



Shifter's Coven: Alpha

Marteeka Karland

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Wolf and Witch unite as dark forces conspire to tear them apart.

The last thing Gennive expects is to witness a horrible crash involving a mysterious man and a lion cub. The crash isn't the only thing she didn't count on. Wade Monroe is a telepath -- and a shape-shifting wolf. The lion cub is his daughter, Sasha, who's shifted to her cat form out of fear.

Calling on powers she's suppressed all her life, Gennive helps Wade and Sasha. Wade's heart calls to Gennive as the vivacious woman awakens feelings he'd thought long dead.

Unfortunately, one "accident" isn't all that's in store for Wade and Gennive. The Dark Witches' Coven has declared war on Wade, jockeying for leadership of his pack. Magic and mayhem follow the couple, and there seems to be little the wolf in Wade can do to stop it.

Chapter One

Gennive sucked in a breath. A semi in the oncoming lane swerved across the median and hit the Navigator two cars in front of her head-on. She swerved around the flying debris, pulled her car off the road, and stopped. The carnage, now behind her, still played out, collecting several more vehicles in the process. Her 911 call took only seconds, then she got out of the car and jogged down the shoulder of the highway, back toward the big, black SUV.

Rain pelted down in great sheets, and heavy drops stung her skin with their intensity and cold. Lightning streaked through the sky followed closely by a loud clap of thunder in the late winter storm, and she winced under nature's onslaught. Being out in this wasn't the smartest thing she'd ever done, but she had to see if anyone was hurt.

No, it was more than that. She was compelled to make her way to that SUV. She recognized the pull on her mind but, given the circumstances, allowed it. She'd be careful. Whoever was in that vehicle wasn't human.

Cars still motored down the road as if nothing had happened. They simply avoided the wreckage and kept going. Gennive could never have done that. Which was why she was here, in the pouring down rain, dodging traffic in near-dark conditions in order to get to someone who was using mind control to bring her to them.

She had to be completely nuts.

The SUV was on its side, the front driver's side smashed so badly the front seat was now in the back seat. Acrid, electrical burning stench emanated from the thing, and Gennive had to remind herself it was likely from the air bags. The driver, a man, was motionless in the seat. Blood covered his face and neck. His shirt was soaked in it. A faint aura of impending danger surrounded him. The closer she got to him, the more the aura faded.

Gennive immediately looked to his chest to gauge the rise and fall that indicated breathing. Satisfied, she checked for a pulse. It was thready but strong. At least he was alive. However, in this weather, he wouldn't stay that way unless she could keep him warm. She frantically looked around the vehicle for something to cover him up with. She didn't dare move him, but she needed to keep him warm and dry if at all possible.

In her search for a blanket or coat or anything she could use as a cover, she heard a high-pitched whine. On the back seat passenger side floorboard, partially hidden under the front seat, was a lion cub. The animal had a grim aura around it, as well, which was odd considering she rarely ever caught auras around animals.

The poor thing shivered and looked at her as if to say, "Help me, I'm scared."

"Take her."

The man was trying to speak, but his voice was weak, and had he not been speaking both in her mind and out loud, Gennive probably wouldn't have heard him at all.

The cub? Gennive deliberately used the mental thread he had created when he'd made his desperate cry for help. There was no need for him to use strength he didn't have if it wasn't necessary. Along with his all-consuming need to protect the little cub, Gennive also felt his surprise. Still, he didn't waste time questioning her abilities.

Take her. Keep her safe.

Will she allow it? The last thing Gennive wanted was to be mauled by a baby lion.

She will. Keep her safe.

After that, the thread slipped away as the man fell into unconsciousness.

"Come on, little girl." She tried to keep her voice calm and friendly, extending her hand to the frightened animal. Surprisingly, the cub approached her and allowed Gennive to pick her up. When she did, the aura disappeared, just as the aura around the man lessened when Gennive was near. The cub trembled, but allowed the contact. Gennive could hear sirens in the distance and knew help was on the way, but she didn't want the cub to be seen.

Making a mad dash back to her car, she tucked the cub into her coat and put her in the back passenger side floorboard. She grabbed the blanket she kept in the trunk for emergencies and ran back to the SUV just as EMS crews arrived.

"Did you move him, ma'am?"

"No. I checked for a pulse then went to get something to cover him." Rain pounded her, and she shivered almost uncontrollably. "Where will you take him?"

"County, ma'am. Do you know who he is?" The EMT didn't stop his assessment or his swift extraction and immobilization of his patient.

She started to tell him no. That she'd watched him get clobbered by that semi and stopped to help, but she was afraid she might never see him again otherwise.

"Yes. He's my fiancé. Please help him." Gennive tried to sound appropriately distressed, which wasn't far from the truth. He was the first person she'd touched with her mind since she was a little girl. There was a bond between them she couldn't simply ignore.

"What's his name, ma'am?"

Gennive froze. Of course they'd want to know his name.

Wade Monroe. His voice whispered gently in her mind, and the sound curled deep in her chest and wrapped its way around her heart. Her mother had always told her that communicating this way was dangerous. Gennive had always thought it was because she might try it with the wrong person and be labeled a freak. Now she suspected it had more to do with the intimacy of the act.

Or maybe she was just out of practice.

"His name's Wade Monroe."

The EMT was saying something, but Gennive concentrated on the man in the SUV. What was she supposed to do? She couldn't leave him alone, but she couldn't leave her car.

Keep her safe.

Grinding her teeth, Gennive stepped back while the medics finished extracting Wade from the SUV and loaded him into the ambulance.

"We'll let County know you're behind us. They'll give you less hassle getting in that way. Bring his ID and insurance if you can."

"Take care of him," she called out.

She turned to go, and ran smack into a state trooper. He steadied her with his hands on her upper arms.

"Careful." Once she had her balance again, he let her go. "You're his fiancée?"

Gennive had to bite her cheek. She didn't like lying. "Yes."

"Were you with him when this happened?"

"Uh, no. I was a couple cars behind him." She needed to search his car. Find his ID or cell phone or insurance card or... *something*. He needed someone with him who knew him. Not her. "Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I really need to get a few things from his car then go to the hospital. Can we do this there?"

He nodded curtly. "Shouldn't be a problem. The fire department's ready to take over here. Get what you need and I'll follow you to the hospital."

Nothing like subtle. Gennive understood, though. It was his job.

She went to the passenger side. Gennive had to crawl through the window and pry open the glove box. Once she had it open, she dug through it until she found his proof of insurance. Thankfully, his cell was in the passenger seat. She took it, as well, before she waved at the officer and ran to her car. Gennive was soaked and chilled to the bone.

As she fastened her seatbelt and cranked the heat on high, she tried desperately to find that mental link Wade Monroe had opened to her without success. If he'd been unconscious -- as was her original thought -- she'd have picked up his subconscious. The human brain was magnificent. Had he been incapacitated, she would have been able to hear at least part of what was going on around him. She felt nothing. Heard nothing. Mr. Monroe was blocking her. Which meant he was very adept at telepathy.

Gennive didn't know if speeding was allowed under the circumstances, since she was being trailed by a state trooper, but she did eighty to the hospital anyway. It might have been a compulsion, but she didn't really care. She'd figure out the enigmatic

telepath later. She was more concerned with what she'd find when she got to the hospital. Unless she was mistaken, he wanted her there to help him escape.

* * *

Wade was careful to keep his mind firmly blocked from the little telepath. She was good, but he was better. Once on his way to the hospital, he had to concentrate to keep the external healing to a minimum or else all the injuries the paramedics had already found would be gone. He was a wolf mage, and his healing abilities were even better than that of the vampyre. Had he not put them firmly in check, he would have been healed of all his injuries in a matter of hours.

Coming across the woman was both a blessing and a curse. A blessing in that, being a telepath, her mental paths were mature and natural. She didn't question his abilities or his instructions. A curse in that she was still human. Her first thought had been to call for help. Now, getting back to his cub was going to be difficult even with her help.

There was also a curious pull within him toward her. Even blocking her from his thoughts, there was a need to touch her mind so strong it bordered on a compulsion. The small time he had to gently probe her mental paths revealed a beautiful and simple trust. It was as though she felt the same need to reach out to him as he did to her. He found she didn't really trust him, but her subconscious urged her to follow his instructions. And she had. She was puzzled by her behavior, but she didn't question it. Wade felt her uneasiness, but also her resignation that she'd do whatever he asked.

It was only minutes before they reached the hospital, and Wade still held his consciousness inside himself, not responding to the outward stimuli of his body. His mind reached for the woman, Gennive. She raced after them, suspicious of his intentions, knowing she'd do whatever he wanted. He was still unsure of her abilities, but for now, it was enough that she could pick up his thoughts. Whatever else she could do, he'd deal with later.

He knew the exact moment Gennive entered the emergency room, and his chest tightened. It had been a long time since he'd actually wanted a woman's presence. Had he been in a more appropriate place, he might actually have tried to seduce her.

Mingled with Gennive's scent, he also smelled little Sasha. She was hidden and perfectly still, held securely in Gennive's arms. He felt a small mental push from Gennive, and everyone in his room left. When they were alone, he opened his eyes. Gennive had wrapped the cub in a blanket and draped her jacket over the bundle. It was bulky, but she used some kind of mental illusion there as well, not necessarily masking the cub, but drawing attention away from Sasha. Clever. His cub was frightened, but not of Gennive. She seemed to take comfort in the secure hold Gennive had on her.

I need you to get me out of here, Gennive.

But you're hurt. You need their help.

I will heal in a few hours. It's actually worse for me to stay here. If they realize how quickly I'm healing, it will raise suspicions I can't afford.

Wade felt rather than heard her sigh of frustration. He also felt her irritation that she knew she'd follow his orders without question.

I'll do what I can to cover you. I can't make you invisible, but I can distract their attention while we leave.

It will be enough. I can add my energies to yours for a better effect.

Gennive glanced down the hallway, looking for hospital staff. Wade heard monitors beeping and alarming in several different places. There was a commotion, and several men and women ran past them. Apparently satisfied, Gennive hurried to his side and helped him up.

