond me," Kaige said, but did as he was ordered. He turned back to wolf form and sniffed out the area.

Mace took that time to order the rest of his pack to hunt for food and start a fire. It would be a long day ahead of them. Then he placed Nayla on the ground and began removing her wet clothes.

Her lips were tinted blue but there was still a bit of color in her cheeks. Fuck. What had he been thinking? He was foolish not to bring extra clothing and necessities from her room. As it was, he worried if she'd have enough in her to survive the rest of the trek.

She stirred as he peeled the fabric from her shoulders. "What...?"

"Shhh. It's okay. I'm going to get you warm but I have to remove these wet clothes."

"The rain is stopping, Mace," Livia, one of the three female pack members, said from behind him. "I'll start the fire now."

"Thank you." Mace carefully finished removing Nayla's dress. Then he took off his own wet clothes and handed everything to Livia. "Could you please make sure these dry? She'll need it tonight."

Livia nodded with a deep frown on her face. "Will you be in trouble for stealing their precious Queen?"

"I didn't steal her. I saved her life." Mace picked Nayla up and held her to his chest. "She'll be my mate, so I'll expect you to respect her. Understood?" He didn't wait for an answer. His word was rule. Anyone who didn't like it could leave at any time and they all knew it.

"The shelter is ready," Kaige said, back in human form. His dark gaze roamed over Nayla's body. "Do you need help getting her warm?"

"Hell, no," Mace growled and pushed past him. In times of need, during the full moon, when the females in his pack craved attention, they'd all shared their bodies. But Mace had no intention of ever sharing Nayla.

Kaige chuckled. "Let me know if you change your mind."

Mace settled Nayla on the dry leafy ground in the shallow indenture of the rock shelter and spread out beside her. He gathered her to his body and rubbed her back, trying to warm her icy skin. "Nayla?" he whispered in her ear. "Wake up for a moment."

She stirred but didn't open her eyes.

"Please, wake up, love. I need to know you're okay." He kissed her chilled lips but she didn't respond. "Nayla." Another round of panic struck him. What had he done? Had he harmed his fragile human mate? God, it had only been a few hours since he'd taken her from her castle.

He continued to rub her skin, then molded to her body, wrapping his leg over her hip.

"Mace, I can't breathe," she murmured. "You're squishing me."

A huge sense of relief overcame him to hear her voice, so much so that he wanted to laugh out loud. But he maintained control, wanting to see if she was truly all right.

He brought his leg down and rested his forehead against hers. A thousand emotions collided as she opened her eyes and met his stare. The rising sun wasn't enough to fully illuminate the cave but he could make out the shape of her eyes and the curve of her petite nose and full lips. Beautiful.

How long until that face transformed to one of anger? Anger he deserved. How stupid he'd been to take her out into the harsh elements. He'd thought he'd been protecting her by forcing her from the castle. Instead, he might have done more damage than good.

"Are you all right, love?" he whispered as his heart filled with a passion he hadn't felt in years.

She didn't answer, allowing a torturous amount of time to pass while her gaze took in his expression and then the cave around them.

"Talk to me." He braced her cheeks and forced her to look at him again. "You have to believe I hadn't meant to harm you. I'd forgotten how feeble humans can be."

"Feeble?" A tiny smile twitched at her lips. "Is that your attempt to win me over with this plan of yours?" Her voice was still weak.

"I thought I'd lost you. I hate that I allowed this to happen."

"I'm fine, Mace. Just exhausted and cold. But I'm also upset. You were stubborn and you wouldn't listen to reason. I'm not one of your pack members and you're certainly not my leader."

There was the anger he was waiting for. Though he had to admit her words didn't sit well with him. "No, I'm not your leader." He kept his voice as even as possible. "But you are my woman, my mate. Let's not forget that."

She tensed in his arms. "I don't belong to anyone. Don't you forget that. And why am I naked?"

He stifled a growl. Obviously, she was gaining her strength back. Before he could respond, she shocked him by attempting to push him away.

To hell with that. He wouldn't be rejected by this woman he'd given his heart to. It had taken over a century to find her and he wasn't about to allow her to deny him.

* * * * *

Nayla shoved at his chest again but, of course, he wouldn't budge. He was solid steel. More than a man, he was a Were. A fact that surprisingly heated her insides. He was strong. Unrelenting. Powerful. Demanding. Untamable. And hers.

But would she allow herself to be tamed by him?

Never.

He grabbed her wrists and kept her from repeating the action, which infuriated her even more. How dare he try to confine her?

"Let me go right this instant, Mace Quinton."

"Not until we have this little argument settled," he said through gritted teeth. His bold blue eyes glinted with determination.

"There's nothing to settle." She jerked her hands in an attempt to escape but it was ineffective. He held her tight.

"Stop fighting me, Nayla. I want you and you will be mine. Outside your castle walls. Outside your country's watchful eyes. You will give in to me." He moved on top of her and wedged himself between her thighs.

Though her heart and body wanted to concede, her temper rose. She wouldn't be forced to do anything. She squirmed and kicked and nearly pulled her hands free.

"Stop." He readjusted his grip on her wrists and pinned them to the ground above her head. "Stop, Nayla." His voice softened as well as his expression. "I don't wish to fight you. You're weak from the trek and I'm deeply sorry for that. But this battle must end."

"I didn't start—"

"Nayla, love," he whispered in her ear so sweetly, she had to take in a breath.

"I'm listening."

"Let me have you. Please."

Her heart drummed a beat so loud it reached her head. He was right. She was too tired to fight. And a large part of her didn't want to anymore.

Not when his warm lips pressed against her neck. Not when his tongue licked her thumping pulse. Certainly not when the weight of his cock sat solidly against her pussy, making her body react. Wetness pooled between her thighs and her nerves tingled with anticipation.

One glance around the cave assured her no one could see them from the outside. They had their privacy, their own hideaway. There was no one to witness her submission. No one to see the Queen yielding to her WereSlave.

WereSlave? Huh. Funny how she no longer liked that term. It didn't suit Mace. Not even close. He'd warned her from the start he wouldn't be her slave. How naïve she was not to believe him.

Perspiration moistened her cheeks and she was surprised to find heat had taken the place of cold, warming her from her bones to her fevered skin. She heaved out a sigh and relaxed her body, letting her heart have its way, if only for a moment. A glimpse of a life with Mace as her husband flittered through her mind. It was a mere fantasy, she knew, but God help her if she didn't fall in love with the idea. No matter how hard she fought her feelings, deep down she wanted to be Mace's wife. His partner. She wanted to lay with him at the end of the day, knowing their lives would forever be entwined. He would be hers and she his. And no one and nothing would stand in their way. Together, they could be a force to be reckoned with.

If only she weren't a Queen, responsible for her country and he a drifting Were, responsible for his pack. If only they could have a common path.

His mouth traveled down her chest, licking and kissing a heated trail to her swollen breast. The long locks of his hair, still damp from the rain, prickled her skin with its skimming touch. She hissed in a breath as his lips brushed her nipple. It beaded so

painfully tight she swore it would burst if he didn't give it his attention. When he drew the nub into his hot mouth, a sharp surge of warmth shot straight to her pussy and she bit into her lip to keep from screaming.

She watched his handsome face as he sucked on her bosom with a hungry eagerness. His tanned face was slightly stubbled, softly scratching her pale flesh. The angle of his strong jaw tensed as he drew her harder into his mouth. How had she ended up here with this god of a man appreciating her body? Was it luck or misfortune? She didn't want to know.

His grip loosened on her wrists, freeing her, as he edged down her body. Moist, firm lips seared her belly then moved lower to gently kiss her mound. A low growl rumbled from his throat, reverberating across her body. She shivered at the mixture of aggression and tenderness, as if he were having a difficult time containing his lust.

"I'm so hungry for you," he said in a deep, penetrating voice that she felt from her ears down to her aching pussy. His tongue slipped through her folds to taste her clitoris.

"Ah." She arched her back and spread her legs wide, needing so much more.

"Is this what you want, love? For me to fuck you with my mouth?"

"Yes." She gulped and attempted to calm her breathing.

"Yes, what?" He flicked her with another teasing lick.

Damn him. Did he want to see her beg?

Fine. Whatever it took.

"Yes, I've never wanted you more. Please, I beg you."

"Ah, love, you don't need to beg." He hit her with one of his devastating smiles. "You just need to desire it, that's all. Now, lay your head back. I'm going to make you feel so good you'll forget where we are."

She didn't dare argue. She dropped her head onto the hard ground and waited for the pleasure she'd grown accustomed to receiving from this man. A pleasure she never wanted to lose.

He gripped her waist and tilted her hips up for a better view. His breath was hot against her flesh as he breathed in her scent. She loved that he used his senses when making love to her. How he took the time to linger and enjoy her body. To be desired so thoroughly, so intensely, made her inhibitions dissolve.

Give in to him? Let him have her? Did she even have a choice?

She loved him. She loved everything about him.

He spread her folds with his thumbs and dragged his tongue along her pussy to her clitoris. Once, twice and again. Then he flicked it along the sensitive nub, driving her mad. The tingling sensation built up in her core. She dug her heels into the dirt and arched up higher. Whimpers escaped her lips as he slanted his tongue into her pussy and firmly fucked her entrance.

"Ah, Mace. You're so good." She clasped her hands over her breasts and massaged the soft mounds, pinching her nipples.

"That's it, Nayla. Pleasure yourself." He eased her bottom onto the ground and moved over her. The heat of his body covered her as his mouth found hers. His kiss was lusty and urgent, as was her response. She sucked his tongue into her mouth, tasting her own earthy flavor mixed with his natural enchanting essence. The combination was something to savor. Heavenly. Addictive.

His cock pressed against her ripe pussy. He slid it along her center, teasing and tempting.

"Please, fuck me, Mace." She reached up to push his damp hair behind his ears so she could clearly see his face. His leaden eyes stared back at her. The brilliant blue irises flickered with a promise of ecstasy while his lips curved into a devilish half-smile.

"Give me your hand." He grasped her palm and sat up briefly, moving her hand between her thighs. "I want you to feel me making love to you."

Nayla knew all too well what he was up to. He was taking delight in mesmerizing his prey. He wanted her to feel the tangible evidence of her giving in to him outside her castle walls. He was taking her on his terms, in his arena and having a wicked time of it too.

And she didn't give a damn.

Her mind was floating somewhere above them, useless, while her body and heart took charge. She cupped her mound and allowed her fingers to bracket her pussy's entry. His hardened shaft was silky and firm as it slid into her oh-so slowly, her fingers brushing the texture of him and her slick channel taking him in inch by inch.

He filled her completely until his tightened testicles pressed against the back of her fingers. Her pussy wept with joy at having him inside her so fully. He prodded her innermost wall and her womb reacted, spiraling and coiling. Heating and sparking every one of her nerves.

"Mace," she moaned. "Oh, God."

"Yes, love. Let me know how it feels. Give me all of yourself."

She slid her other hand down his back to his firm ass and squeezed. "You can have me. Just, please, continue."

He chuckled and kissed her lips. Then slowly eased his cock from her pussy. Her fingers grazed his slippery hard shaft and she could almost swear he pulsed against her touch. He pulled out until she felt the ridge of his head, then he drove back in, faster this time.

"Do you like how I feel when I'm fucking you, Nayla?" His voice was rough, wild.

"Yes," she said, breathless, her body humming. "I love it. I want more." She dug her nails into his backside, urging him to continue.

"Of course." He tugged her arms up and pinned her hands above her head again.

Any protest she might have had scrambled away as he began pumping into her quivering pussy. The spiraling orgasm that had begun came back with a vengeance as

he glided into her welcoming channel. She clenched down on his erection as he entered her, indulging in how his cock curved in just so. Up and out, in and down. He hit her G-spot over and over, winding her insides.

Her breath came in pants. "Yes. Oh, God, yes!"

She wrapped her legs around his and met his thrusts, earning her a feral groan from deep in his chest. Her hips ground against him and a raging storm rolled through her from the back of her eyelids to her core. Lightning pinpricked her nerves and her womb melted. She felt her body tense then slack as she rode the tantalizing currents.

He shuddered as he came into her, pushing her through one last crashing wave. She crumpled onto the ground and smiled, almost laughed, at how her body liquefied under his command.

"My mate." He nuzzled into her neck. "You smell delicious after you cum. Did you know that?" His eyes were closed as he crawled down her body, his nose and lips grazing her skin.

"What are you doing, silly?" She giggled yet struggled to keep her eyes open. The exhaustion had taken its toll, along with the exquisite orgasm Mace had just given her. But she wanted to stay awake, to savor this moment before the harsh reality took its place.

"Just want a taste of you. My dessert, if you will."

She laughed and her heart swelled. No, there was no doubting her love for him.

His warm tongue lapped at her pussy, licking their tangible passion as if it were the finest chocolate. Delightful aftershocks tingled at her core and she sighed with contentment.

"Mmm," he murmured and moved a little lower, shocking her. His tongue teased her sensitive anus, flicking and laving at her entrance.

A new and fabulous sensation built in her center and any self-conscious thoughts fizzled. "Mace," she said, holding back a whimper. "Do you want me there?"

He kissed her responsive flesh before smiling up at her. "Yes, very much so. But not today. You need your rest."

She bit back her disappointment. "Will you lay with me?"

"I will. Until you fall asleep." He moved to spread out next to her. His strong arm held her close.

She snuggled up against his steely body, feeling safe in his arms. For now.

Chapter Eight

Nayla sat by herself in front of the campfire watching and waiting for Mace to come back from his trek. He'd left her with a kiss and a promise that he'd return well before sunrise. When she'd asked him where he was going, he'd refused to answer, only telling her that she'd be safe and warning her not to attempt an escape.

A new surge of anger flamed her cheeks and she crushed another dry leaf in her hand. Confused and irritated, she wondered for the hundredth time how he could go from warm and adoring to commanding and superior in a matter of moments. Add the fact that he'd left her alone with the three females from his pack and she might as well forget sleeping. She'd gotten only a couple hours of rest after the encounter in the rock shelter.

Her insides heated at the memory of Mace's unrelenting passion. She couldn't deny her love for him no matter how angry he made her. No matter that he'd taken her from her home.

Her home. Another emotion, sadness, took hold of her but she held back the tears burning at the back of her eyes. She'd stay strong. She was still Queen of Paqualette, after all, and crying wasn't an option.

She certainly hadn't cried when Livia had woken her abruptly and helped her wash up and dress—per Mace's orders. The Were hadn't seemed happy about the task and Nayla had had to bite her tongue to keep from having it out with the female wolf. She wasn't used to being treated as a commoner—no, less than a commoner.

But then Nayla remembered the harsh reality—the reason behind Livia's anger. Nayla had imprisoned her pack, leaving them for dead in the castle's dungeon. She couldn't help but wonder if she'd ever be forgiven for her ignorance.

Or if they wanted revenge.

A chill crept up her spine but she didn't dare glance around to catch the attention of the three Weres left at camp. Would they want her punished for her actions? Why wouldn't they? Wouldn't she do the same for her people?

How would she have known any better, though? Her only experience with a werewolf had left her an orphan. And all the tales she'd heard of the savage war with the Weres hadn't helped with her judgment then—or now.

The sound of leaves crunching startled her from her thoughts and from the corner of her eye, she saw one of them approach in its wolf form. She shivered and tried to gulp down the heavy knot of fear in her throat. What was taking Mace so long?

The sandy-haired werewolf wasn't as large as the others. Nayla guessed it was Blanca, the petite blonde with the cute heart-shaped face and amber eyes that reminded Nayla of autumn leaves. Blanca had been the kindest to Nayla so far. Well, she'd been the one who didn't seem to loathe her very presence.

"Did you eat?" Blanca's usual soft voice came out in a gravelly tone.

Nayla relaxed a little and faced the Were, who looked more like a friendly dog. "Yes, thank you for asking." The cooked rabbit churned in her stomach but at least they hadn't expected her to eat it raw.

Blanca sat on her haunches close to Nayla's side. Nayla had an urge to reach out and pet the soft coat of fur, but thought the Were might find it condescending.

"Are you frightened of me, Nayla?" Blanca's amber eyes met her dead on.

How could she answer this without offending? Before she could stop herself, she began to blather. "I'm only fearful of what I don't know. I had an awful experience as a child. It skewed my judgment of Weres and," she blew out a calming breath and straightened her posture, "I apologize to you and your pack for hurting and imprisoning you. I hope that someday you can forgive me."

Blanca snickered. "Mace likes you enough for all of us. His approval of you is all I need."

"I see."

"I only hope you don't take it for granted."

Nayla picked up another dry leaf from the ground and crumpled it between her fingers. "What do you mean, exactly? What would I take for granted?"

"Don't you know?" One side of Blanca's black lips quirked up, showing a sharpened tooth. "Mace hasn't explained what you mean to him?"

Nayla shook her head and listened carefully to what Blanca had to say next. Any insight to the crazy path her life had taken the past twenty four hours would be much welcomed.

"He's claimed you as his mate, Nayla. When you made love on the balcony, the pack witnessed as he promised he is yours and you are his." Blanca cocked her head. "For the rest of eternity, Mace will be faithful to you. He'll protect, fight and care for you. He'll honor and do right by you."

The meat in Nayla's stomach roiled uneasily. At the same time, her heart fluttered with hope. For the first time, she dared to ask herself if she could give up her country to be with Mace. With his pack.

Blanca let out a husky laugh. "It's not all roses and sunshine, though. He must be your equal, your partner in life, through all hardships. You must give all yourself to him, as well, and forget about your past."

And relinquish her duty to her country? "What if I can't do that?"

Blanca sighed. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask that. He's never chosen a mate before. He'd once told me about a wife he'd had as a human. Her name was Elizabeth. The sickness that had changed us into Weres killed his woman and their unborn child."

"That's terrible." Nayla had heard tales of the epidemic that struck a quarter of the world's population over a hundred years ago, killing most and transforming others into werewolves. To think Mace had at one time been human...and that he'd loved another

woman. She attempted to push away the irrational jealousy, but couldn't help but ask, "And he's never loved anyone else?"

Blanca stared up at the moon, basking in it and continued. "He told me he was so heart-stricken, he'd become a recluse, journeying across the continent. Many years later he found and rescued me and Kaige from a Vampire slave ring. He put us under his protection, made us family. Over the decades, he allowed few others into this pack. Some would stay. Some would go. But," Blanca peeked at Nayla from the corner of her amber eye, "he never once claimed a mate. Until you."

Before Nayla had a chance to digest that information, another Were crept into the camp's circle. Out of habit, she tensed and wrapped her arms around herself protectively. But, of course, the Were didn't attack her. The Weres in Mace's pack had proved to be harmless so far.

Livia settled at the other side of the fire. "If you want my opinion—"

"She doesn't," Blanca interrupted.

Livia flashed her teeth and growled. "The Queen Bee can speak for herself. Honestly, I think she's better off sitting pretty on her little throne with her servants at her beck and call. She's not right for the Were life. Mace just hasn't looked past his lust to see that. Yet."

Nayla would've been angry at Livia's comments but she'd always thrived on a challenge. "I can promise you, wolf, I'm all the woman Mace needs."

"Until the next full moon when you find him with me." Livia's words added grease to the fire burning in Nayla's heart.

She stood and faced the Were, ready to fight for Mace. "You little beast. Who do you think you are?"

The Were showed her teeth and growled, causing Nayla to step back. What was she thinking, provoking the wolf?

"Livia," Blanca barked. "Mace chose her as his mate. Have some respect." She turned to Nayla. "Don't let her get to you. She's only jealous she wasn't chosen. She's wanted to be his mate since the day she joined us five years ago."

Another growl rumbled in Livia's chest. She arched her back, threatening to pounce. Nayla froze as horrific memories of blood, torn flesh and horrible loss flashed through her mind. Her breath sat heavy in her chest, burning her lungs.

Blanca quickly blocked Nayla's view of the raging Were, but nothing could stop the fear pulsing at her temples.

"Livia!" Mace's jarring voice roared threateningly from deep within the shadows of the forest outlining the camp.

Livia yelped out a whine similar to a child being scorned. "I wasn't going to do anything," she pleaded. "She provoked me."

Blanca chuckled quietly as she eased back and sat by Nayla again. "This should be good," she whispered only loud enough for Nayla to hear. "Livia's a goner. I've been waiting five long years for this."

"What?" God, was Mace going to hurt Livia? Because of her? She wouldn't let him. She'd seen enough violence in her lifetime. And she refused to sit back and watch it happen again.

* * * * *

Mace transformed into human form as Nayla ran toward him, her eyes wide and wild. Oh, hell. What had Livia done? He left his companions behind and met her halfway to the campfire.

With all her body, she jumped up on him and nearly tackled him to the ground. He staggered but stood strong as she wrapped her legs around his waist and clung to him, vulnerable and human.

"Nayla." He held her tight against him and inhaled her scent, a mixture of Livia's pine soap and salty tears. Tears? He smoothed his hands over her body, checking for injuries. "Love, are you hurt?"

She shook her head against his neck as her body shook with sobs. "Take me away from here so they don't see me cry," she whispered. "Please."

Mace shot Livia a warning glare and she cowered. He'd have to deal with her later, after he comforted Nayla. If he'd had any idea his mate would be in any danger, he never would've left her. He'd counted on his female Weres to protect her from harm while he was away. If he couldn't trust Livia, she'd have to leave the pack for good. There was no way around it.

He carried Nayla to a patch of grass out of the camp's sight and settled down with her in his lap. With careful hands, he lifted her chin and examined her face.

She pushed him away and hit his chest. "I'm so angry with you I could scream." More tears streamed down her pale cheeks.

"I'm sorry, Nayla. I didn't know Livia would be a threat to you."

"That's not it." She gulped down a sob and his heart ached. "That's not why I'm mad."

He didn't want to ask what caused her anger. He already knew and there wasn't anything he would or could do about it. She belonged with him. He refused to give her up.

Even if he had to let her go temporarily— No, he wouldn't discuss that with her yet. He'd spent his whole Were life lonely and incomplete. Now that he had in his arms what had been missing for all those years... Now that he found love again, he couldn't bear to part with it. With her.

Tell her you love her.

Mace hadn't spoken those words in over a hundred years. They were lost in the recesses of his mind. They'd been unnecessary. Pointless. Until now. He drew out a

breath. Did she need to hear them? His human mate, so frail and small in his arms, yet so strong-minded and stubborn.

"Nayla—" he began but his thoughts melted away when she reached up and cradled his jaw.

She had determination in her glistening green eyes. "I won't allow you to harm Livia."

"What?" Not what he'd been expecting to hear and it tore the hell out of his pride. "What do you think of me, Nayla? After all our time together, do you still believe me to be a monster?"

"No," she said right away, alleviating some of his pain. "I don't know. I heard the tone of your voice. And how Livia whined. Then Blanca said, well, she acted as if Livia was going to be punished."

"She will be. I intend to banish her from my pack for frightening you like that. You're my mate. You're to be respected."

Nayla's shoulders visibly relaxed. "Banish her? That's it?"

"That's a lot. A Were is privileged to be a member of my pack. To be under my protection." He didn't know why he felt the need to defend himself. It wasn't something he was used to.

"Of course." She swiped away her tears and straightened her shoulders, always the regal Queen. "I suppose I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions."

"No, you shouldn't have." He shoved down the irritation when she licked her lips, making them moist for kissing. "Yes, I would kill for you," he said, hunger unconcealed in his voice. "But only if it were necessary. I'm not a monster, Nayla. Will you ever see that?"

"I see it, Mace. I do." She took the edge of her dress and wiped her moist cheeks, removing any trace of the weakness she'd just shown. She rotated her body slightly and the heat of her pussy brushed over his thigh, tempting him.