"OK. Now. We have to go. Now."

Wade was sore and stiff. His whole body hurt. He'd feel better tomorrow, but right now he was miserable. It took all his strength of body, mind and will to get up off of the stretcher and onto his feet.

He shook his head. Gennive looked at him, then out the door again, anxiety in her lovely face. She looked like she knew she needed to assist him in standing, but was afraid to touch him. Indeed, she stood cowering in the doorway, hugging Sasha close.

The lion cub wiggled out of the blanket and rubbed her head on Gennive's chin. The gesture seemed to calm Gennive as much as Sasha, and they both visibly settled down.

We don't have much time, sweetheart. Wade tried to give her an encouraging grin, but he wasn't certain he pulled it off.

Wade followed as Gennive carefully made her way through the ER to the exit. Now that they were leaving the hospital and the watchful eye of modern medical equipment, he could quit fighting his body's natural healing abilities. However, healing would take a lot of energy. He needed to sleep. Badly. He wasn't sure how long his strength would hold out, but he'd make it as far as he could.

Correction. He'd make it as far as he had to. He'd do it because Gennive needed him to. She was willing to help him, but she couldn't do it by herself.

He stumbled outside and spotted Gennive running across the parking lot to her car. She was in the car and pulling it around to him so fast her tires screeched. Wade used every trick he knew to muffle the sound, but he was so weak, he wasn't sure how effective he'd been. Fortunately, it didn't matter. Once he was in her car, Gennive sped away as if the hounds of hell were on their heels. She looked as though she thought they really were.

* * *

For several minutes Gennive drove as fast as she dared. She constantly checked her mirrors for the police she was certain would come screaming after her any second. Several miles later, she had to force herself to slow down or risk getting caught out of stupidity.

"It's not like you did anything wrong, you know." Wade's voice was weak.

"Don't try to talk. Save your strength in case we need it. We're on the run."

He snorted. "On the run from what? What did you do wrong?"

"I helped you escape! They've probably got all kinds of APBs out on us and everything!"

"Why?"

Gennive opened her mouth to answer, then stopped. What exactly *had* they done wrong? Leave the hospital against medical advice? The trooper had taken her statement -- which wasn't much of anything. The hospital staff had taken his blood and quite possibly a urine sample -- she didn't want to think about that. They had his license, registration, and proof of insurance. What else could they possibly need? "Uh, well..."

"Exactly." Wade sounded entirely too smug. "Now slow down before we wreck. Again."

"I guess twice in one night would be a bit much, huh?"

"Indeed."

"Where do you want me to take you? I have no idea where you live."

"Twenty-two Thornbrook Row. Help me inside, keep Sasha tonight, and I won't ask anything else of you." *Tonight, anyway.*

The unspoken addendum caressed her mind like a lover's stroke, and Gennive shivered. She had no idea what he meant, but it felt exceedingly naughty.

Deciding to ignore it, she asked about the lion. "Is there anything I need for your cub?"

"I'll give you a duffle with her things in it when we get to my home. I suggest you go through it before you go to bed."

"Why is that?"

He didn't answer her. When she glanced his way, Wade's eyes were closed, and his breathing was steady and deep. He'd finally succumbed to sleep.

Chapter Two

Dragging Wade inside the huge house wasn't an option. He had close to one hundred and fifty pounds and eight or nine inches in height on her. Still, Gennive was about to try when the shadows surrounding her car moved. They melded into the biggest, scariest looking man she'd ever seen. His skin was so black she might have been tricked into thinking he wasn't there at all if not for the faint gloss of his skin under the moonlight. Instinctively, she put her body between his and Wade's.

"Who are you?" Her voice quavered, but she didn't budge from her protective position.

"I'm Mr. Monroe's bodyguard. Who the blue fuck are you?"

A cold shiver went through her. His words were angry, harsh, but his voice was anything but. He wasn't the kind of man who needed to raise his voice. He got his point across by simply being there.

"Well, Mr. Bodyguard, sir, your charge had himself a nasty accident." This man might scare her pants off, but if he truly was Wade's bodyguard, he was the only way she was getting Wade inside. Rolling over and showing her belly wasn't the way to get him to do her bidding. "So, just where the hell were you when he was getting his car smashed to bits by an eighteen wheeler?"

He pushed past her and looked around the car. "Where's Sasha?"

"Meooooow."

At the sound of the bodyguard's voice, the lion cub pushed through the blanket on the back floorboard she had buried herself in, but she didn't completely come out of hiding. Gennive opened the rear passenger's door and gathered little Sasha in her arms. The big man held out his hand to Sasha, who promptly licked his fingers and butted the thick tips with her head. She didn't purr.

"Look, Wade told me to take care of Sasha no matter what. I think he intended for me to take her home with me, but she obviously means a great deal to him. With Wade out like this and unable to tell me for certain, I don't like the idea of taking her away from him."

"I'll take her." He reached for Sasha, but Gennive backed away a step.

"I wasn't told to turn her over to the bodyguard." Gennive did her best to look and sound stern. For one thing, she was actually quivering. The man simply vibrated with danger. "I was told to keep her safe. At all costs. You get Wade inside and look after him. I'll keep watch over Sasha."

For several moments, they stood there in a silent war of wills. Finally, the large man stepped back and stuck out his hand. "Simon Vesper. Perhaps Wade chose wisely this time."

Gennive took the offered hand and gripped it firmly. While she contemplated the meaning, Simon hefted Wade into a fireman's carry, kicked the door to her Taurus shut, and headed to the side entrance. Not knowing what else to do, Gennive followed him. If he didn't want her there, she had no doubt Simon would kick her out.

"Follow me. You'll sleep in the adjoining suite. He'll want Sasha close."

Simon led her down the hall and through the kitchen. The master suite was probably bigger than Gennive's whole apartment, and it was adjoined by a second suite that might have been smaller, but she couldn't tell. Both rooms faced the massive swimming pool surrounded by palm trees. A glass wall gave a breathtaking view of the man-made oasis. It was more than Gennive had ever even imagined in a home, much less a single room.

Simon dropped a dark blue overnight bag on the bed. "You'll need this. You'll find sleepwear in the bureau." Then he went back to Wade's suite and closed the double doors, effectively shutting her out.

If you need me, I'm here. She hoped her silent reassurance would penetrate Wade's deep sleep, but there was no way she could tell.

Gennive flopped down on the bed, her legs hanging off the edge. Sasha jumped up beside her, turned around a time or two, and cuddled against her.

She really needed to go through Sasha's things and change her own clothes. Hell, she needed to pee. But she couldn't muster the strength to do anything. It had been an eventful evening and Gennive was just plain worn out. She sighed once, closed her eyes, and promptly fell asleep.

* * *

"I need you, Gennive."

Gennive still lay on the bed, but now she was naked, and Wade Monroe lay on top of her, urging her legs around his waist. At first she was shocked and confused, but the sensations were so real, the touch brushing her mind so tender, Gennive soon sighed and wrapped her arms around him.

"Is this real?" Her question was a mere whisper, but she knew he heard her.

Wade dipped his head to her mouth and claimed her lips. It wasn't just a kiss. He claimed her, took what she knew was rightfully his and refused to let her go. Her head spun. His kisses were like a drug she couldn't get enough of. Nothing in her meager sexual encounters had prepared her for the sensual onslaught she was experiencing now. Wade consumed her with only a kiss.

"As real as you want it to be, my Gennive." Wade didn't stop kissing her. Just as he had before, he spoke directly into her head. His tongue danced with hers. He caressed her gently and coaxed her to explore him as well. "I've never in my life been so drawn to a woman. You will be mine, Gennive. I'll have you. Coven be damned."

He felt so good against her, his big body covering hers in a protective embrace. She felt tiny underneath him. His muscles bunched and flexed underneath her touch. Those sensations alone were enough to make her cream her panties, but the way his cock brushed against her clit was the best sensation in the world.

His kisses tantalized her with the promise of mind blowing sex to come. Gennive knew she should care that he was another woman's man, but why she should care eluded her just now. She couldn't think about anything other than the pleasure he

created so effortlessly within her. Her orgasm was there, simmering just beneath the surface. All she had to do was reach for it...

"That's it, my Gennive." His whisper caressed her as much as his body did. "Don't hold back. Don't hold back."

His mind-whisper tantalized her. If this was a dream, she didn't want to wake. To have a man as handsome and powerful as Wade Monroe interested in her was heady. To have him need her, crave her, was simply unbelievable. This had to be a dream. She was still in Wade's guest suite with Sasha nestled into her side.

With her wavering faith, the crystal clear image faded, but the sensations continued. "I will not let you go, Gennive." He rocked gently against her. Nothing substantial remained but Wade's face. His intense expression penetrated her soul, and Gennive just knew he could feel her arousal. Somehow, he knew how much his kisses affected her and he intended to use that to gain every advantage he could. She could feel his determination as if it were her own.

Wade thrust against her, the bulge of his cock grazing her clit with every stroke. He wasn't naked, though, and rough denim of his pants abraded her deliciously. Each movement pushed her closer and closer to the edge of a cliff and, God help her, she didn't want to fall. She wanted to jump. Wanted to experience the sensation of flying she knew would be there just before she hit bottom. She knew it would be unlike anything she'd ever known before.

Gennive reached for her climax with everything she had in her. Three more strokes, and she exploded in the most intense orgasm of her life. It took several seconds for the sensations to ebb, and once she came down from her post orgasmic high, she tried to put herself back into the fantastical dream world, so she could explore more of Wade's body, but something pushed deeper into her side. Sasha? Now, even the pleasure died slowly as she struggled to awaken. The little feline needed her but Gennive couldn't seem to break through the dream haze. With her attention diverted, Wade took over her dream once again. Everything came into focus and she stared into his eyes.