The wolf in him yearned to press her onto her stomach on the grass and take her the way an animal would, the way he longed to. But that would have to wait for a little while longer. He hadn't left her alone for hours upon hours today without a purpose. No, there was a reason for Mace's every action. And he hoped his actions today would prove to be wise.

He gathered her soft curves against him and pecked her lips. "I have a surprise for you."

Chapter Nine

Nayla knew something wasn't quite right when she counted thirteen wolves lounging around the campground rather than the usual dozen. Next to the Were named Kaige sat an unfamiliar salt-and-pepper-haired wolf. She stopped short and tugged at Mace's hand. "What's going on? Who is that?"

He chuckled and leaned toward her ear. "Very perceptive. I could introduce you but I'm certain you've already met."

"I've met him?" She asked, but Mace had already left her side and was headed toward Livia, who cowered as he neared.

Nayla clasped her hands in front of her and stayed a safe distance from the strange Were. There was something very familiar about his eyes. And as he stepped away from the pack and drew closer, Nayla wasn't frightened. He held his head down, as if ashamed and bowed at her feet. Well, as much as a large animal could.

"Who are you?" she asked, unable to hide her curiosity.

"Forgive me, my Queen. It is I, your loyal guard, Saul."

"Saul?" Confusion mixed with the excitement of seeing someone familiar, someone she thought she might never see again. Nayla draped her arms around his massive neck, forgetting all propriety. "Saul, how is it you?"

"Are you well, my Queen?" he said quietly against her ear.

"Yes, I am." She pulled back and examined his face, taking in every detail. It truly was her Saul. "I'm fine. Look at you. How is this possible?"

He lowered his eyes again. "I apologize for my deceitfulness, my Queen. I've failed to disclose that I am part Were."

"Saul." She ran her fingers over his silver fur. "I had no idea. Why didn't you ever tell me?" Someone so close to her, someone she trusted, had always been what she'd feared most, what she'd most hated.

"My Queen —"

"Call me Nayla. You're my family. You've always been my family."

"Nayla," he said hesitantly, "I've been torn between two battling worlds my whole life. To live without fear, I needed to choose one. My option was, of course, limited. Weres were not welcomed into human society. Not since long before the war."

Nayla blinked her eyes to keep from tearing up. The man had always been a father figure to her. What an awful life he'd had to live, denying his true self. And to think she'd been part of the reason. "I don't want you to hide it anymore. I want you to be you, whether Were or human." She glanced over her shoulder at Mace, who now stood alone. Livia was nowhere to be seen. "How did you find me?"

"I saw Fenton freeing the wolves and I knew something was amiss. When I went to your room and you weren't there, I followed your scent. I met Mace halfway here. He said he was on the way back to the castle."

"Why would he —" she began, but stopped when she felt Mace's looming presence behind her, his warmth and wild scent encompassing her. He'd moved so quickly and quietly, she hadn't seen him coming.

He wrapped his arm around her waist and gathered her against his body. "I want you to be safe, Nayla. And after seeing you succumb to the cold last night, I can't ask you to continue on with the journey without a known destination."

Her mouth dried up and her pulse sped. "What do you mean? Did you bring Saul to take me back?"

"It's not that simple, love."

"You're giving me up because I got a little chilled?" She wasn't sure why she was so hurt by the idea. Isn't this what she'd wanted? To go back to her normal life? Her

feelings were unbalanced. Somehow, someway, Mace had maneuvered into her heart. And she didn't know if she could give him up so easily.

"No. I'll tell you a hundred times, Nayla, if that's what it takes. You're my mate. Nothing will stand in the way of that." He turned her and held her by the shoulders. "Your councilman Fenton is dangerous. With his threats to take your life, I had no choice but to take you with me."

"So you wouldn't have otherwise," she whispered. Her heart pinched tight as his words sunk in deep.

"I don't know." He cupped her face and pierced her with his brilliant blue eyes. "As much as I want you with me, I can't deny that drifting isn't a life for a human woman."

"I can handle it." Had she just said that? She bit her lip to keep from saying more. Did she really want to continue to travel endlessly through cold weather and rain? Did she want to give up her position of Queen? She shook her head. All she knew was she didn't want to lose Mace. She loved him and had no intention of saying goodbye anytime soon.

His Adam's apple bobbed unsteadily as he continued to study her face. "Saul has promised he'll dispose of Fenton and whoever else dares to threaten you. As soon as I find a home for us, I'll come for you."

Tears burned her eyes but she stayed strong. "Come back with me."

"I won't leave my pack without a leader."

"Bring them with you." Determination pushed all doubts from her mind. "Paquette is my country and I welcome your pack." She smiled as every piece began to fit together. "Saul?"

"Yes, my, uh, Nayla."

"The country respects you. If they realize a Were has been living amongst them for all these years and that I've trusted you as my guard, then they're bound to accept Mace's pack. Don't you think?"

"I don't know. I suppose it could help."

She turned back to Mace. "There's a thousand acres of undeveloped land in the eastern section of Paqualette. A generous river runs through it and I've heard the soil is rich. I want to give that land to you and your pack. You can finally have a home of your own. All I ask is that the Weres obey Paqualette law just as the humans do. There can't be any separation or it won't work."

Mace looked at Kaige, his second-in-command. The Were had seemed very important to Mace, possibly a good friend, Nayla had observed during their time at the castle. But did the Were have a say in this pack? She didn't quite understand the dynamics yet.

Kaige transformed and, just like every other time Nayla had seen him in his human form, he left her a little breathless. He was almost as handsome as Mace, but in a carefree way with his long brown hair unkempt, sitting in clumps that hung down his broad shoulders. His smoky gaze met Mace's and he murmured something in their secret Were language.

Mace shook his head, apparently dismissing whatever his friend had said, then turned back to Nayla. He squeezed her shoulders gently but gave no sign of acceptance. Doubt shadowed his eyes. "Your offer is very generous but I can't accept your charity."

"Charity? Mace, isn't this what you've been searching for? A home for your pack? Equality and peace with the humans?"

"Equality?" He scoffed. "That'll be the day." He dropped his hands to his sides and cursed under his breath as he walked away from her.

Rage built up inside and she followed him, determined to win this argument. "Does my offer offend you so? Do you have any idea what I've overcome to even consider it?"

He stopped at the riverbed and whipped around, cutting her with his dark gaze. "Tell me, Nayla. What did we scary Weres do to the precious Queen of Paqualette?"

She stifled the memories rushing to her mind. This wasn't the time to show weakness, but Mace needed to know her story. "Paqualette has always been a peaceful

country. We tried to remain neutral during the Great War. Our soldiers stayed home to protect our boundaries and didn't allow any Were to step over. But it wasn't enough. One night, a bloodied, battered Were broke into my home and murdered my mother and father. He tore them apart while I watched, helpless and terrified. There was nothing I could do to save them." She stopped to take in a calming breath. The memory was still too fresh in her mind.

"Nayla. I'm so sorry." Mace's voice was a gruff whisper. Her stomach churned. She'd never told anyone but her physician about what else had happened that day. But Mace needed to know. If he chose not to want her after he heard the story, then so be it.

"His fur was covered in blood as he approached me. I was curled up in the corner of the room, paralyzed with fear. I couldn't even gather the nerve to scream, to yell at him for murdering my parents. I couldn't fight back. I was a coward."

"You were a child." He grabbed her wrist, but she twisted away, unable to feel his touch at that moment.

"I was a young teenager." She gulped down her anxiety and continued. "He laughed at me then and...and, in his dirty, foul human form, he hurt me so savagely that I—" Her voice betrayed her and she broke into a sob.

A violent growl ripped from Mace's throat and Nayla winced. She gathered the courage to look into her lover's eyes to say the most important part.

"I can't have children." She held her stomach and a familiar knot twisted deep in her womb as she recounted the memory. She'd tried to forget, tried to make it not matter. But it did matter. Now that her future wasn't only her own, it mattered more than she ever wanted it to.

Shame consuming her, she looked away from Mace's watchful gaze and continued. "I was a virgin, but he didn't care. He had his way with me and made it so I can never bear children." She sucked in a breath and slowly looked up to see his reaction. "So can you understand that when I was made Queen, I swore I would never allow such a travesty to happen to anyone else in my kingdom?"

Mace's nostrils flared, his eyes narrowed and his muscles tensed to make him seem at least a foot taller. "I'll find him, Nayla." His lips tightened as he bared his teeth. "I swear to you I will find him and make him pay for hurting you."

She believed him and honestly wouldn't have minded seeing that bastard punished at the hands of her lover. But the past had been settled in the past. There was no one left to penalize. "He was already found and brought to justice for killing my parents, as was his pack." By the Paqualette Guard, so it was told. They'd hunted down the pack during daylight hours and decapitated every one of them.

Mace clenched his hands so hard, she heard his knuckles crack. "I'm very sorry you went through that," he said through gritted teeth, obviously holding back his rage. "Is there anything I can do, Nayla, to make it up to you?"

She swallowed and looked away from his fierce stare. "That day is the reason I had you captured and imprisoned. I was wrong to judge all Weres by the actions of one, I see that now and I want to make it right. I trust you, Mace. I trust your pack. And I want to show the people of Paqualette what I see in you."

He stepped closer and she allowed him to wrap his arms around her. In his arms, she felt safe. In his arms, she could almost forget.

He kissed the top of her head and drew her close. "Nayla, my Nayla, had I known you then, I would've protected you and your family." His hand cupped her cheek and his muscles relaxed.

Nayla leaned into his palm, welcoming the warmth, needing it.

He stared at her for a long moment and she hoped he wasn't rethinking wanting to have her as his mate.

She'd never be able to bear his children.

Finally, he spoke in a low voice. "Are you okay?"

"I am." She ran her fingers down his chest. "I would be better if you agreed to come back with me."

"I won't be your WereSlave."

"I know. I would never ask that of you now." She watched hopefully as the hard lines of his face softened some. Her fingertips gingerly circled his bare chest.

"I won't live apart from you, Nayla. You're my mate. You'll live with me in a home that I build for us." He held her hand still above his heart.

"The castle could be our home. We have everything we need there." Joy was quickly smothered by reality. "But I'm afraid there is a law, stopping me from having a husband."

He shook his head. "I don't need your country's approval. In the eyes of my people, you're already mine."

His. But what of love? Did Weres declare their love? Or was she a means to an end? She couldn't help wonder if Mace knew she'd offer land to his pack. Did she really mean something to him or was this all just a well organized effort to find a home for his people?

No. Of course he cared for her. She saw it in his adoring gaze. She felt it in the way he made love to her so passionately.

"You'll change the law. If their approval means so much to you." He tilted his head. "If I mean something to you."

Change the law? It seemed so simple. She'd never considered it before. She'd always thought her country deserved her individual attention, that the law was there for a good reason. She'd been prepped and prepared to be a selfless servant until her last breath. Certainly having Mace at her side as her consort—no, her King, an equal ruler—would only help her be a better Queen.

"The council will have to agree."

"They will. I'll see to it."

Nayla didn't want to ask what he meant by that. "Then you agree? You'll come back with me?"

His jaw visibly ticked as he nodded. "Yes, I agree."

* * * * *

She'll never bear my children. Mace let the knowledge sink in as he carried her in his arms through the dark forest. He'd spent countless years dreaming of finding a mate and having the family he'd wanted since he'd been human. A dream that had been torn from him just as his wife had been.

He'd lost everything with this plague that had transformed him into every man's enemy. A Were. A drifter.

Now that he'd found Nayla, he refused to let her go. Children or no, he'd love and protect her. He'd never allow anyone to hurt her again. And as they traveled closer to danger, to Fenton and the unknown, he held her tighter to his body.

She nuzzled up to his neck, her arms enfolded loosely around his shoulders, her legs wrapped around his waist. She hadn't spoken a word since they'd started their trek back to the castle.

Her body trembled slightly, but not as she had the night before. Tonight there was no rain. There was barely a breeze as he ran alongside his pack.

"Are you all right, love?" He hoisted her higher up his abdomen.

"I don't know." Her soft voice ruffled against his ear. "I'm...I suppose I'm nervous."

Mace clenched his jaw. Is this when she changed her mind? He couldn't say he hadn't seen it coming. However, her anxiety was irrelevant. Weres mated for life. She'd have to accept that. But for now he'd allow her to think she had a choice in the matter. It would make their lives easier. "Do you wish to stop?"

"Only for a moment. So I can stretch."

"Of course." He carefully set her on the ground and called for his pack and Saul to continue without them. They'd most likely need some time alone.

Her cheeks were rosy and her green eyes glistened as she looked up at him and gave him a brave smile. So lovely and sweet. She licked her plump lips, swiped loose curls from her cheek and perched her tiny hands on her waist.

God, she was the most beautiful creature he'd ever seen.

His cock grew stiff at just the sight of her. And her eyes dipped to watch as he grew hard for her.

"Mace." She quickly met his gaze again and drew out a long breath. "Here?"

He grinned. "Anywhere."

She let out a heartfelt laugh and the tense lines in her forehead eased. "You're insatiable."

"Only for you."

Her smile twisted anxiously. "I want to tell you something, Mace. Before we go any farther."

"There's no need. There's only our destiny. We move forward and never look back. That's all there is to do, love."

"Love." Her lips flattened and her eyes lost their sparkle. "Why do you call me that? Do you, you know, do you feel that way for me?"

"Isn't that obvious?" he asked too sharply.

She took a step back as if he'd slapped her.

Hell. What was his problem? Why couldn't he just say the damn words? He knew they mattered to a woman like Nayla. They'd mattered to his wife so many years ago. He'd said them freely and often back then. Until she lay on her deathbed.

"I suppose we don't have to speak about this now. You probably have a lot on your mind." She straightened her dress and looked toward the trees. "I was only curious."

Mace opened his mouth to speak, to force out the words that teased the tip of his tongue, but stopped when a strange scent seized his attention. He jerked his head to the

right then the left. Where was it coming from? Why hadn't he heard footsteps? Had he been so wrapped up in this woman he'd missed something? Damn.

No breeze meant the scent was near.

Too near.

He looked back at Nayla and saw that she'd taken steps away from him. "Nayla." He moved toward her, to grab her and run.

"Stop right there." Fenton stepped out from behind a tree like a panther in the night and captured Nayla in his arms. A knife pressed to her neck. "I'll kill her if you try anything, Were."

Chapter Ten

He'd kill her anyway.

Nayla sensed it deep in her bones. Fenton's fury was a tangible force, evil and barely contained. His body shook as he held her to his chest, the blade jabbing too roughly against her skin. A thick drip of blood sloped down her neck and puddled at her collarbone.

She didn't dare breathe or move, even though her racing heart demanded it. Instead, she concentrated on Mace. The moon glistened against the whites of his eyes and cast shadows down his face. His fists clenched and unclenched at his sides. Every muscle on his naked body was tense, ready to pounce. He looked fierce and deadly.

It was no wonder Fenton shook. The bastard was going to die tonight. Whether she lived or not, Mace would surely kill him. With his bare hands, no doubt.

She took a small satisfaction in that thought. Her life would end but Mace wouldn't be harmed. He was immortal and powerful. What was Fenton thinking?

"You'll drop your weapon." Mace's voice was deep and menacing, alarming even to her ears. "You'll let Nayla go free and unharmed and I won't torture you before I kill you. It's your choice."

The blade sliced deeper as Fenton tensed but Nayla bit back a scream. Oddly, it frightened her more than it hurt. Was she ready to die? Would this moment be her last? She'd only now dared to question the need to give up happiness to fulfill her destiny. With Mace, she could have everything she'd ever wanted but hadn't had the courage to ask. But did she deserve joy and love? Or was her fate to follow her mother and father?

No. Not yet. She wasn't ready. Please, God, not yet.

Fenton's sour breath was hot against her ear. "Stay back, Were. Your threats are useless. I won't allow Paqualette to suffer under this foolish woman's control any

longer. Don't you see? If you have any sense in your mind, if there's any human left in you, you'll understand my actions."

"No." Mace stepped closer. "I won't understand anything if you harm her." His lips curled up into his teeth as he seethed. "I'll tear your goddamn limbs off and feed them to my pack if you hurt her."

Fenton wheezed and his hand at her arm felt clammy as his grip loosened. "Stay back!" he choked out.

The edge of the blade eased some, allowing her a shallow intake of air. It was now or never. She jolted to the side and the sharp edge of the weapon carved into her flesh as she dropped to the ground.

Blood seeped from the wound and oozed down, staining her dress. Too much blood. Oh God. Help me. She pressed her hand to the raw sliced flesh, felt the burning pain and watched in shock as chaos erupted around her.

Mace lunged forward, changing into his wolf form. A chilling scream cut through the night air as Fenton stumbled, futilely trying to run away. The enormous black wolf trapped him against the earth and didn't waste one second before chomping his sharp teeth into Fenton's jugular.

Nayla clamped her gritty eyes shut as both nausea and exhaustion claimed her.

She prayed for sleep. She prayed for the calming blackness to save her from her aching heart, her woozy stomach, her helpless, paralyzing fear.

She prayed the horrifying sounds from her past would stop, from the day her parents had been murdered just like this.

Mace. Mace was the executioner now, she reminded herself. Yes, it was for her sake, for her protection, but the putrid coppery smell and the sound of flesh being torn from bones was unbearable. Her stomach roiled and her pulse pounded at the back of her head.

She dug her forehead into the damp leaves on the forest floor and gave in to her extreme fatigue. The dark bottomless pit consumed her, but the promise of peace was a lie. A god-awful lie, ripping her from her senses and forcing her back to that terrible day she'd lost her parents.

Stop. He has to stop.

The sharp teeth. The screams of horror. Scarlet puddles of blood pouring from their bodies, seeping through the wooden floor.

The sounds. Oh God, the sounds of death.

There's no end to the torture. Her parents are going to die. She'll never see them again. Never hear her mother's sweet laughter or cuddle into her father's large embrace.

The monster is too big. I'm too small. Can't stop him.

I'm so sorry. So very sorry.

"Nayla. Nayla!" The monster's voice was familiar as he called her name, hacking through the mist in her mind.

Wet velvet licked at her neck over and over again. His tongue. The animal's tongue. It burned her wound but she couldn't move, couldn't push him away.

"Nayla, you can't leave me. Come back to me. I love you. God, I love you."

No. You're a murderer. Stay away from me.

She had to save herself, to drop farther into the trenches of her mind where he couldn't find her, couldn't see her. She fell until the cavern of night ended, its spongy floor bouncing her up and sucking her down.

Safe. I'm safe here.

A twinkling light flickered in the corner. Just there. Gone then back again.

"He loves you." The soft melodic sound of her mother's voice floated above Nayla's head.

"Mother?"

"Yes, it's me, sweetheart. Rest your head and listen. You've pained for too many years."

Nayla gasped for breath as her lungs grew heavy. Her eyes stung.

"I couldn't save you. I'm so sorry."

"Tsk. You mustn't blame yourself, child. And you mustn't blame him either. The one who loves you."

"He's a Were, Mother. Like the animal who killed you."

"No, Nayla. They're of two different minds. One of evil, hate and vengeance, the other of honor, love and loyalty. Confuse them and you'll never find happiness."

"I'm not sure I deserve love. His love or any love. Not when I survived and you..."

"Shush, child. You always were a stubborn one."

Sweet laughter filled Nayla's ears and heart.

"I never thought I'd hear your laugh again."

"I live on, Nayla. In your heart, in your memories. I live on and so should you. If you need my permission to love this Were, then I fully give it to you. Open your heart to him. Live and be loved."

"Live?"

"Yes, child. Go on now. You've wasted too much time here."

* * * * *

Mace tore the clothing from her body, shredded a piece of cloth and pressed it to her neck. He tried to focus on stopping the bleeding rather than her ashen skin and the size of the gash on her neck. And how her pulse fluttered weakly under his hand.

God, this couldn't be happening. He wouldn't let her die.

His pack surrounded him. Saul and Kaige knelt by his side.

"She's lost a lot of blood, Mace." Kaige, in human form, skimmed his fingers over her forehead and cheek, pushing back a thin layer of mud and ringlets of damp hair.

Mace released his suppressed growl, throwing his frustration directly at Kaige. "You touch her again and I'll kill you. Do you understand that?"

Kaige lifted his hands in surrender. "Understood. So what are we going to do? We've got a dead councilman and a dying Queen. It won't take long for the Paqualette guard to find us here and come to some screwy conclusions. Do we really want to end up in that dungeon again?"

"She's not dying. " Mace said the words but knew deep down they weren't true. His gut twisted at just how true they were. He leaned over to kiss her cold lips and to whisper he loved her. If only he'd had the nerve to tell her when she was conscious. Coward.

Kaige rose to his feet. "So what would you like to do? Take her with us? We can't stay here. It would be stupid to think Fenton traveled all this way by himself. His men must be camped somewhere near here."

Mace ignored Kaige and turned to Saul, who was looking down at Nayla with tears in his eyes. "We can find a physician who can help her. Where's the closest one?"

Saul shook his head slowly, his brow creased. "One in town and one at the castle. Too far, I'm afraid."

"Who else? A nurse. Anyone. Who lives near here?"

A hint of hope glistened in Saul's moist eyes. "The coven. The witches' coven is near."

"Witches." Mace had come across several covens in his long life and knew just how powerful some of them were. Hell, one had helped him save Blanca and Kaige from the Vampire slave ring. Of course, he'd had to bargain with them. There was always a fee of some sort with witches. But it didn't matter. He'd do anything to save Nayla. "Let's go."

"And what about us?" Kaige asked. "What about your pack, Mace? Would you like us to wait around until the damn guard attacks us again? You're our leader for a reason. You're supposed to make the decisions to protect us and keep us together."

Mace glanced around at the faces of his pack and then at Nayla. "You're all able-bodied. You do what you must to survive. My mate is my priority now. She needs my

help. If you choose to follow me to the witches' coven, then I'll gladly be your trusted leader when I know for certain she'll live. If you choose to leave, you'll be cut of your ties to me and I'll wish you the best."

Without another thought, Mace carefully bundled her up in his arms. The decision to stay in Paqualette to save his mate would've surprised him a year ago, hell, a week ago, but now it was the only choice. His pack had been his life, his heart, his pride. He'd killed for them. He'd die for them. But if there was a chance he could save Nayla, the woman to whom he'd given half his soul, then he'd damn well follow through.

Saul quickly led the way through the forest until they reached a visible trail. Behind Mace footsteps followed, some human, some wolf. But he refrained from turning to see who remained and who he'd never see again.

The lush body in his arms was limp and pale, her lips blue. How much longer? He readjusted her, cradling her with one arm and pressed harder on the gouge. The bleeding had slowed but her pulse had slowed as well. Damn it all to hell.

He gritted his teeth and shoved the disparaging thoughts from his mind.

She'd live and he'd make love to her again. Hell, he'd be her damn WereSlave if that would guarantee her survival.

Anything.

He'd do anything.

Chapter Eleven

Seven thatched-roof bungalows sat in a tidy row along the shallow, narrow creek. They showed no signs of life except for the last one on the left, which had a single candle flickering in the window.

A beacon of light, Mace thought.

Hope.

That's where he would take her.

"Stay here," he yelled over his shoulder to the remainder of his pack, catching a glimpse of most of his followers. Only Kaige was missing. The realization was a punch to his gut. He'd lost his best friend to save the life of his mate.

Kaige, the damn fool, wasn't as loyal as Mace had hoped.

To hell with it. He shook off the disappointment and nodded to the steadfast group and then to Saul. Now he knew who he could trust. "Thank you for staying. Guard these homes. I'll call you if I need you."

Determination fueling him, he leapt over the creek and didn't bother to knock as he pushed through the door. The sturdy slab of wood swung open and hit the wall. A middle-aged woman with silver and black streaks of long, wiry hair stood just beyond with her hands clasped in front of her and a meek smile on her face.