"I'll come for you when I'm whole again. Do not leave this house, Gennive. I'll find you if you do, and I won't be gentle." With one last thrust of Wade's hips, Gennive came. She gasped for breath that wouldn't come. Her whole body seized and pulsed. Gennive wanted to scream, but somehow held it in. Wade fastened his mouth onto her neck and pulled. The love bite stung, but the slight pain made her orgasm even more intense. Every cell in her body hummed and sizzled with pent-up energy. Never in her life had she experienced anything so intense. Little pinpricks dotted her vision as she opened her eyes...

...to find a naked little girl lying so close to her, she had almost rooted herself underneath Gennive.

What the hell?

Immediately, Gennive grabbed the edge of the comforter they lay on and wrapped it over the tiny body. The girl had folded her knees into her chest and her skin was chilled. Gennive's eyes landed on the bag Simon had handed her. She snatched it and opened it. The contents explained everything. Probably why both he and Wade had insisted she look through it before she went to bed. Inside it was clothing for a girl child. Everything was a child's size five. Jeans, shirts, underwear, and a nightgown. There were socks and shoes also, as well as a stuffed puppy dog that looked like it had seen better days.

"Sasha?" Gennive stroked the girl's hair and stared in wonder. The lion cub wasn't a pet after all. No wonder Wade and Simon were so protective of her.

Carefully, Gennive dressed her for bed, turned down the covers, and gently moved the child to the pillow at the head of the big bed. Covering her up, she dropped a gentle kiss on top of her head.

For a moment, Gennive just stood there watching the child and wondering what to do next. She was still weak in the knees from her wet dream. It seemed obscene. She wanted to put on some nightclothes and crawl into the bed with Sasha, but, given her shaky control on her mental guards, she couldn't make herself. If Wade invaded her

dreams again, she didn't want to be in the same room with a child, let alone the same bed.

Knowing she couldn't leave Sasha alone but not knowing what else to do, Gennive grabbed the other pillow from the bed and curled up on a small sofa in front of a picture window that overlooked the valley below the house. A light throw draped over the back was big enough to cover her and she pulled it to her chin. It wasn't particularly cold, but she shivered anyway. This had to be the strangest day of her life, and she had a feeling it would get worse before it got better.

Damned good thing she had her own paranormal abilities. Otherwise, she'd probably have run away screaming a long time ago. As it was, she was probably losing her mind. She just hoped she'd get some answers before she did. Looked like her mother had been right. Nothing was ever what it seemed.

Chapter Three

Wade's head pounded. It always did after something like this. That, combined with the young woman in the next room who called to everything inside him wolfen, was enough to make him lose control of his telepathic abilities. He'd projected his lust onto her while she slept. He'd known from the second his mind had touched hers he had to have her.

Being an Alpha wolf had its advantages, but sometimes they popped up at the most inconvenient of times. There was an innocence about her. She carried no preconceived notions and had enough paranormal ability to not judge him for his own abilities. Not only that, but she wasn't a member of any pack or coven. Unlike his promised mate, she had no agenda of her own. She'd been in his mind, though limited by his blocks, and had allowed him into hers. She hadn't even tried to block him, only embraced him and his presence. There had been nothing but a desire to help and only a mild irritation at herself for doing his bidding without question.

He smiled at that last. She was surrendering to her Alpha without even realizing it.

Add that to the way she'd protected Sasha from everyone -- including Simon -- and she was perfect for him. Everything he'd ever wanted. The way she'd responded sexually during her dream thrilled him even more. That was an unexpected bonus. He had been more interested in someone to protect Sasha when he couldn't be there than a sexual partner, but she would definitely be that to him if he had his way.

More than that, actually. While in her mind, during their wild flight, Wade had seen within her the capacity for more love and compassion than anyone he'd ever known. Including himself. She wouldn't be a sexual partner without offering him her heart. It was all or nothing with her, and he wasn't sure he was ready for that as a man.

The wolf within him, however, knew exactly what he wanted. It was an impossible reconciliation.

Wade sat up and scrubbed his hand through his hair and over his face. He'd deal with that later. Right now, he needed a shower and a bottle and a half of aspirin.

"About time. I was beginning to think I needed to call the Healer." Simon's deep bass voice rumbled at him from across the room. He sat in a recliner facing the bed. There was no question that the other man had been up all night watching over him, but he showed no sign of weariness.

"No. I'm fine. How are Sasha and Gennive?"

Simon rose slowly, allowing his massively tall and muscled body to unfold from the chair in the most dramatic fashion. The man just loved to impress people with his sheer size and bulk. It definitely helped at times, but Simon was wasting the effect on him. "Why did you trust Sasha's safety to a complete stranger?"

Ah. That explained his show of strength. Bruised feelings. "Because I don't know what happened out there. Just before that semi plowed into me, I got a mental..." He struggled for the words to describe what he'd felt. "...twitch. I don't think it was an accident."

Simon raised one dark brow. "Dark Witches?"

"I'm not sure. I just knew I had to keep Sasha safe. If someone was out to kill me, I wanted to put as much distance between me and her as I could. Finding Gennive was a stroke of luck I didn't question."

"Could have been too lucky. What if she's in on it?"

"No. I was in her mind. She's mildly telepathic, but hasn't developed her abilities. I don't think she's used them much. It felt like she was working on pure instinct instead of skill."

"I sensed much the same. I just wanted to make sure you felt it too." Simon paced a couple of steps away from Wade before adding, "I still think you should have left Sasha with me."

"She's not yours to protect, my friend. I've got her well in hand."

"I wish I could say the same about you, Wade. It disturbs me more than I can say that you believe someone tried to kill you."

"You and me both, Simon." Wade took a moment to gather his thoughts. "What do you suggest we do? Pretend it didn't happen? Deny it was anything other than a minor accident? Do you think the pack would believe it?"

Simon shrugged. "Wouldn't matter. You're alive and healed. You're still the Alpha."

"I want you to look into this on your own. Don't leave it to the hunters. I want you and your team on it. Quietly. If anyone in the hierarchy is behind this, I want to know."

"Indeed. I'm leaving Micha here to watch over you and Sasha. He'll keep a distance, but be there if you need him."

"Include Gennive in his charge."

Simon raised an eyebrow. "Her work is done. I'm sure she'll want to go home."

"I don't intend to let her, Simon. She's mine. That's between us. I don't want to make her a target. If I keep her here with Sasha, no one will suspect she's anything to me other than a babysitter."

"You're kidding. Right? If it is the Dark Witches, they'll know. Much as I hate to admit it, since you agreed to a union with Vivian, they seem to know every move you make. You need to get rid of the woman. If you want to protect her, send her away until we figure this out."

Wade shook his head. Simon was right, but he couldn't do it. He'd known it from the second he'd looked into her lovely face. "Not an option. I don't know why, but I can't. I won't."

"Wolves mate for life, Wade. You promised yours to Vivian. She might have fled back to the Dark Witches, but she's still your promised mate."

"We went through the betrothal ceremony, yes, but she's not my mate. We never sealed the promise."

Wade could easily read the shock on the other man's face. He couldn't really blame Simon. It was hard for him to believe it himself, let alone expect anyone else to understand. Vivian was a beautiful, exotic woman. But the sexual attraction just wasn't there.

"If you tell me you haven't consummated the promise, I'll kick your ass for lying to me."

"I swear, Simon, I just couldn't do it. I mean --" He paused and took a breath. It was the only time he'd ever breathed a word of his failed covenant to anyone. "I *really* couldn't do it. Damned witch cursed me. Told me I'd never be able to touch her, and I never have. Couldn't have even if I'd wanted to. Not that I ever really had any inclination to."

"That's just..."

"Weird?"

"Cruel. No wonder you sent her away."

Wade smiled. "Well, she got the alliance she wanted between the pack and Witches. I supposed that's all she was after." He shook his head once. This was the part that bothered him. "I just know the woman is up to something. The only way to back out of the betrothal and still save face is to prove she entered into it with malice. Other than just not liking me, I have no idea what it could possibly be."

"Hmm." Simon was obviously thinking things over. He often did when Wade had a bad feeling but had nothing else to offer but intuition. "Keep your woman, Wade. Keep her close. Sasha too. I'll be back when I can."

Simon opened the door, shifted into the large silver wolf that was his pack form, and bounded off without another word. Something in the back of Wade's mind told him this whole situation wasn't good. Not good at all.

* * *

Gennive woke when little Sasha crawled onto the couch beside her, molding herself into Gennive, and pulled the blanket around her tiny body. She pulled Gennive's arm around her as if she needed the security of an adult to feel safe.

"You OK, sweetheart?" Gennive whispered her question, kissing the top of Sasha's head as she did.

"Yeah. Where's Daddy?" The girl's voice was quiet and small. She was obviously still scared and needed Gennive's comfort and reassurance.

"I think he's in his bedroom. Simon was with him." She didn't know what to tell Sasha. Was Wade OK? Gennive had no idea if he was. He hadn't been, exactly, and she was still unable to reach him mentally. With him still blocking her, Gennive took it as a good sign. Neither of them said anything for a moment, and Gennive thought Sasha had gone back to sleep.

"Can we get back in the bed? It's cold here." Sasha's sleepy voice wrapped around Gennive's heart and squeezed. This little girl trusted Gennive to protect her. Sasha accepted her without question.

"You can go back if you want to, sweetheart. I'll probably stay here." Gennive found she really liked the closeness she and Sasha shared, but she wasn't sure it was appropriate.

"But Daddy always snuggles me," she whined sweetly. "I don't think I can sleep if you don't snuggle me. I'll be awake all night." It was a highly practiced line, Gennive thought, but that didn't make it any less endearing.

Gennive couldn't help but smile and hug the child tightly once before sitting up. "OK. Let's go to the bathroom before we get back in bed. Is that OK?"

"Yeah. Daddy says you should always pee before you go to sleep."

"Your daddy's a smart man."

"He's leader of the pack. Of course he's smart!" Sasha flounced to the bathroom, never missing a step in the dark and making absolutely no noise. Gennive followed her, feeling her way through the large room until Sasha turned on the bathroom light.