As if she'd been waiting for them.

"Set her in there." The woman gestured toward an open bedroom door, her white linen gown swooshing with her movement, reminding Mace of an angel.

Please, if there was a god, any god, then let her be an angel.

Without a word, he strode into the bedroom and set Nayla's lifeless body on the mattress, careful not to jostle her wound.

The witch made her way to the other side of the bed with a small tin pot cradled in her hands. Steam billowed from the top.

"What is that?" Mace asked.

"Something to soothe her pain. A remedy of sorts."

He was tempted to ask how she knew to prepare her medicine beforehand but decided not to press his luck. The witches he'd known in the past were quite secretive of their powers.

With smooth hands that appeared younger than her age, she scooped a handful of white fatty mush from the pot and placed it on Nayla's neck.

"My mother's recipe," the woman said with a wink.

Who gave a damn, as long as it worked? Mace pushed any doubt from his mind and sat next to Nayla. He leaned toward the witch so she'd see the seriousness on his face. "Can you help her? As you can see she's lost a lot of blood."

She shrugged and maneuvered the mush to cover the gouge, avoiding eye contact. "I might be able to help. What sort of person would I be if I didn't attempt to save my Queen?"

"A dead person. A fucking corpse." Mace swallowed the anger rising in his throat. Her nonchalance was grinding his last nerve. Leave it to a witch to minimize a dire situation.

"Threats will get you nowhere, Mace."

"How do you know my name?"

"The Queen's WereSlave?" She arched a salt and pepper brow. "Who in Paqualette doesn't know who you are? I think it's sweet that you've fallen in love with your master. A big mean ol' Were like yourself." She cocked her head. "By the way, my name is Lorzener, though my girls call me Lorze. You, honey, can call me whatever you want."

"I'm not here to play games, woman," he spat out. "If you have the means to save her life you better damn well do everything in your power."

Her irritating smile didn't fade. "And what will I get in return?"

Of course.

"Anything. Name it." There was no time for bartering.

Lorzener's deep blue gaze swept over his body. She seemed undaunted that he was covered head to toe with blood. Fenton's blood. The bastard deserved to die a hundred painful deaths for what he'd done to Nayla.

Mace reveled in the memory, pleased he'd been the one to extract Fenton's evil soul from this earth. To shred the bitter flesh from his bones. To crush the last breath of air from his lungs.

Lorzener's eyes widened and locked in when her gaze reached his dick, forcing him back to the here and now. The grim reality. No matter what he'd done to Fenton, Nayla was still in danger.

"What?" he growled at the witch.

"You're impressive. It's no wonder she picked you." She met his stare and twisted her grin. "I suspect the two of you are quite a sight in the throes of passion. A beauty and her beast."

"There's no time for your jokes, witch. What the hell do you want?"

"I can make her a Were, an immortal just like you. Can you imagine that? A Were for our Queen?" She laughed. "Paqualette would never be the same with all those puppies running around."

"No! That's not an option." Not when he'd lost his Elizabeth the same way. What were the odds of Nayla surviving the plague, especially when she was half-dead to begin with?

"Why not?" Her smile finally weakened. "If she doesn't die today, she'll die ten, twenty, thirty years from now. That's a blink of an eye for an immortal, is it not?"

"It is." He couldn't argue. "But inflicting the plague is too risky. There has to be another way. Look at her," he said, but couldn't stomach doing the same. How could he watch her perish before his very eyes? "You must save her."

"You realize I wouldn't have let you in my home if I didn't want to help." The smile returned. "Queen Nayla is by far my favorite of the Queens who have ruled this country. She can see past the nonsense and make fair decisions."

Why was she talking so much? "And? Get on with it, woman."

"And if I save her life, I ask that she remains here in Paqualette."

"That's it? That's what you want in return?"

She shrugged. "An invitation to the castle every so often would greatly improve my coven's reputation. As it is, we're feared or hated by most of the townsfolk. It's no fun worrying if mutiny is afoot. One night we'll go to sleep and the next thing we know, our heads will be on the slab. Can you imagine fearing for your life every second of the day?" She bunched her brows together and laughed. "Never mind. I suppose you can relate."

Mace shook his head in disbelief. "So you'd like a dinner invitation?"

"To the balls as well. My girls don't get out very often. They'd enjoy mingling with some of the finer men of Paqualette."

"Very well. I'm sure Nayla wouldn't have a problem with that."

"Or you? You'll be King, won't you? There'll be co-sovereignty, will there not? I can't imagine an alpha Were agreeing to anything less."

"Yes, of course." Whatever it takes. If he needed to be king of this god-forsaken country for Nayla, then he would. He just wanted her to live. He wanted to see her face its natural color and hear her laugh. Or simply breathe, goddamn it.

"Wonderful."

"Then you'll help her?" Yes. Hope filled his lungs.

She twisted her thin lips into a smile and waved her hand toward Nayla. "Ta da! There you go, King Mace. I've already done all I can."

"What the hell does that mean?" He looked down at his mate and was surprised to see the blob of medicine had disintegrated and the cut on her neck was completely healed. But her face was still pale and her lips still blue.

He peered at the witch, who was walking out the door. "What happened? She's not recovered yet."

"It will take some time," she said lightly and leaned against the door frame, "although I used the accelerated version of the plague so she should be completely transformed by morning. You won't have to wait weeks until you know if she'll make it."

Mace stilled. He couldn't believe his ears. "The plague? You infected her? After I told you not to?"

"How else did you think I would save her? She was on her last breath when you brought her to me."

He growled under his breath as every muscle in his body tensed. "Damn you, you wench. I told you infecting her wasn't an option."

She rolled her eyes. "Too late. It was either the Were plague or an injection of Vampire blood and I heard Weres have an aversion to the fanged species." Her shrill laugh echoed in his ears. "Wouldn't want to make your relationship any more complicated, dear. Now, take care of her. You both have a long night in front of you."

He stepped toward her, ready to wring her thin neck but he clenched his hands instead. He might still need the wicked witch. "Do you understand what you've done? If she survives she'll never forgive me for allowing this to happen. If she dies, you'll pay for her death. Either way, you're doomed."

"Mace, honey, you really should work on your manners if you're going to be the King. Tomorrow, when you're feeling less dismal, I expect at least a thank-you." She released an annoyingly cheery sigh. "My girls will be here in a moment to clean you

two up. The Queen's going to want you to comfort her through the pain of transforming. And you'll want to battle that pain with the pleasure only you can give her."

"Pleasure?" Was she insane? Yes, of course she was.

"You know. Sex. A little moaning and groaning will help her tremendously." She winked and closed the door behind her, leaving the room with only the light of the moon shining through the window.

Mace looked down at his fragile mate covered in blood. If she got through the transformation without dying then he'd have her for eternity. A beat of optimism slipped through his thoughts followed by the cut of reality. If she lived to be a Were, she'd hate him. She'd become her worst nightmare.

He'd allowed this to happen. Never trust a goddamn witch. He knew better. Their good deeds never came free. There was always a price to pay, always a fucking hidden fee. He only hoped he wouldn't have to give up Nayla. One way or the other.

The door sprang open again and four chattering young witches glided in. They laughed and went on with their idiotic conversation as if there weren't a dying woman spread out on the bed before them.

"I can't believe we'll be invited to the balls," one of them said. She appeared to be in her early twenties, pretty, blonde and incredibly annoying. Her voice screeched as she spoke.

"I know!" A second one, a redhead, sat on the mattress beside Nayla, holding a pan of steaming water. "I'm going to have to sew a new dress. That green fabric we just bought will be perfect."

They were talking about going to a goddamn ball? His mate could die any moment and they were discussing ball attire. "Leave the water," he barked out, attempting to scare them away. "I'll clean her. Just get the hell out of here."

The third witch, a raven-haired beauty with enormous brown eyes curved her lips into a condescending smile. "'Fraid not. We have our orders from Lorze."

"I don't give a damn about Lorze or your orders."

"You don't want us to get in trouble, do you?" She batted her thick eyelashes at him and Mace thought if he were any other man he'd be down on his knees. Instead, he wanted to rage. He wanted them gone.

But he held his tongue and watched as patiently as possible as the witches ran damp cloths over Nayla's limp body. She didn't stir. Her chest barely rose with her breaths. But at least the extreme pain hadn't begun. Not like it had with Elizabeth.

Mace remembered trying to ease some of Elizabeth's agony, but his own suffering had taken its toll. He'd been too weak. By the time he'd fully transformed into the immortal Were, she had passed. Her reaction to the plague had killed her. The torturous process had taken her from him, to live eternity on his own.

Oh hell. He couldn't watch the same tragedy happen to Nayla. He wouldn't simply stand around to witness her so fragile and helpless. Whether he liked it or not, the witch had been right. He'd need to help his mate through this the only way he knew how.

He had no choice but to clean himself. No way was he letting these hags near him. Before one of them approached, he grabbed a spare cloth from the pan and rubbed it over his face. The cloth covered with blood.

"Let me help you," the brown-eyed witch said.

"Don't touch me."

"Dream on, stud. I've no interest in getting my jollies from bathing a Were. Please. I wouldn't stoop to your level."

"My level?" A witch was saying he was beneath her? "Ha. Don't let your knack for witchcraft get to your head. A Were is a powerful being. We'd withstand any of your silly tricks."

"Really?" She arched her brow slyly. "Silly tricks, you say?"

"Of course. I've known witches who've tried to use their craft on me." He shook his head and scrubbed the soiled cloth over his chest. "Never works. Sorry to squash your theory, but my level is beyond your vision."

"Interesting." She snapped her fingers. "The witches you've met must've been humoring you. Take a look at yourself, Were. All clean."

Mace glanced down at his body. Not a trace of blood or dirt remained on his skin or on the cloth in his hands. And...he brought his forearm up to his nose and sniffed—he smelled of piney soap. Huh. The witch hadn't touched him or said a single word of a spell. She'd simply snapped her fingers. He'd never seen anything like it.

Maybe he'd underestimated the Paqualette coven. His hopes rose. Could it be Nayla would get through this?

He sat on the mattress next to her as the witches glided back out of the room, taking their incessant chatter with them. Good. They were gone and he was alone with his mate. His Were mate.

God, he hoped she'd forgive him for allowing the transformation to happen. He gritted his jaw and swept his fingers down the curve of her breast. She wouldn't have a choice. He wouldn't give her up. Not now. Not ever. Whether she fought him or not, she'd be his for eternity.

He just needed to get her through the night. With that thought, he brought his mouth down to her soft nipple and licked the rosy-scented flesh until it budded under his touch. She stirred and her breath hissed.

"Mace." Her voice was a rasping whisper. "It hurts. My body hurts."

"I know, love. I'll make you feel better."

Chapter Twelve

Nayla's blood burned as it gushed through her veins and pumped in and out of her rapidly beating heart. Like a river of lava, the intense heat traveled slowly down her body. She took in gasps of air in an attempt to cool herself. But it was no use. What was happening to her? Was she dying? The flames of hell couldn't be this hot.

She opened her eyes and peered out through tears to see Mace leaning over her, his blue gaze watching her intently, his inky hair tucked behind his ears. He looked like an avenging hero, she thought between intakes of air. She may be dying but having him near eased her frightened sense of terror. If only for a moment.

"I'm here for you, Nayla. Tell me what you need."

"It...burns." She spoke through jagged breaths. Her lungs filled with hot tar. "Mace, I think I'm dying."

"No. You'll live." He sounded so certain, Nayla almost believed him. "I'll cool you down." He gathered her into his strong arms and lifted her off the bed.

Flames lapped at her skin as she cuddled up against him, searching for some comfort, anything at all to dull the scorching pain. He carried her through a small house and out its front door. Any confusion about her whereabouts was quickly replaced by the agonizing heat pouring down her body, reaching her core.