She was beginning to realize just how different Sasha and Wade were. It was highly probable that Simon was part of this too. Exactly what "this" was, Gennive could only guess. Given Sasha's unique gifts, Gennive figured they were all shifters of some

sort. Were they all lions? Somehow, she didn't think so. Especially Simon. She couldn't put her finger on it, but the two men just felt different from Sasha.

Once both of them were snugly cuddled together, Sasha let out a contented sigh and promptly fell asleep. Gennive was grateful the child went back to sleep so quickly. She needed to think.

Come to me, Gennive.

The whispered command from Wade was laced heavily with suggestion, and Gennive almost got up before she could stop herself. She was so in over her head!

No, Wade. Not tonight. I need to think.

You have no idea what you've stepped in the middle of, Gennive. I can help you.

From my perspective, you're the main problem. I don't know what to make of you. The only reason I'm still here is because I promised to take care of Sasha.

I'm betting I've got at least a little to do with it, too. Wade's voice, carried through her mind, was too intimate. Especially after the very vivid dream earlier. How long has it been since you've communicated this way with another living being?

Damned man. He had a point, but Gennive refused to take that bait. I'm leaving in the morning, Wade. Even if you're not completely healed, I'm betting Simon can look after Sasha better than I can.

He could, probably, if he weren't on the hunt.

You're not making any sense, Wade. Well, maybe you're making sense to yourself but I have no idea who or what you are... I know you're something... different... but I have no idea what.

Come to me. I'll explain everything.

No. I'm going home.

Gennive felt his sigh more than heard it. She was finding it less and less difficult to pick up on his emotions and thoughts. She wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not. It felt too damned intimate.

We don't think my accident was an accident, Gennive. Someone is trying to kill me and Simon is going to find out who. In the meantime, I'd really appreciate it if you could stay here

and look after Sasha. She really likes you, and you're the only one I can trust other than Simon at the moment.

That's totally ridiculous! You have no idea who I am, Wade! Why would you trust a perfect stranger to care for your daughter? What if I were the one trying to kill you? How do you know I'm not?

Wade's laughter caressed her mind and sent her stomach fluttering. He had such a sexy laugh, so full of naughty promises Gennive groaned aloud.

Sweet Gennive, I've been in your mind the same way you've been in mine. Only I'm a lot better at it than you are. I'd never invade your privacy, but I relived the wreck through your eyes. I felt your emotions and heard your thoughts. You're a good person, Gennive. You're not the one trying to kill me. I know that with every fiber of my being. Now, come to me.

This time, there was no compulsion other than the sinfulness of his voice. That fact alone made her decide to comply with his command. She sighed and carefully extricated herself from Sasha's embrace. She tucked the covers around the child before tiptoeing from the room. Gennive left the door open and made her way down the short hallway to Wade's room. Before she could knock, the door opened and there he stood.

Her breath caught. Wade Monroe was pure sin. Had the devil come to Earth, he'd probably look like this man before her. He stood there, bare-chested, the dancing firelight the only illumination. Black hair glistened with red and orange highlights. His body was big and muscled, and Gennive felt small next to him. She hadn't noticed how large he was before, but it was all she could concentrate on now. He was perfection. It was all she could do not to reach out and trace the beautiful curve of one arm with her fingertips. He was her every naughty fantasy in the flesh and if given the chance, Gennive knew she'd live out every one of them. With him. One glance from those exotically blue eyes and her knees went weak and moisture leaked from between her legs.

"Before you enter, we need to get something straight, Gennive."

She had to blink several times before she could process his words. "You called me to you. Remember?"

Wade shook his head slightly as if trying to clear it. "Yes. But I won't take advantage of your generosity anymore."

"I don't understand." Gennive had no illusions about what would happen once she entered his rooms. She wanted him and, unless the thoughts and emotions he was spilling over to her were extremely misleading, he wanted her too. She had a very vivid image of him covering her with that magnificent, big body and plunging into her over and over. She'd wrap her legs around him and never let him go...

"I've imposed on your time by insisting you stay with Sasha. I don't intend to take anything else from you unless you give it to me freely."

It was Gennive's turn to try and clear her mind. How did he get under her skin like this? Gennive had had her share of lovers in the past, but none of them had affected her like this. He was a stranger. She knew nothing about him except he hid part of himself from everyone the same as she did. Perhaps it was that common link that compelled her. Perhaps it was his raw sensuality. Maybe she just had been too long without sex and needed to scratch an itch. That was certainly possible, but Gennive doubted it. There was something about this man she simply couldn't resist.

"I stayed because Sasha needed me, Wade. I don't consider that an imposition. She was scared to death. If I was able to calm her, it was worth any amount of time."

"What I want from you now is much more than simply your time, Gennive. I want everything. I want you."

Gennive blinked several times and stepped back once. "I -- I don't understand."

"I intend to claim you for my own. You may not be of my pack or even one of the witch covens, but you're mine. I can feel it in every part of my being. Once you give me your body -- and you will give me your body -- I don't intend to let you go."

Chapter Four

Wade knew he'd shocked her. She was also excited beyond belief. It was definitely encouraging. His wolf nature had made up its mind, and there was no turning back. She might not be ready yet, but Wade knew he could convince her they called to each other.

Feeling that call now, Wade wondered how he could have ever let himself be fooled into thinking a match with Vivian would settle this part of his wolf nature. The hard truth was, he'd let her bully him into it. It was so against his nature, he'd kept it a secret from even Simon. If anyone found out how completely she'd forced him into their "engagement," he'd lose leadership of the pack.

Gennive looked at him now, and it struck him how different the two women were. Vivian's eyes were so full of secrets and dark magic. Gennive's were full only of wonder and excitement. Even if Wade hadn't been able to catch emotions and spill-over thoughts from Gennive, her eyes gave her away. She held no secrets, no ulterior motive, only desire and longing.

He could also see her reluctance. Like any smart woman, the thought of "forever" with a stranger was a bit daunting.

"Good," he praised. "You're not taking me lightly." He stepped aside then and motioned her inside.

"But you said --"

"Hush, sweetheart," Wade cut her off with a whisper. "As long as you accept I mean exactly what I said, there can be no misunderstanding. You're not ready. I felt it in your mind. I would still like the pleasure of your presence."

Gennive hesitated, wary of him. Wade couldn't help but smile. She probably had a right to be. The longer he was with her, the more he knew he had to have her. Truth

be known, Wade wasn't above seducing her. He just wanted to make sure she knew what she was getting herself into.

"You're not going to pounce on me or anything, are you?"

Wade couldn't help his chuckle. "No promises, my Gennive, but I'll not do anything you don't want me to."

"OK, but you can't count reading my mind. I have to actually say it."

"I've found the secret places in the mind often speak the truth when the individual won't."

"You'll get no argument from me there," she mumbled, "but I want your promise. You won't do anything unless I actually say it's what I want. I'm not going to tie myself to a man in a society I don't understand simply because I think he's a sexy hunk I'd like to screw into next week."

Wade blinked several times before chuckling softly. He would have laughed out loud had he not been afraid he'd wake Sasha. "I'll do my best to use that bit of information to my advantage, but I swear I won't screw you into next week unless you ask me to."

"Fair enough."

Just like that, Gennive lost all her hesitation and stepped into his suite. He guided her to the sofa in front of the fireplace. Wade shook his head. She had no idea what he was capable of, though she knew more than he'd ever shown anyone else. She'd seen him at his most vulnerable and didn't think less of him for it.

"Why would I think badly of you for being hurt?" Gennive's face showed genuine puzzlement.

Wade wasn't used to other people slipping inside his mind. Normally, he'd just block her, but he didn't want to. She didn't make any attempt to keep him out of her head. It seemed like the right thing to do, but there was more to it than that. He wanted her to know everything about him. Needed her to be comfortable touching his mind when she wanted. It might put him in a weaker position, but Gennive wasn't the kind of woman to use it maliciously. She was the only truly guileless person -- other than

Sasha -- he'd ever met. It was part of what drew him to her. "I'm leader of my pack, Gennive. Being weak isn't allowed, no matter the circumstances."

She shrugged. "I didn't think you were ever weak. I don't know how you managed to make it out of that hospital on your own power, but I knew I couldn't carry you. I would have tried though." She raised her chin up a notch as if she thought her lack of physical strength might turn him against her.

"I know you would have. I was able to haul my sorry hide out of there because of you, Gennive. You couldn't do it on your own, but you were willing to try. For a stranger. You gave me the strength I needed."

Her eyes were wide, fathomless pools as she looked at him. Wade could feel her awe and what she considered an insane need to wrap her arms around him and hold him close.

"What do you want from me, Wade?" Her voice was thick with emotion. "I don't know you, but I know more about you than anyone I've ever known. Even my mother. I've been in your mind. I know the kind of person you are. I can feel your need for secrets, yet you let me in whenever I want. For a man with secrets, you sure do give away a lot."

"Simon feels much the same way, but I refuse to keep anything from you."

"Come on, Wade. I know you've been in my mind as much as I've been in yours, but neither of us knows the other that well. My own mother had secrets she never let me in on. I find it hard to believe you'd not hold something back."

Wade frowned, looking in her thoughts for memories of her mother. From the information he gleaned, her mother was a powerful telepath but afraid of her abilities. She had been mortified to find out she had passed on her curse to her daughter and had taught Gennive to repress her gifts. Which she had. Until tonight. "You know what it feels like to encounter a block, yes?"

"Of course. I found your blocks earlier."

"And have you found any since I woke?"

She hesitated. "No, but I'm not very good at this. I'm not saying I think you are hiding anything, I'm just saying everyone has secrets."

"You're absolutely right, and I'm sure if you looked hard enough, you'd find I have plenty. Just not from you."

She was breathing hard, like she'd run a race. Wade knew it was a combination of extreme attraction and mental overload. She'd had all she could take for one night, yet she didn't want to leave him.

Perfect.

Wade took her hand in his and turned it over to kiss her palm. "You're tired."

Gennive sighed and wilted visibly. "Yes. It's been an eventful day. I think I broke my brain a while back."

"Kiss me, Gennive." His whispered command brought an instant blush to her cheeks and sparked a flame deep inside her. Wade wanted to fan.

"Is that allowed?"

He grinned. "Absolutely. Now, kiss me."

She knew he hadn't answered her question, but, again, Wade felt that complete trust in her heart as she leaned forward and pressed her lips against his.

It was a simple, closed mouthed kiss. At first. Gennive's lips molded lightly to his. Wade gave her a moment before he retreated, only to lick the seam of her lips and slip his tongue inside her mouth.

Gennive gasped, then moaned and opened for him, tentatively touching his tongue with hers. Wade was content to let her explore their kiss and take what she wanted. He wanted her familiar with his touch, with him. He wanted Gennive to crave him as he was beginning to crave her.

When her mind grasped at his, needing an anchor, he opened himself up to her. His lust and deep-seated need for her poured through her link. Gennive whimpered and grasped his shoulder. She was remembering her earlier statement about wanting to screw him into next week and wasn't sure she wanted this to stop, no matter what happened in the morning.

Only if you ask me, Gennive. Tell me what you want, sweetheart.

His lips teased and promised. It wasn't so much a kiss as a claiming. Gennive knew she was in over her head, and this torrid kiss only confirmed it. Two more minutes, and she wouldn't merely ask him to take her, she'd probably take what she wanted from him.

Her stomach fluttered, making her pussy clench with need. There was a void inside her she'd never noticed before. Not until this extraordinary man had touched her had she found out what she'd been missing all her life.

It wasn't merely the sexual need. Wade seemed to promise much, much more. With their mind-to-mind communication, he'd opened a link few people were capable of sharing and touched something inside her no one else had ever been able to. She knew she'd always know what he was feeling.

Even now, he wanted to share her body, but he had a deep-seated need to wrap himself around her heart first. Once he'd done that, he would never let her go. Gennive knew he didn't fully understand his need and had no expectations she felt the same attraction and all-consuming need for him, but he was determined to explore these feelings and see if he could make her feel the same way.

Gennive fed from his hunger. She loved the wild, tangy taste of him. His breath smelled like the beginnings of a summer storm and tasted like rain. The effect was like a thunderclap to her senses and she was soon lost in the torrent of sensations he created within them both.

Over and over he sucked and licked at her lips, kissing her with a fevered intensity without overpowering her. Gennive found herself kissing him with just as much hunger and enthusiasm. She matched his lust and, in that moment, she could easily see herself kissing him and exploring his body happily for the rest of her life. She doubted very much that she'd ever tire of the feel of his mouth on hers.

What would it feel like to have him kiss the rest of her body?

Wade groaned and pulled his head away from hers only to bury his face at the juncture of her shoulder and neck. Gennive clung to him as if he were her only lifeline in a turbulent sea. Her whole body tingled with sensation, and Wade was the cause of every bit of it.

"I love the way you smell, Gennive." Her ears rang and blood rushed through her head, but she still caught his throaty whisper. "It's like a forest after the first snowfall..."

Wade seemed to be mumbling to himself, but his words sent a thrill shooting through her core. Her pussy clenched, and she couldn't have stopped her moan if she'd tried.

"Oh, yes, Gennive," he whispered. "I can give you such pleasure as would make the gods blush. Tell me what you want. Tell me you want me."

His hands roamed her body lightly. He didn't grope like most men she'd been with had. Instead, he touched her as if she were precious to him. He molded her curves, brushed her nipple with a thumb. All the while, he trailed kisses along the side of her neck, her cheek, her temple. Feather light kisses all over her face sparked shivers. Chill bumps erupted over her skin, and her nipples puckered to impossibly hard peaks.

Before she could answer, he covered her mouth with his once more. His tongue slipped effortlessly inside when she gasped. Gennive knew she needed to stop this before it went any further, but she didn't have it in her to make him stop. She wanted this. Wanted it with every fiber of her being. In that moment, she didn't care if she tied herself to Wade for life, she wanted him.

He seemed to sense her surrender. He urged her to lie back on the couch and followed her, coaxing her legs apart so he could fit his hips between them. Wade never broke their kiss, only tangled his fingers in her hair and positioned her head just where he wanted it.

And he went on kissing her.

Gennive's head spun, and she clung to him. Nothing had ever felt so good. She felt as if she were on the verge of something great, something beyond a simple orgasm.

She threatened to burst free of some invisible bond and stretch her wings. It was that overwhelming.

As she lost herself in the sensations Wade was creating within her with only a kiss, her body tingled. A soft breeze stirred around her, ruffling her hair and his, tickling her nose. She felt lighter than air and could have sworn her body floated off the couch slightly. Then his tongue danced with hers, and she didn't care.

They were both fully clothed, except for Wade's shirt, yet Gennive felt more naked and exposed than she ever had. The way she felt his need of her and his desire for nothing more than her comfort and happiness was more intimate than any act of love or lust she'd ever participated in. He wanted her with him forever with a passion that bordered on obsession, but he was resolved not to claim her until she was ready. Gennive even heard a hint of something that suggested he'd willingly give himself to her even if she could never accept him. He needed her that much. Knew in his heart that he'd never be satisfied with anyone else.

It was enough to give Gennive pause. She stilled under his kisses, and he immediately pulled back. He didn't roll off her, and he didn't completely stop his nuzzling and butterfly kisses over her face and neck. That was when Gennive realized she really had been floating off the couch slightly. They settled back down softly, thank goodness. She wondered if Wade noticed, but he gave no indication.

"You slip into my thoughts too easily, little Gennive. There's nothing for you to be afraid of."

"I just feel like everything's happening too fast. I mean, you're much more than simply a man. You're a shape shifter. Leader of your pack. I don't know the details, but you're not entirely a single man, are you. And you have a child. I'm not a home wrecker, Wade. You're the first person in my life, other than my mother, to have the same gifts I have, and it's only natural I'm more than a little taken with you."

Gennive sighed and finally gave in to the temptation to touch his beard-roughened cheek with her fingertips. She found herself straying to his kiss-perfect lips and longing to feel them on hers once more. "Add to that I've never been kissed before

the way you kiss me, and how handsome you are and how you make me feel like I'm the only woman in the world, and I don't stand a chance." She shook her head. There was a point she had been trying to make. "But I don't fool around with married men. Not for any reason."

Wade smiled, but didn't let her up. "My betrothal to Vivian is... complicated. At the moment, she's back with her coven, and I'm sure she'll only return for the joining ceremony. Sasha isn't her child. She's really not mine, either. I found her, abandoned. As pack leader, it was my responsibility to find her a suitable home. Several people volunteered, but the little hell-cat wouldn't leave my side."

He smiled and Gennive caught glimpses of his memory. Sasha, in her lion cub form, digging her claws in as deep as she could to his chest and shoulder, refusing to be separated from Wade. Gennive could even feel the remembered pain, but she also noticed in his memory Wade clung to Sasha just as she clung to him.

"Vivian never took to Sasha. She was never much of a kid person and even less of a cat person. For a witch, that's pretty abnormal."

If he was hoping for a smile, he didn't get it from her. Gennive could hear the sorrow and annoyance in his thoughts.

Gennive wasn't sure how much of her thoughts and feelings Wade could pick up, but she needed to put them into words for him. This was way outside her realm of experience, and she was lost. "I know you're a telepath, Wade. Probably stronger and certainly more adept than I am, but I want to make sure you don't misunderstand me."

She shifted her position, trying to ignore his cock rubbing insistently against her clit through their clothing. She absolutely could not be distracted now. "I've seen into your mind. You're a good man. Even though I've known you less than twenty-four hours, I'm convinced I know you better and more completely than anyone I've ever met. I feel the same need to keep you close that you feel for me. But I can't commit myself to a man who's not mine. I hope you understand what I'm trying to say. It's not that I don't want you or think I might change my mind once I get to know you. I know I won't."

The love and pride that shone on Wade's face and flowed into her mind was almost enough to make her cry. Not only did he understand her decision, he respected her for it. And he was determined to end things with Vivian once and for all. The sooner the better. Gennive knew that had always been his intention -- even before he met her -- but now, he'd end it no matter what. Pack leadership be damned. Nothing was more important than Gennive and Sasha, and he was determined for them to live as a family.

With one last, lingering kiss, Wade rose to his knees on the couch. Standing, he reached for her hand. "You're tired. Go rest. I'll be here if you need me."

Gennive hesitated before taking his hand. He pulled her gently to her feet and into his arms once more. She stared into his face, wanting desperately not to leave him, yet knowing she had to. If she wanted a future with this man, she had to.

"I'll never leave you, Gennive. If you need me, just reach for me with your mind. You can always find me there. Always." He let her go then, though his fingers twined with hers as he led her to the door. It was as if he was as loath for her to leave as she was. He opened the door and dipped his head for one last kiss before she turned to leave.

When she heard the door close behind her, Gennive sagged against the wall. There was no way she could stay away for long. She already felt alone and bereft without him. She'd never been in love before -- wasn't ready to say she was now -- but she knew she didn't have the willpower to keep her distance. She hoped he got the mess with Vivian straightened out soon.

Very soon.

Chapter Five

Gennive was his. It was just a matter of him freeing himself of Vivian and those vicious Dark Witches. It was simple really. He'd let the pack elders know his suspicions that he'd been hexed in order for Vivian to gain control of the pack. Tradition said that if he, as pack Alpha, was unable to do his duties, his mate had first opportunity to claim the title. She'd have to prove herself, but she would be seriously considered. He had a feeling that's what Vivian was going for. With them not being officially married she'd have less of a claim, but it was still theoretically possible. If he could get the elders to pool their resources and combine them with Simon's hunters, they'd at least find out if he was right or just crazy.

The more time that passed since the ceremony binding him and Vivian as promised, the more he wondered how he'd allowed it to happen. He'd never had any notions of love toward Vivian. He didn't even particularly like Vivian. She'd always done her best to keep her distance from him, and she used very powerful spells to keep him out of her mind. He'd never invade someone's privacy without permission, but intimacies between a husband and wife were guaranteed to give them both spillover into private thoughts. Vivian had made damned sure that hadn't happened.