* * * * *

Mace rushed her out of the cottage and over to the cool water of the nearby creek. The members of his pack were nowhere to be seen but he caught their scent. They'd most likely hidden in the shadows of the forest, ready to defend if any of the Paqualette Guard attacked. Once Nayla recovered, he'd have to show the loyal bunch his appreciation somehow.

And she would recover. She'd survive this. She had to.

He glanced around for any sight of the witches but they'd disappeared into their dark bungalows. So he waded into the shallow brook and slowly lowered Nayla into the crisp water. He propped her head on the grassy bank and her body sank into the water, resting on the sandy bed while the stream ran over her naked body. He took in the sight of her slick skin and tight nipples and guiltily hid his burgeoning erection under the running water. "Does this help?" He looped a lock of her golden hair behind her ear and spread out beside her.

"Yes," she said breathlessly. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me, Nayla. I..." His confession stuck in his throat. Now wasn't the time to tell her she'd never be human again. "Is there anything else I can do? Do you still burn?"

"Yes, but the cold water is soothing. The burn is dulling and..." She stared up at him and curved her hand over his jaw and slid it down his chest. "I feel strange."

He held her tiny hand flat against him while guilt besieged him. He could tell by the look in her eyes what she required. A Were female was insatiable. A human woman turning Were was ten times as needy. And with the accelerated version of the plague the witch had administered, there was no telling how Nayla's body would react.

He couldn't help but feel a sense of pride and a surge of lust. His mate would be Were. She'd be immortal.

If he pleased her, maybe she'd forgive him for not protecting her from this fate. A fate they now shared. Even though this was his fault, he'd never felt so close to her, so bound to her heart.

She moved her hand down to where he ached for her. His cock stiffened, hard as ever as she firmly gripped his shaft.

"Ah, Nayla." He groaned, then kissed her nose, her cheek and her lips. "What do you need, love? Tell me. Anything you want. I'm yours."

"Oh, God." Her eyes fluttered and she cupped her mound and squeezed his cock with her fist. "It's too much, Mace. Please, just help me. Please."

All the blood in his body rushed to his balls and his dick. He throbbed against her touch. "All right." He sucked in a breath and clenched his abdomen to keep from ejaculating too soon. This would be a long night. He needed to stay strong and take charge.

Carefully, he peeled her fingers from his shaft. "Spread your legs for me, Nayla."

She did as he asked and he quickly maneuvered between her thighs, kneeling down as the water's gentle current coursed against his erection. He reached below the surface and gripped her ass. The soft rounded flesh molded to his palms and she arched up, begging for more. Her pelvis thrusting and her smooth belly constricting. The most beautiful movement he'd ever seen.

He lifted her lower half above the water, making sure her head still rested on the grassy bank.

"Oh, Mace." She grasped the inside of her thighs and spread them for him. The sight of her rosy folds, the small patch of blonde hair arrowing down her lush mound and the way she spread for him, made his mouth water.

"Love, I want to bite into your flesh, you look so good."

She squirmed, but he held her still. "Don't tease me, Mace. I can't take it. Do you understand that? I need you to help me, to make the pain go away."

The pain. He'd almost forgotten. "Of course. Forgive me."

He used his thumbs to separate her pink folds. Her pussy was ripe and swollen and he inhaled the sensual scent before licking her from her anus, to her pussy, to her clit. One long, hard lap had her quivering in his hands.

She covered her face. "Mace. Please don't stop."

"I won't." More than ready, he dropped his mouth to the heat between her wet thighs and licked her budded clit, hot and smooth against his tongue.

He licked again and she wrapped her legs around his neck. The soft flesh of her thighs caressed the sides of his face. The whimpers she made sent a surge of hunger into his groin. Bottomless hunger.

The wolf in him would've shoved her onto her stomach and fucked her from behind, taking her taut ass, showing her he owned her. But the man merely gripped her hips and plunged his tongue into the tight slit of her pussy. His pussy. His mate.

He pointed his tongue and lapped at her slick juice, prodding into her channel and sucking on her flesh. She tasted so ripe, like lust and pure sensual woman. Like a promise of pleasure.

She moaned into the night air, motivating him to do better, to give her his all.

But the sound of footsteps closing in gained his attention.

Mace quickly pushed Nayla from his shoulders and into the water. Then he dropped down to cover and protect her from any harm. Where was his pack and why weren't they attacking? Senses on high alert, his gaze zeroed in to where a wolf stood some thirty feet away.

Kaige.

He'd returned. Mace didn't know whether to shake his hand or rip out his throat for leaving the pack. He didn't have time to decide as Nayla wrapped her moist legs around his hips and entwined her fingers into his hair.

"Fuck me, Mace." Her voice was raspy and raw as she lifted her hips and ground her pussy against his cock. "I need it hard. Please. Make the wanting stop."

A switch clicked on inside him, igniting the wolf and forcing the man to the side. He forgot about Kaige's presence as his mind filled with desire and he focused on the woman beneath him. "Hard?"

"Yes." She nodded as tears brimmed her eyes. Her cheeks flushed red and her nipples beaded into rigid points against his chest. "Now."

Mace braced his hands on either side of her and nestled the head of his cock against her entrance. Despite the cold stream they lay in, her pussy was hot and inviting. And as soon as he slid inside, her slick channel hugged him tight.

“Nayla,” he called out as the wolf in him howled and began pumping.

The water splashed with each thrust. And with each thrust, she sobbed and bucked her hips upward, meeting his rapid movements. Her pussy sucked him in as he slid out and cushioned him as he drove in. Sucking and cushioning. His balls tightening, his cock pulsing. The feeling was almost enough to make him shoot his cum into her, but he stayed strong. He didn’t want this to end. Not until she was satisfied and her pain had ended.

She fisted her hands in his hair and drew him down to her lips, where their mouths molded and parted for each other. She lured his tongue into her mouth and he fucked her with it just as he did his cock, with authority and vigor.

When she didn’t come, he deepened his thrusts and maneuvered so his shaft would grind against her G-spot. Swift and hard. Slick and tight. In and out. Pushing. Searing. Conquering.

His muscles strained, his breathing rasped and his blood pounded as it shot down to his groin. He wanted to please her, to stop her pain, to get her through the night. But with each push into her snug pussy, he grew closer to release.

To torture him further, she dragged her fingers down his back and squeezed his ass. She panted and writhed beneath him as the water lapped around them for what seemed like eternity.

Still, she didn’t climax.

Hell. This wasn’t working. Frustrated, he pulled out and broke away from her embrace.

“Wait.” She reached for him with one hand and cupped her mound with the other. “Where are you going? Why did you stop? I need you.”

“Don’t worry, love. I’m not done fucking you.” Not by a long shot.

Mace quickly thought of what he could do to increase her pleasure when out of the corner of his eye, he saw Kaige approach in his human form. His Were brother walked up the stream and stopped beside them. Mace held back a growl and looked up to see a surprising expression on Kaige’s face.

Back and forth, his eyes showed understanding and compassion then lust and heat. “They gave her the plague,” he said, knowingly. “Do you need my help, brother?”

Help. Mace glanced down at his mate, who was suffering, whose body was no doubt aching for release and who might not survive the night. Mace never intended to share Nayla with anyone, but if it were to save her life and to keep her from pain, did he have a choice? The only question was could he trust Kaige? The answer would’ve been a resounding “yes” as of that afternoon. But now...

He peered back at his second-in-command. “You left. How can I believe you’re loyal to me, my mate and this pack?”

Kaige dropped his gaze, then made eye contact again, stronger this time. “I had to take care of some guards camped near here, planning to close in on us. It took longer than I’d expected. But I’m back.”

Mace stifled a chuckle. So his friend hadn’t deceived him. In fact, Kaige had probably saved his pack.

He could be trusted.

* * * * *

Nayla wanted to scream, or cry, or whatever it took to gain back Mace’s attention. She didn’t know what was happening with her body, nor did she care. The only thoughts, the only emotions, she could conjure was the deep-seated need to be fucked. Her body craved Mace’s cock thrusting inside her. Hard and deep and fast. Never ending.

But he’d stopped and left her empty. And he was looking up at Kaige.

Where had he come from? It didn't matter. Her unfathomable yearning held her mind hostage. The heat that had washed through her body had left her cavernous and hungry. Her body, from her womb to her pussy to her trembling thighs, was a pit of pain and need. And if the desperate yearning inside of her wasn't quenched soon, she feared she might die.

She reached for her lover again. "Mace. Please."

"I'm here." He nodded to Kaige and then lifted her into his arms. "We're going inside. Kaige is going to help me comfort you."

Comfort. Yes, that's what she needed. She wrapped her arms around Mace's neck and watched as Kaige walked ahead of them into the small cottage. She surprised herself by not being frightened of what was to come. Instead, her body cheered knowing the two large Weres would share her, make love to her and she intended to take full advantage of the both of them.

Her mouth watered in anticipation. She hugged her thighs together, attempting to dull the pang of longing surging to her pussy. Even her ass cried out for attention. The way Mace had teased her anus before had her curious as to how it would feel to be filled there as well.

God, what was wrong with her? It was if her inhibitions had been cut with a blade instead of her neck. Her neck? She reached for her wound and found it was gone. Not even a scrape.

"Mace," she whispered. "Am I losing my mind?"

He kissed her cheek as they walked through the bedroom door. "No, love. Your mind is fine and your wound is healed. Just relax."

"All right." She drew in a breath to ease her rapid heartbeat.

"There's something on the bed." Kaige lifted a wicker basket and picked out a small note card. "It's from the High Priestess Lorzener." He cleared his throat and shot Nayla a glance with his sensual smoky eyes. "For assistance in soothing the Queen."

Nayla let a whimper slip out and pressed her thighs together tighter. Her pussy tingled with a persistent itch that begged to be scratched, to be tamed, to be fucked. "Mace, put me on the bed. I can't wait any longer. I want you inside me." With his glorious cock. She wanted every inch of him, stretching her, pleasing her.

He placed her on the mattress and knelt in between her spread legs. His erection arched toward his abdomen, swelling thicker and longer than she'd ever seen it. Her pussy wept from just the sight. Unable to control herself, she caressed her breasts and lifted her hips.

His crystal blue gaze dropped to her cunt and his expression changed from loving and worried to primitive and lustful. "Come here." He grabbed her wrists and pulled her onto his lap, lifting her enough so his cock found her wet entrance.

She gasped at the delight of sliding down on his solid shaft. Her pussy welcoming him, hugging and molding to his length. Her skin tingled and her stomach fluttered and some of the pain aching in her bones eased.

As he gripped her hips and easily pumped her body up and down his stiff cock, she held onto his shoulders, her fingers grasping at the solid, straining muscle. His mouth, wet and delicious, kissed and licked her neck on the way up to her ear. Once there, he tugged on her lobe and whispered heatedly, "I love you, Nayla."

She moaned and closed her eyes. Despite the dull, aching pain, despite the bottomless hunger, she sighed with contentment. She opened her mouth to reciprocate, but was stunned silent by Kaige's presence behind her. Her mind was in such a haze, she'd forgotten he was in the room.

"He's here to help soothe you, Nayla," Mace said as he continued the steady rhythm with his hands and cock. "I want you to enjoy the both of us. I promise he won't hurt you."

Kaige chuckled from behind her and ran his large rough hands up her back, settling them on her shoulders. "Nope, I only give pleasure to beautiful women. No reason to

worry, sweet Nayla. Here,” he drew her back against his chest, “rest against me while Mace fucks you.”

Nayla watched carefully to see if Mace objected, but his full attention was on moving her up and down his cock. His nostrils flared and his muscles tensed as he worked her body. She relaxed, then pressed back against Kaige’s warm, solid chest, welcoming his strength.

Her pussy quivered with each thrust and her womb tightened and heated. Deep-rooted pleasure was slowly building, pushing at her core. Teasing her with the promise of release. She needed more, something to tip her over the edge, so she circled two fingers over her all-too-sensitive clit.

The Weres encompassing her both hissed in a breath. “Yes, love, help us make you come,” Mace said before leaning over and sucking her budded nipple into his hot mouth.

“Ah.” Nayla arched toward him and sighed as Kaige cupped her other breast in his palm and massaged her needy flesh. “Yes, touch me everywhere.”

Her body pulsed and her nerve endings danced. She could stay on this high forever, at the hands of these men. But still, a climax was just out of reach. She rubbed at her clit and clenched down on Mace’s cock each time he slid from her.

He groaned against her breast, then threw his head back. “Hell, I’m going to explode. You feel so fucking good.”

“No,” she cried, desperate for this to last. “Not yet. Please.”

Kaige squeezed her breast, sending sparks down to her pussy. “Go ahead, Mace. Give her to me while you rest.”

Give her to me. The words sounded erotic and heady coming from Kaige’s lips. Whatever was wrong with her, he was going to help.

She couldn’t wait.

It must've been all Mace needed to hear. He drove deep into her slick, quivering channel before spurting his hot cum inside her.

"Mmm." She moaned at how he'd rammed into her innermost walls, at how his cum washed her with its liquid heat. She tilted her pelvis up and ground her pussy against his still-hard cock.

He groaned, but then pulled out, leaving her empty again. She fisted her hands and bit her tongue so she wouldn't scream.

Mace kissed her pursed lips and grinned. "I only need a moment, love. Kaige will fuck you for just a bit. He's fairly competent, I've heard."

Scowling, Kaige gripped her waist and yanked her from Mace and onto the mattress. The foreign hands on her skin startled her for a moment, but insurmountable lust quickly took the place of fear.

"Fairly competent?" Kaige sneered as he spread her knees and kissed her mound. "We'll see about that, won't we, sweet Nayla?"

She swallowed a knot in her throat as Mace spread out beside her and set a warm hand on her belly, her center. A single act silently proclaiming her body was his and his alone.

Guilt warred with need. Her heart against her desire. Her mind fuzzy and unsure.

Mace put up his hand for Kaige to wait as if he'd sensed her tension. "It's okay, love." He cuddled up close to her ear. "I'm here. You can pretend he's me. Or you can indulge in having two men ravish you. Two Weres who are very much attracted to you." He kissed her cheek. "One who is very much in love with you. Tell us what you need."

Nayla nodded as perspiration beaded her forehead and moistened her face. She couldn't deny how her body craved the carnal pleasures she knew these Weres were capable of. Their muscled bodies and impressive cocks ignited her deepest fantasies. And they'd no doubt soothe her pain.

“I want you both inside me, both fucking me.” The words left her lips before she had time to filter them. “I’m sorry. I—”

“No, don’t apologize. What’s happening to you is normal. And Kaige and I will do as you wish.”

Normal? How could he call this normal? It was if she’d woken from a trance in someone else’s body.

He stood from the bed, expressionless and gestured to Kaige. “Get her used to you alone. I’ll return in a moment.”

Chapter Thirteen

Mace stepped out into the cool pine air and transformed into wolf form. His mind was freer this way. Not as cluttered. Not as guilt-ridden for allowing Nayla to be infected with the damn plague in the first place.

The sound of her whimpering and panting through the window didn't bother his wolf mind. No, quite the opposite. It turned him on envisioning Kaige pumping into her, giving her delight. Sometimes his wolf intellect confused him by being less selfish than his human intellect. Curious. Very curious.

On all fours, he crept over to the stream and lapped up the cold water. The moon shone bright, energizing him, giving him strength for the remainder of the night. He stared up at the glowing orb and howled, releasing the rest of his tension into the night sky.

"Somehow I think your bark is bigger than your bite," a familiar feminine voice said.

He jerked his head around to see the pretty brown-eyed witch from earlier sitting not three feet from him with her bare feet dangling in the water. "How did you get there so quickly? Teleportation?"

She shrugged and tilted her lips into an easy smile. "I'm quiet. You didn't hear me."

Mace doubted she was speaking the truth but he didn't waste time arguing. He sat on his haunches and closed his eyes.

"Who is that Were in there with the Queen?" she asked.

"My friend and second-in-command, Kaige."

"Kaige, huh?"

Mace peered at her from the corner of his eye. "I thought you witches knew everything about everyone."

"I'm not as talented as Lorze. But I am sensitive to certain things." She glanced over at the window. "Like his anger."

"Anger?" Mace transformed and stood to his feet, ready to protect Nayla. The witch's words were most likely nonsense but he wouldn't take a chance, not even with a Were he'd known more than half his life.

"Don't worry, stud. He's not angry toward anyone but himself. And his past. Do you know much about that?"

Mace relaxed, realizing the witch was just being nosy. "Why do you care? He's a Were, below your level, remember?"

She rolled her eyes up at the sky and let out a dramatic sigh. "Of course I remember. Stop proving my point, stud. Why aren't you in there participating in the sex marathon?"

"None of your concern."

"Whatever. Have you told her yet that she'll be Were?"

"Still none of your concern."

"Probably for the better that you wait until morning and she's back to herself. If she makes it, which she no doubt will, I'll have to reconsider my stance on Weres." She glared up at him. "Female Weres, anyway."

Mace scrubbed his hands across his face and thanked the gods Nayla wasn't this aggravating. "Sleep tight, witch." He turned on his heel, suddenly rejuvenated enough to please his woman and he walked back into the cottage.

* * * * *

Nayla wasn't sure where to place her hands as Kaige settled between her trembling legs. She decided on setting them on his solid chest, although the wicked phenomenon

that had taken over her mind begged her to reach down and cup his balls or grip his cock. With all her remaining strength, she restrained herself.

His erection nudged against her heat, teasing her, as he braced himself above her. Would it be wrong to enjoy Kaige's body? And she was sure she would. He was stunning with his smoky gray eyes, full lips and tan muscled physique. But being unaccompanied with the near stranger made her tense, all the same.

His stomach muscles constricted as he pressed forward and slid the head of his cock into her pussy.

She fisted her hands on his chest and closed her eyes. Again, guilt warred with the extreme need for pleasure, for release. God, what's wrong with me?

"Look at me, Nayla." His mouth brushed her cheek. "Touch me. The big alpha is away and I promise I won't bite." His light tone diminished some of her anxiety.

Still, she kept her eyes shut. It was the only way she could bring herself to reach up and run her fingers over his solid chest and around to his back. His physique was close to Mace's, but slightly leaner. His cock, just as large, just as tempting. God help her, she wanted him closer, wanted him deep inside her, easing her desire.

"That's a good girl," he whispered huskily against her ear. He lowered onto her, mashing his chest against her sensitive breasts. Then he drove into her wet heat.

"Ah," she breathed out, indulging in the satisfying feeling of being filled.

And made the mistake of opening her eyes.

His lips loomed just above hers. His clumps of brown hair hung down around her face. His sensual gaze met hers. All so personal, so different.

"I want you to know," she said, making eye contact, "that I'm in love with Mace."

He grinned, showing her his carefree smile and kissed the tip of her nose. "That, sweet Nayla, is one of the reasons I'm inside you right now." He inched out and slid back in, causing her to whimper. "If I questioned your loyalty to Mace, I'd have left him and this pack the moment he jeopardized all of us to save your life. More important, I'd

leave you to suffer. But I sense you are loyal to Mace. And I've dreamed of fucking you for a long time now."

She gulped. "Do you know what's wrong with me?" Why did her body yearn with an unquenchable need? And how had her wound healed so quickly?

"Mace will have to explain that to you, sweet." He winked and glided into her again. "But you'll be fine soon. Mace and I will see to it."

"Yes," she moaned as he slid out and drove into her again, forcing her to forget anything else. She entwined her legs around his and hitched her hips up to meet his next thrust. The swift movement curved his cock into her pussy, brazing along her G-spot, sending a surge of delectable heat to her core. "Mmm. Kaige."

His smile faded into a thin line and he pressed his forehead against hers. "Now I know why Mace needed a breather. Damn, Nayla, your pussy is delectable."

"Just fuck me, Kaige." And stop mentioning the man she loved. Her heart couldn't handle it.

She closed her eyes again just as his mouth covered hers in a crushing kiss. His lips were firm and insistent. And as she parted for him, his tongue slipped in to boldly stroke and flick and tease her until she reciprocated.

God, she couldn't help but respond. His kiss reminded her of a hot summer evening after she'd had one too many glasses of wine. It was thick with lust and made her mind so dizzy she lost herself for a moment. All fun while it lasted, exciting for the moment. And she imagined any other woman wouldn't mind letting his kiss swallow her whole.

He continued to move inside her as his hand caressed her breast, his thumb brushing across her nipple. Each sending lightning sparks to her nerves and a curling blaze to her womb, tightening like a loaded spring.

Just as her climax began with Mace, it did so with Kaige. Rising and hanging at the edge, waiting to be tipped over, or at this point, shoved over. She knew when she did come, it would be a tidal wave, unlike any orgasm she'd ever experienced.

"I'm back." Mace's gruff voice shook her out of her haze.

She broke the kiss and looked up to see her lover staring down at them with eyes full of a passion she'd never seen before. His blue eyes glinted with feral desire.

"Mace." She reached for him as he lowered onto the bed and Kaige halted his movements.

"Don't stop." The words slipped from her mouth and she bit her lips shut.

Kaige grinned. "Give us a moment," he said and turned his head to speak to Mace. "Do you want her pussy?"

Mace shook his head and kept his intense gaze locked with Nayla's. "I'll take her ass. She's a virgin there."

Yes, her body cried out, instantly erasing any trepidation. Being filled by the two Weres was what she craved and could possibly be the only act to give her that much-needed relief.

Mace spoke in his foreign tongue. The intimate, drawling words caused Kaige to sit up, gathering her with him, his shaft still hard inside her weeping pussy.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and clung to him but kept her gaze on Mace as he pulled a brown glass bottle out of a basket. Kaige had said it was from the High Priestess Lorzener. The familiar name now clicked a light on in her mind.

They were at the witch's home. Mace had brought her here and Lorzener had, no doubt, saved her from death, judging from how quickly her wound had healed.

But was there a cost? And why was her body behaving so oddly?

Mace distracted her from her thoughts by kneeling behind her and grasping her face, turning it to the side. He held her cheek and kissed her lips with a desperate passion, his tongue sweeping into her mouth, consuming her. Kaige watched them, his hardened cock sending jolts of pleasure up her spine to the kiss.

She moaned and squeezed her pussy walls against his shaft.

"That's it, sweet Nayla," Kaige murmured. "You're so wet, your cum is dripping down my balls."

Being sandwiched between the two steely males gave her a sense of security. She knew she'd be safe with them. And as she caressed Mace's five o'clock shadow with one hand and gripped Kaige's solid shoulder with the other, her fingertips tingled as if her sense of touch were irrepressible. Overwhelming.

The scent of lust and male heat filled her nostrils as Mace curved his tongue along hers. She tasted his potent hunger, his masculine confidence...and she tasted his love. Her heart overflowed as her pussy ached. This would be enough for any sane woman but she craved something else, something further.

Before she could ask for more, Mace broke the kiss. She heard the slight cracking sound of a cap twisting open, then felt the oily substance from the bottle drip down the crevice of her ass cheeks. Mace followed the warm liquid's path with his hand, wedging his fingers between her buttocks. He found her anus and rubbed two fingers in a circular motion over her puckered flesh. Nayla sucked in a breath as her sensitive skin prickled with delight.

"I'm going to fuck you here, love. Do you want that?"

"Yes. Please." She leaned against Kaige's chest as Mace continued to stroke her anus.

Kaige made small upward movements into her pussy with his cock and he kissed the sensitive skin below her ear. His hot tongue swirled and sloped around her lobe. "You're going to be full soon, sweet." His voice was husky. "We're going to pack you so tight you're going to scream."

"Good. I want to scream." She smiled as the wicked thought monopolized her mind. Perspiration moistened her forehead and her hands against Kaige's chest grew clammy. "I want you both inside me, fucking me hard." She couldn't contain her words, her excitement. Her heart beat wickedly and she shivered with anticipation.