The fact that she hadn't wanted to consummate their betrothal puzzled him, though. By having a child, she would have secured her position and he'd never have been rid of her. Even before their official marriage, before she was actually his wife, a child would have created a permanent link to both himself and the pack.

Now, it was only a matter of time before he figured out what she was up to and dissolved their impending union. That there was something more going on other than a merger of their two peoples was a given. He and Simon just had to figure out what.

Then there was Gennive. She thought he'd missed the fact that they'd levitated a few inches above the couch when she surrendered to him, but he hadn't. She had been shocked, hadn't known what was going on. Even now, she wondered if it had been her imagination.

Wade knew differently. Gennive was a witch. Just what kind of witch, he didn't know, but they'd figure it out.

It all scares me so much. What's happening to me?

The question hadn't been for him, but to herself. Gennive was confused and scared. Wade wanted to go to her, but it was too soon. She needed her space, and he needed to heal completely. When he claimed her, he'd do it whole.

I should leave. I should really leave. But Wade needs me. So does little Sasha. Wade's still hurt, though he tries to hide it, and he's sent Simon away... and there's... someone still out there...

Her thoughts faded as she drifted into sleep, but Wade was struck by her last comment. She was right. He couldn't prove it, but he was certain Vivian had something to do with the incident earlier in the evening.

I don't know about that, but it's a good thing you set up that dummy bank account for Vivian or you'd be cleaned out.

Simon. The way his security chief penetrated his thoughts was always unnerving. Wade never seemed able to block him, no matter what he did. Simon had never told him so, but Wade had long suspected the man could break any mental block.

Most of the time, yes. In your Vivian's case, she was definitely prepared before going into this venture. Her mind is protected with the strongest magic I've ever come across. And I get the feeling this was about more than just money.

If she's blocking you magically, how can you tell? A gut feeling?

That's the strange part. She's intentionally letting the magic slip.

In all the years Wade had known Simon, he'd never seen the man falter. Whatever Vivian was up to, she had even the great hunter Simon Vesper stumped.

What else did you find out?

That you're in danger. Someone within the Dark Witch Coven has put out a hit on you. You can bet they'll try again. Don't leave the house until I get there. I'll move you and Sasha to a pack safe house.

And Gennive. Don't forget Gennive. Wade knew damned well Simon hadn't forgotten her. Simon never forgot anything.

Use caution with her, Wade. She has latent powers I don't trust. Even in the mind-to-mind communication, Simon sounded tense. Strained. Simon was most comfortable at a distance from other people. Wade knew he preferred interacting with people telepathically.

Through their constant communication over the years, Wade had learned to glean a bit of information on whatever subject he and Simon discussed. Just knowing Simon was concerned was enough to convince Wade to use caution where Gennive was concerned, but not for the reasons Simon might think. No matter what the other man said, Wade would never believe Gennive was anything other than genuine in her actions. The woman was truly concerned for Sasha and himself. She was confused by her attraction to him and the all-consuming need to touch his mind when he wasn't close, but she had no malicious intent.

I know. You probably know more than I do, but I'm not certain she was aware of her abilities before tonight. Wade wanted Simon to see his point of view, not so much for himself, but for Gennive. Wade had a protective urge that wouldn't rest until he convinced his best friend she wasn't a bad person.

There's another reason I don't entirely trust her. She can block me naturally.

She can? I seem to be able to move freely through her thoughts, and she's getting better at reading me. It's almost as if she reaches for me unconsciously. Not ten minutes earlier she projected her thoughts to me just before she fell asleep.

I still don't like it. It was obvious Simon wasn't going to be convinced easily.

Sasha likes her. She never hesitated once to go with her. She dreams of Gennive even now.

I know. I'm always in Sasha's thoughts and dreams.

And Simon was gone.

Now, why would Simon be interested in Sasha's dreams?

* * *

The morning didn't give Gennive any answers. She was still torn between the need to put as much distance between herself and Wade Monroe as possible and the need to protect him. He might be the dangerous one, but there was something dark following him. She could see that dark aura about him she always saw when someone was in danger. Sasha, too. The only time the aura lessened was when she was with them.

Gennive watched the little girl as she brushed her long blonde hair. "Can you help me with the tangles? I'm getting stuck."

She smiled and took the brush from Sasha and began sorting through the tangles. Gennive got the feeling Sasha wanted to say something but was afraid. She was about to question the child about it when a deafening explosion rocked the house.

Sasha screamed and dropped to the floor, covering her ears. Gennive did the same, gathering the child in her arms. Automatically, she reached out for Wade. At first she felt nothing. She thought he might be unconscious, then she realized he was blocking her. It took little effort to break through. When she did, white-hot rage poured in from Wade. He was fighting, and absolutely furious. It took all her strength not to get caught up in his emotions, but she managed to rip herself away before he took her with him down his violent path.

Gennive gasped under the onslaught, causing more distress to the already frightened Sasha. Tears now streamed down the child's face, and she still had her hands clapped over her ears.

Simon! Gennive called out with everything in her she possessed. Not a full day ago, she'd never have thought to try this, but now that she'd been using her gifts so much, she found it the most natural thing in the world. *Wade needs help! He's being attacked!*

Are you and Sasha safe?

Not yet. But I don't think we're in any immediate danger.

Get Sasha out of there. Wait for us at your apartment, and Wade and I will take both of you back to the pack.

Almost immediately, a dark and ominous aura filled her mind around Wade and Simon. If she left them, they'd die. She knew it in her soul.

We'll wait by my car for you.

You'll leave. Now! I will not have you risking Sasha's life for any reason.

The deadly implications of what would happen to her should something bad befall Sasha sent shivers through her body. But when she looked at Sasha, reached out for her mind, the auras surrounding the child were the same as those with Wade. As long as she was with them, they'd both be OK.

You're going to have to trust me, Simon. If I leave you and Wade, you're both dead. Same with Sasha. I can't leave any of you without death following, so I'll just have to protect all of you. If you don't like it, do whatever vile and horrendous thing you want to me. Just wait until we're away from here.

Simon's irritation and anger beat at her. Not because she was that far into his mind, but because he wanted it to. He was more infuriated at her than he'd been at anyone in his entire life. She was risking Sasha's life unnecessarily. Fortunately, that didn't bother Gennive. She'd always trusted her instincts. She wasn't about to second-guess herself now.

Gennive gently pulled Sasha's hands down and wiped her cheeks with the pads of her thumbs. "We've got to get out of here."

Sasha shook her head violently. "No! Daddy needs us! If we leave him here, he'll die. I don't care what Simon says."

Gennive paused and looked at Sasha before asking her next question. "Do you see and feel the auras, too?"

Sasha nodded vigorously. "We can't leave him. Please, Gennive." She was a child, but she sounded so much like an adult, it hurt Gennive's heart. She shouldn't carry the worries of grownups at her age.

"We won't. But I won't put you in harm's way. We'll go wait by my car. That's close enough to help if we need to, but far enough away to shield you should we become the target instead of Wade."

"He's my daddy."

Gennive hugged the child tightly. She hoped it was reassuring. Instead, she was pretty sure she took as much comfort from Sasha as Sasha took from her.

They couldn't afford to stay long though. Another explosion shook them, this time followed by an intense light so bright Gennive had to squeeze her eyes tightly shut. She pulled Sasha against her body and shielded her eyes as best she could.

"Dark Witches," Sasha whispered. "Vivian."

"Are you sure, Sasha?" Gennive whispered back, reaching out with her mind for a clue as to what was happening. She could no longer find her way into Wade's thoughts. There was no way to tell what was going on where he was.

The child nodded her head. "It feels like Vivian."

Gennive took a breath. The longer they waited, the more likely they'd be trapped if the house were on fire. No matter what, they needed to get outside. She stood and urged Sasha to do so as well.

Keeping a tight grip on the girl's hand, she hurried through the house, all the while mindful of the sounds around them. She strained to get a glimpse of Wade's mind, but he had a block firmly in place. Simon, too. She knew Simon had arrived, but both men refused to let her in.

She and Sasha made it to her car in short order. Behind the house, in the back yard, a fantastic light display was testament to the battle taking place. Occasionally, explosions and blindingly bright flashes lit the already bright sky. A myriad of colorful auras danced around the area as the battle raged. Each aura changed to fit the situation, and Gennive could tell which way the battle was going. Unfortunately, she had no idea which end of the yard Wade and Simon were on.

Simply running into the fray wasn't an option. She wouldn't risk Sasha getting hurt, and she wouldn't leave her alone. With the men blocking her, there was only one other option.

Gennive closed her eyes and reached out to the person Sasha had named a Dark Witch. At first she got nothing, but after a couple of minutes of concentration and clearing her mind of anything other than her target, Gennive started to get vague images of the back of Wade's house.

The witch fought two great canine-like creatures. Their heads and hind legs were like great wolves, but they stood on two legs, and they had arms and hands with long, sharp fingernails rather than front legs and claws.

The witch's magic seemed to be defensive rather than offensive. Several times, she had the opportunity to kill one or the other, yet she merely fought them back and stayed out of their way. To Gennive, it felt like her effort was more for show than any real attempt to kill or maim. She wasn't even looking for something to steal. She had something to prove, and she was determined to do that without harming Wade or Simon even if others wanted her to.

Gennive was about to gather Sasha and make her way behind Wade and Simon when four other witches joined the first. The woman whose mind Gennive had managed to enter was taken completely by surprise. One of them backhanded her so hard, Gennive tasted blood. Then the attack began in earnest.

Simon and Wade were pinned down now. Gennive could see it through the eyes of the first witch. Men they could kill. Magic they couldn't fight. They had nothing with which to fight. It was only a matter of time before they made one last, desperate charge. Then they would die.

"No!" Gennive screamed as she pulled out of the other woman's mind. She concentrated all her might on Wade and Simon. If they couldn't make it to her, she'd bring them herself.

In an instant, she lost her breath, and the air was suddenly white hot. Gennive tried to scream, but no sound reached her ears. Her skin burned, and she even felt it

bubble from the intense heat. She had a moment to wonder what the hell she'd done and if Sasha would be OK.

Then a small hand on her outer thigh grounded her and she reached for the two men, not questioning the magic that gripped her. As quickly as it had started, the magic vanished. Gennive fell to her knees and gasped for breath. She groped for Sasha's hand and pulled it to her chest, hugging the child's hand and arm close.

"You OK?" Sasha's small voice penetrated the ringing in Gennive's ears, but she still couldn't focus on Sasha's face.

"Yeah. I think so."

She'd barely gotten the words out of her mouth when she was lifted by large, strong hands with pointy fingernails as sharp as daggers. She looked over her shoulder and the very same creatures she'd seen the witch fighting stood over her, urging her to her feet. Both looked scary as hell. Not to mention more than a little pissed.

"I did exactly what you told me to, Simon. I got Sasha out of the house and I didn't get either of us involved in the fighting."

"Get moving, human." The gruff growl was Simon's voice. Wade looked toward the attackers behind the house and backed away, guarding their backs.

Simon shoved Gennive forward and scooped up Sasha. He ran ahead of Gennive but not far. Wade moved behind her and urged her to run faster. Gennive shook her head, trying to clear it.

Take us away. Sasha's small voice penetrated Gennive's dazed brain as she stumbled after Sasha and Simon. *Only you can save us, Gennive.*

Desperation gripped her when she looked back at Wade only to realize they were being hunted. Figures in dark capes raced up the hill from the back of the house toward them. One of them raised a hand, and long arcs of lightning shot out at them, singeing the ground where she'd stepped.

Fleeing the old fashioned way wasn't an option. They'd get fried before they got far. Without another thought, that awful burning, dizzying sensation of magic gripping

her overtook her senses. This time, when she opened her eyes, they were standing in her small apartment.

Well, the others were standing -- she was crumpled on the floor retching. The burning pain over her skin still gripped her, but lessened as the seconds ticked by. She looked at her arm, fully expecting to see the flesh charred and blistered. Instead, she saw only clean, pink skin.

"What the fuck just happened?" Simon sounded mad as hell and looked at her accusingly. "That was more than a simple spell. That was complicated magic. Very complicated. And powerful. It's hard enough to transport one person, but four?" He rounded on Wade. "Why didn't you tell me she was capable of this kind of magic?"

Wade shifted back to his human form. "You've been in her mind as much as I have, and you're more adept at telepathy. Why didn't you pick it up yourself?"

Simon shifted as well. "Because she didn't know she could do shit like that."

"Well, if she didn't know, how the hell did you expect me to know?"

"Shut up." Simon scrubbed his hands through his long, dark hair. "This is a hell of a mess. You're tying yourself to another witch, Wade. And not just any witch. She's likely a member of the Grand Coven or something equally bad. Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

"You worry about your own life and leave me to mine." Wade let his arms hang at his sides, but he shifted his weight to the balls of his feet. Clearly, he expected a fight.

"You're a fool, Wade!" Simon hissed and slashed his hand through the air. "Take her to the Dark Witches and dump her. You've already put your leadership of the pack in jeopardy once. Twice won't be forgiven. Even by me."

"She's not our enemy, Simon. If she were, she'd have left us there to die."

Simon growled and turned to face Gennive. "If you put so much as a toe out of line, I'll kill you myself."

"You stop it!" Sasha stomped toward them, hands on her hips. "Gennive is nice, and you're being mean to her." Tears filled the child's eyes, and her lip quivered. "She's my friend, and you shouldn't yell at her."

Gennive wasn't sure what she expected, but she certainly didn't expect Simon to back down.

He blinked and looked so stricken, Gennive almost laughed. "Sasha, you know what Vivian did back there. That was her." Simon sounded like he was reasoning with an adult instead of a child. He also sounded, for him, impossibly contrite.

"I know that. I'm not stupid." She laced her words with as much sarcasm as a seven-year-old child could. "But it's not Gennive's fault. She helped us." Sasha lifted her chin and gave Simon a stubborn scowl. "I like Gennive, and you should say you're sorry."

"I will not be lectured by a child. I know things you don't. Now, hush. Wade and I will handle this."

Sasha burst into tears and threw herself at Gennive. She clung to Gennive and Gennive stroked her hair and back, kissing the top of her head. "He's not going to hurt me, Sasha. I won't let him."

"I won't either." Wade picked up the child and hugged her close. "You know Simon. He's just looking out for all of us. But he's not going to hurt Gennive."

"Bah!" Simon turned his back on all three of them and paced the length of Gennive's apartment. "I've never gone against you on anything, Wade. I just have a bad feeling it's not over."

"I know it's not over. I'm not sure what Vivian wants, but she's obviously not going to stop until she gets it," Wade conceded.

"I know I'm the newcomer here," Gennive interrupted, "but if that first witch was Vivian, I'm not certain she's a willing participant in whatever is going on."

Both men looked at her as if she'd lost her mind. Wade said, "If she doesn't want to harm me, then who does?"

"I don't know."

"Now, there's a surprise," Simon mumbled. Wade shot him an annoyed look, and Simon rolled his eyes but kept silent.

"Look, all I know is she had several opportunities to kill one or both of you, and she didn't take it. It felt like she was trying to give you a chance to escape, but you were both too bull-headed to take it."

"So --" Wade looked from Gennive to Simon, "-- if not Vivian, then who?"

He and Simon exchanged a long look.

"That, my friend, is a good question."

Chapter Six

Simon left to prepare his hunters to move the group to the pack lands in the mountains. Until they were ready to leave, he'd stationed two hunters outside Gennive's building to keep watch.

Privately, Wade wasn't sure it had been a good idea. There had been a guard outside his own house before and it hadn't worked. In fact, they'd not seen the wolf at all. Oh, the guard had shown up when Simon had called them all together with excuses that seemed plausible, but Wade didn't buy it. For the first time in his life, he questioned the loyalty of a pack member.

Everything had gone to hell since he'd met Vivian. It had gotten worse when they'd announced their betrothal.

"I know you don't want to hear it, Wade," Gennive's quiet voice penetrated his dark thoughts, "but I don't think Vivian is behind whatever is going on."

Wade sighed. Gennive lay on the couch with a cool washcloth over her eyes. After Simon had left, she'd been violently ill. Sasha had cowered in the corner and whimpered, scared for Gennive. The child truly loved her. She'd latched on to Gennive as quickly as she'd taken to Wade when he'd first found her.

At the sound of Gennive's voice, Sasha crept to the couch and took her hand. Gennive removed the cloth from her face, looked at the child, and smiled. Sasha then crawled up to lie with Gennive, snuggling close. Gennive kissed the top of Sasha's head, and Wade's heart ached with emotion. They were like a family.

He replied gently, "She was there. What else am I supposed to think?"

"I know. I'm just saying she didn't want to hurt you. And she tried to shield the fact that Sasha was on the place. She didn't do it very effectively, but it was enough to buy us time to escape."

Wade sighed. "There are a lot of things that don't make sense with Vivian."

"Then maybe you should find out what's going on before you pass judgment on the woman. She took a bit of a beating for not killing you and Simon back there. I think someone else is pulling her strings."

Even with dark circles under her eyes and her pale face -- evidence of her recent bout of sickness -- she looked so lovely lying there holding Sasha it was hard for Wade to hold the thread of the conversation. He wanted to kiss her. To hold her.

Make love to her.

Her essence called to him like nothing else ever had. It wasn't just a sexual calling, either. He needed her. All of her. Forever. If he never had the privilege of actually making love with her, beyond what they'd already done, he simply wanted her by his side as long as they both lived.

That was the key ingredient missing with him and Vivian. Neither of them wanted each other like that. Never at any point had he thought of her as more than an acquaintance, at best a friend. Then it had all fallen apart.

His eyes strayed from Gennive's face to Sasha's. The child had fallen asleep in record time. He smiled. "Sasha's had an exciting day."

Gennive snorted. "You think? Poor thing spent most of it scared to death."

"I know. She's lucky you were there. We both are. I'm not certain how I would have dealt with this had you not been."

"You'd have killed Vivian instead of trying to find a way to capture her alive. She might not be totally innocent, but she's not the real evil in this mess. I'm certain of it."

Wade knelt and stroked Gennive's hair back from her face. "You're so beautiful, Gennive. Do you have any idea how beautiful you are?"

When she smiled, time stopped for Wade. Never had a woman taken his breath away with a mere smile, but Gennive did so effortlessly. Hair the color of mahogany, bunched up in unruly curls atop her head, was as soft as silk. Her eyes were huge, mocha pools he could easily get lost in. Before he realized what was happening, he had

dipped his head and found her lips with his. Once she opened her mouth to receive him, he was lost.

It was funny how a moist touch on such a small surface of skin could cause so much pleasure. He groaned when her tongue darted out to lap at his. Wade's cock hardened to painful proportions, and he deepened the kiss.

Gennive whimpered, and she lay there letting him kiss her for a few more seconds before she pushed him away. Her eyes were glazed and her lips beautifully kiss-swollen, but there was a reluctant resolve in their depths.

"Not with Sasha here. And not while you're engaged." Her rapid breathing pushed her breasts high underneath the V dip in her shirt, which Wade tried valiantly to avoid staring at. "I want you more than I can describe, Wade, but no matter what I want, I have principles I refuse to compromise for anyone. Including myself." She looked longingly into his eyes then strayed to his lips. She wanted him, he could tell. More than that, she had the same need to be near him he did of her.

Dropping a kiss to her forehead, he gently gathered Sasha in his arms. The child shifted and wrapped her arms around his neck as he lifted her.

"I know, Gennive. And you're right. I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry, Wade," she smiled, "just work through this. One way or another. I'll never forget you no matter what, but I just want you to be happy. Sasha, too."

"I will be, Gennive. With you beside me. Nothing could make me happier."