"Then that's what you'll get." Mace slid one long slippery finger into her taut entrance.

Delicious sparks traveled from her ass to her cunt. "Yes." She pushed off from Kaige and leaned back against Mace's chest. He was the only one she'd ever trust enough to penetrate such a personal, private area.

Her heart filled with love, yet her body was still empty. How she'd awoken with this selfish, barren soul, she'd no clue. A slice of guilt skittered through her thoughts but was quickly halted when Mace gripped her breast with his free hand, massaging her.

"Relax, love. Enjoy this. Let your body accept me into your ass. Take pleasure in how I, we, make love to you. Together." He withdrew and inserted his finger again. "Touch him if you like. I won't be angry. Consider this a get-well gift."

"Mmm." Her mind blurred from the liquid warmth coiling in her womb with each pass his finger made into her ass.

Kaige grasped her hips and continued to move inside her pussy. She looked down to see where they joined, where his cock pushed in and eased out, where his abdomen constricted with each movement. His tanned muscles clenched and his dark curly hair crushed against her.

Heat bottled at her core as Mace slid in a second finger. "You're loosening for me, love. Soon I'll be inside you, claiming your pretty little ass."

"Thank you," she said and tilted her head to kiss his sweat-moist cheek. The sentiment was silly but heartfelt. She couldn't remember ever wanting anything more than to have him take her ass and her gratitude for his generosity overwhelmed her.

His hand on her back nudged her toward Kaige. "Lean on him, sweetheart."

Nayla held onto Kaige's steely shoulders and whimpered at how Mace's oiled fingers felt slipping into her. He was right, she was loosening for him. She was ready.

He removed his fingers and the warm solid head of him pressed against her. She cuddled her forehead into the curve of Kaige's neck, tilted her ass back and waited. Mace gripped her breast with his large hand as he pushed inside her, bypassing her rigid entrance and inching his head into her channel.

Nayla bit into her lip at the slight pain, but was surprised his large cock didn't hurt as much as she thought it might. Instead, she craved all of him. All of them. "More." The word slipped from her mouth and Mace chuckled.

"I'll give you anything you want, love." His voice was ragged and deeper than ever. He eased farther in, slowly stretching her, filling her alongside Kaige's cock. Side by side they packed her body, sending lightning sparks to her nerve endings. Giving her no room to be unsatisfied.

"Fuck." Kaige's fingers dug into her hips. "So damn tight."

"Ah," Mace groaned by her ear. Both hands squeezed her swollen breasts. "How do you feel, Nayla?"

Stars danced in front of her eyes, her skin prickled and her pussy hummed with pleasure. Her only answer was a moan of relief. Of sheer satisfaction.

Mace chuckled again and kissed her cheek. "Good. I'm glad."

She whimpered and began to move with the two Weres' synchronized movements. Slowly and steadily they moved inside her. Her pussy quivered as her ass tingled with delight. Each stuffed full with thick cock, pushing her to her limit. Stretching her.

The tiny room echoed with the sound of her bodily juices sucking and releasing combined with grunts and groans. The air was thick with the lusty smell of sex and male pheromones. Large, rough hands covered her body, touching and massaging.

Mace's solid chest rubbed against her back while Kaige's chest crushed against her breasts. Each was damp with sweat and slick with oil as they continued to work their cocks inside her body. They encompassed her and filled her.

And for first time, she connected to their primal level. Their animal side. It felt natural to want these two Weres at once. They were quenching her need and finding pleasure in the action. Both selfish and selfless. Both taking and giving.

She moaned again as a sensational wave of warmth surged through her, coiling at her core. Her thighs trembled but the Weres held her up, secure in their arms. She was on the brink, the tidal wave cresting and about to crash into the shore. "Oh, God." She shook and drops of perspiration trickled down her face.

"Come, Nayla." Mace kissed and licked her neck. "Come for us."

They quickened their pace, in tune with their movements. Each thrust pushed her closer over the edge. She dug her fingernails into Kaige's biceps and pressed her head to his shoulder. Her breath came out in pants as shock waves coursed through her body, relentlessly zapping her nerves and heating her pussy.

"Yes!" she cried out. Both cocks felt so good, so very good as they drove in and stretched her innermost walls. Side by side.

Mace reached around and found her clit. He circled two fingers around it and Nayla screamed. "Yes. God, yes!"

Her body convulsed as the tightly wound spring in her pussy broke free, allowing the tidal wave to crash into her body. Liquid heat sizzled and danced in her womb. Sparks shot to her fingertips and toes. Warmth overcame her. Her limbs cheered with the release of pressure. So much pressure. Every ounce dripped from her bones, her nerves, her muscles, leaving her limp and utterly satiated.

"Ah," she sobbed at the extreme pleasure. At how the orgasm had washed away any pain, both physical and mental. Tears burned her eyes as both Weres eased from her body, gently laid her on the mattress. They kissed and licked her slackened body, groaning as they satisfied themselves.

Selfless. Gorgeous.

How could she have ever thought badly of them?

Her mother's words shifted forward from the recesses of her mind.

They're of two different minds. One of evil, hate and vengeance, the other of honor, love and loyalty. Confuse them and you'll never find happiness.

Of course.

She tried to relax but her breathing hastened and her heart still raced. Uncontrollably. She pushed locks of damp hair from her face and attempted to calm herself. Something was wrong. Still? What could the witch have done to heal her wound?

"Mace?" She spoke as calmly as possible. "Was I given a drug?"

Mace looked down at her with a concerned expression. "Why? Are you well?" He spread out beside her and placed a hand over her heart, as if he knew what was causing her alarm.

Her skin tingled along her arms and legs. And her muscles suddenly felt like liquid. But nothing hurt. No, in fact, she was rejuvenated, her energy level peaking.

"Yes." She smiled, unable to help herself. "I feel exuberant. Out of my skin. What did the witch do to me?"

She didn't wait for an answer. The three quarter moon shining through the opened window captured her full attention. Drawn to its glow, she walked over and drew in a long breath. Her lungs filled with the brisk night air. Wonderful. Absolutely brilliant.

All her worries disappeared as her body transformed fluidly. Like the creek in the distance, her bones, skin, teeth, veins, organs and muscles combined into one organism, rushed through her body and quickly manifested in a new location.

It happened so fast, she hadn't had time to panic. No, just the opposite. Her mind was free. Carefree. Blissful.

Until she looked down upon herself. Her hands were not her own. In their place, were two furry paws. Golden fur covered her skin. She dared a glance behind her to see the body of a Were. Shock mixed with curiosity and anger and a hundred other

emotions she couldn't contain. One question broke free from her muddled thoughts. How had this happened?

"Mace?" she said in a voice she didn't recognize.

Her lover dropped to his knees in front of her and held her neck. "You're okay, Nayla." He seemed to have a hard time looking into her eyes. Why?

"Am I a Were? Is this a dream?"

"It's not a dream." He didn't answer the first question.

"Did you do this to me?" she asked, but was distracted by the moon's glow once again. She closed her eyes and took in its fantastic energy.

"The High Priestess Lorzener infected you with the Were plague to save your life. It was all she could do to save you. You were on death's door."

"Death's door?" The words seemed silly to her. Everything seemed so unreal. Soon she would wake up from this dream, she hoped, but first she wanted to play in the moon's warmth. "I have to go."

He swallowed and nodded his head. "I'll see you soon."

* * * * *

Mace didn't have time to blink before she leapt out the window. She was breathtaking in her wolf form, as he knew she would be. But he hadn't been able to gauge her reaction before she'd fled. The moon had lured her out as was common in newly made Weres.

No doubt she was angry with him for allowing her to be infected with the plague. How could she not be?

In the morning, when the sun rose and she transformed back to her human form, he imagined her adrenaline rush would die down, leaving her only with the grim reality.

She was Were.

But she was alive. She'd survived the transition. Whether she hated him or not, she would live another day. And he wanted to keep it that way. The forest was a dangerous place for a new Were and he wanted to keep her safe, while allowing her to discover the advantages of being a werewolf at the same time.

He turned to Kaige. "Take Blanca and follow her. Give her room to explore her new abilities but don't let her out of your sight. I'll find you at daybreak and release you."

Kaige opened his mouth to speak, then clamped his lips shut. He nodded, changed into wolf form and jumped out the window.

Mace watched them go, despair punching him in his gut. When the trio was out of sight, he sat on the bed and lowered his head. He was a coward for not joining his mate on her first night out. The look in his friend's eyes reinforced that knowledge. But a rational conversation wasn't possible when she was in newly wolf form. And he simply couldn't pretend otherwise.

No, if she wished to reject him, he'd wait until morning, when he could face her rather than the Were she'd been changed into without her consent.

Damn it all. He could only hope she'd understand enough to forgive him.

* * * * *

Mace held a heavy quilt in his hand as he approached Nayla. She lay in a fetal position on a patch of grass only a hundred yards or so from her castle. She'd almost made it home before the sun rose over the crest of the nearby mountains. Then she'd transformed into human form and fell to the ground.

He'd watched it all. Hell, he'd watched her from afar for most of the night. He hadn't been able to stay away. Not when his bond to her was so tight. He loved her with all his heart.

When she didn't rise right away, he ran over and kneeled by her side. Her eyes were closed but a curious little smile peaked the corners of her full lips.

"Nayla? Are you all right?" He wrapped the quilt over her naked body and gathered her into his arms.

Her hand reached for his jaw and caressed him there. "I'm fine, Mace. Don't worry about me."

Relief flooded through him and he held her closer. "Tell me how you feel. I'm going insane here."

"How I feel?" She finally opened her eyes and her green orbs glistened up at him. "I've never felt so amazing in my life."

"Amazing?" He kissed her forehead. "Are you angry with me, love? Do you hate me for allowing this to happen to you?"

"Hate you?" Her smile broadened. "Mace, I love you. And..." She readjusted in his embrace and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"And what?"

"And I'm glad I was infected. Wait." She shook her head. "What an awful word. I wasn't infected. I was blessed. I was given a gift. Being a Were isn't a sickness. It's a privilege. One I'll cherish for eternity." She kissed his lips. "My eternity with you."

"Oh, Nayla." Warm relief washed down his body, easing his tension. "I was worried you'd hate me for allowing you to turn into your worst nightmare."

"I'd never hate you. You've changed my life for the better. You've opened my eyes and made me see that I was letting my past dictate my future. Now I know I don't have to be lonely. I can have everything."

It was all he needed to hear but one factor remained. "And if your kingdom doesn't accept Weres?"

"They will. If they don't..." She shrugged her dainty shoulder. "If they don't, then they're a kingdom of fools and I won't want my family near them. We'll leave and continue our journey for a home."

"Your family? We? But I thought you couldn't have..." He let his words fade and dropped his gaze, sorry he'd almost brought up the sore subject.

"We can try, Mace. While Blanca ran beside me last night, she mentioned any ailments I had as a human would be healed as a Were." She cupped her tiny hand against his jaw and forced him to look into her vibrant green eyes. "My body feels different. Like I wasn't truly living before but I am now. It's the most amazing feeling." Color rushed to her cheeks and her smile widened to her ears.

"Sweetheart." He brought her hand to his mouth and kissed her palm. "I've never loved anyone more than I do you. Never."

"Oh, Mace." Tears brimmed her eyes. "I don't mind sharing you with your memory of your late wife. I realize how much she meant to you."

"It's all in the past, love. I'm ready for the future, with you and you alone."

She laughed and wiped away a stray tear. "No more sharing, then."

He couldn't hold back a smile. "Absolutely no more sharing. You are mine and mine alone." He kissed her sweet lips. "And I am yours."

About the Author

Lia Slater thinks the world would be a better place if everyone read romance novels. There's so much to learn from the storylines. Love. Loyalty. Confidence. Passion. Desire. Conflicts would be resolved with happy endings. And, of course, the sex would be mind-boggling.

Lia is well on her way to helping the world become a better place by writing steamy romance with heart-pounding emotion.

Lia welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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