Gennive and Sasha slept in Gennive's bed for about thirty minutes before Simon returned with three of his hunters to take them to the mountains and Wade's pack. They all rode in silence for the two-hour trip. Even Sasha didn't say much, sensing the tension in the adults. Once they arrived, Wade brought Gennive to his den. "You'll be safe here. Just don't leave without an escort. Outsiders aren't allowed here, and the only reason you are is because I'm the pack Alpha."

He could tell Gennive was reading him. Her pained, apologetic expression said as much. "This must be awkward for you, Wade. I'm sorry."

"Given the circumstances, yes. Normally, you'd be welcomed as long as you only stayed a short time before we were formally mated."

"But given the situation with you and Vivian..."

"They are, naturally, questioning my ability to lead the pack. If Vivian can manipulate my mind so completely as to get me to agree to a marriage with her, I'm not so sure they're not right." Wade left then. He knew Gennive wanted to say more, but he wasn't ready to hear it yet. He had work to do before he was ready to face her again.

* * *

"You realize what this implies, Wade?"

"Yes. And I'm fully prepared to surrender the title of Alpha and leave the pack as soon as I'm sure it won't fall to the Dark Witches."

"You'd do that willingly?"

"Absolutely. For a multitude of reasons. Not the least of which is an Alpha can't have his attentions so greatly divided. I'd be split three ways, and that's unacceptable."

Daven, speaking for the pack elders, looked at him with a mixture of sympathy and pride. "It takes a brave, wise man to realize when he's no longer able to do the job. For whatever reason. It takes a man with a good heart to put his family in their rightful place -- at the top of his priorities. I will be truly sorry to see you go, my friend."

"And I will miss the camaraderie of the pack, but I don't feel I have a choice. Allow me to retain the position a few more days in order to uncover what the Dark Witches have planned and I'll leave you." He sighed. "The only alternative would likely put Vivian in the Alpha position, and I know that would be disastrous, not only for us but for every pack in the area."

"I agree." Grandel, a grizzled, battle-hardened old warrior, stood. "I think we all agree there was bad magic involved. We'll gladly give you the time you need. The only stipulation is, should you start acting irrationally, you will be relieved."

"A sensible precaution, Elder Grandel. I gladly agree."

"It's settled then." Daven shook Wade's hand. "You will take Simon and the hunters --"

"Not the hunters," Wade interrupted. "Just Simon."

Daven raised an eyebrow. "Is there someone you don't trust?"

"Not in the least," Wade lied. "I just feel more comfortable with fewer people involved."

"As you wish."

As much as Wade knew he'd miss the pack, he couldn't regret his decision. He loved Sasha. She might not be a child of his body, but she was a child of his heart. He'd raised her since she'd been barely weaned, and nothing was more important than her. Gennive, he was growing to love with every passing second. For them, he'd do whatever he had to.

Chapter Seven

It had been a day and a half since Wade had left Sasha and Gennive in his den. They had been comfortable, and several of the pack's women and girls had visited them to make sure they had enough to eat and drink, but no one offered to stay, and no one offered to escort them anywhere, effectively making them prisoners.

Sasha flounced down on the couch and sighed. "I miss Daddy."

"Yeah, baby. I miss him, too."

"He's OK, though. He's kinda growly right now, but he's OK."

Gennive giggled. "Yeah, growly is a good way to describe him at the moment."

"They're looking for the wrong person. Vivian was kinda mean, but she wasn't the boss."

Gennive pulled the little girl into her side and hugged her. "I know, sweetie. But they have to start somewhere."

"They won't find her, you know. She's back in the coven. The Dark Witches won't let Daddy and Simon find her."

"I know. Even if they did, it probably wouldn't do them any good."

They sat there, cuddling for a few minutes. Gennive thought Sasha had gone to sleep, but when she looked at the child, she saw she had been horribly, horribly wrong.

Sasha's eyes had rolled back in her head, and she frothed at the mouth. Gennive screamed, "Sasha!" as the child started to convulse. Gennive flung open the door and screamed for help. Sasha's seizure became more and more violent, and Gennive gathered her in her arms as best she could. "Somebody help me!" She had no idea what was wrong. All she knew was the aura around Sasha suddenly turned black.

Gennive dove headlong into Sasha's mind. Even though the child wasn't conscious, Gennive might be able to glean information if she looked carefully enough. What she found wasn't what she was expecting.

You should have let him die when you had the chance. Now you'll die by his hand.

Gennive tried to call out to Wade. Before she could, however, a block was slammed down on her so hard, she fell backward against the side of the couch where she sat with Sasha. When the first of several women entered Wade's den, Gennive was too stunned to do anything other than look at them with her mouth open.

"What's happening?" One woman went to Sasha's side and pulled the child from Gennive's arms. She checked Sasha's pulse before rushing to her feet and handing the little girl to another woman. "Get her to the Healer. Quickly." She looked at Gennive. "Did you call for Wade?" The quick way the woman had snatched Sasha from her suggested she thought Gennive might have had something to do with the child's sudden illness. Then it occurred to her, that was exactly what the others were supposed to think. It was the one thing Wade would be angry enough to kill her over.

"No. I tried, but I'm being blocked." Gennive was shaken, and felt like part of her was missing. But she'd lived her entire life without using her telepathic abilities so she wasn't about to panic now. Whoever that voice had belonged to wasn't going to defeat her so easily.

"Blocked by whom?"

"I'm not sure. She's done something to Sasha, though. She's trying to take over her body through a mind thread. Sasha's fighting her, and you see the result." Gennive stood and wrapped her arms around herself. "Whoever she is, though, she's dangerous. She's willing to hurt -- even kill -- Sasha in order to get to Wade. It's insane."

"Vivian?" The woman raised an eyebrow.

"I don't think so. This voice sounded like an older woman. You know, like you can sometimes tell an older person on the phone by the quality of their voice? That's how it sounded in my head."

An old man entered the room then. Well, "old" if one judged him by the wrinkles on his face and the long snow-white hair hanging to his shoulders. He stood straight and proud. The chest exposed by the dip in his shirt still held a fair amount of muscle, as did his arms.

"It's Deloris, Vivian's mother. We've been after the wrong witch all along."

"Are you certain, Grandel? She hasn't shown herself since before this fiasco began. It's not her style."

"I'd bet my life on it, Taley. Deloris is nothing if not cunning. The young woman was right." Grandel waved a hand in Gennive's direction. "Vivian was set up to take the fall for someone else. Why we didn't suspect her mother is beyond me."

"You didn't because she didn't want you to," Gennive said. "The same way Vivian was able to block Wade and Simon before, this woman only let slip what she wanted to. She's blocking my telepathic abilities now, thinking I'd be vulnerable enough for her to force me to implicate myself."

Grandel snorted. "But since you've only just stopped fighting your abilities, it didn't distress you enough for her to plant the suggestion."

"Exactly. I don't know how all this stuff works, but I'm guessing she did something similar to Wade to get him to marry Vivian."

"I've alerted Wade and Simon to what's happened. They'll be along shortly." Grandel reached for Gennive's hand, and she let him have it. "Come with me, young lady." His grip was firm but gentle, and he guided her to the Healer's den. There, on a feather bed, Sasha lay looking pale and drawn, but peaceful.

"How is the girl, Marla?" Grandel's voice was quite and respectful when he greeted the slender woman Gennive presumed was the Healer.

Marla smiled warmly at Grandel. "She'll be fine. Indeed, it was Deloris invading her mind. Sasha put up a magnificent struggle, though. There's no doubt she's got witch's blood in her along with that of the Lion."

"Any idea which coven?"

"Unfortunately, no. Given the fact that she was abandoned in her cub form, though, I'm guessing she's part Dark Witch. It's probably why Deloris didn't care to harm her."

Gennive shivered. "I can't imagine anyone being willing to harm a child, no matter the situation."

"Deloris is..." Marla trailed off and looked at Grandel as if needing him to supply the words.

"Not well. She has ideals that don't fall in line with any decent individual and she'll be the downfall of the Dark Witch Coven if they don't see her illness before she does something unforgivable."

"Are they all bad, then?" Gennive asked, needing to understand in an effort to help Wade and Sasha.

"Oh, heavens, no!" Marla looked almost scandalized, and Gennive blushed.

"I meant no disrespect --"

"And I took none, dear." The fragile-looking Healer took Gennive's hand in her own. Her grip was surprisingly firm and warm, though a tad bony. Like Grandel, her face was lined with deep wrinkles, but her eyes looked as if they loved to laugh and laughed often. Her hair fell down her back almost to the floor. Instead of the painfully white color of Grandel's, however, it was fine and slightly thin, and held more shades of gray. "The Dark Witches are complicated, indeed. They dabble in magic generally forbidden, but most of them temper it and find a way to use it that benefits the entire coven. They don't usually turn that into a reason to harm other covens or shifter packs. Deloris, however, has had a hard life, and her views on the way things should be have become distorted."

"That's no excuse for this, Marla."

Wade's presence filled the small den. Gennive still couldn't sense him, but she didn't need to be a telepath to read the anger radiating from him. She actually took a step away from him, making sure not to get between him and Sasha. She had a feeling,

no matter how much he said he loved her, now would not be a good time to come between him and his daughter. Which was how it should be in times like these.

Instead of rushing straight to Sasha, though, he snagged Gennive's hand and took her with him. He knelt beside the bed and took Sasha's hand gently in his own.

"Is she all right?" His voice was husky, and Gennive could see he was hurting. Wade spared Marla a glance before looking back at his daughter.

"She's fine." Marla smiled reassuringly. "You have a strong little girl there. Not one witch in a thousand could have fought off another telepath with that kind of a mind hold on her." Marla laid a hand on Wade's shoulder. "She needs rest, but she's fine. You can take her home with you, if you like, but I'd prefer to watch her here. If you don't mind, that is."

Wade squeezed Gennive's hand. "Are you comfortable with that?"

Gennive was taken aback. She'd never expected Wade to ask her opinion, much less ask if she were comfortable with the situation and treat her as if it really mattered to him that she agree in the plan for Sasha's care.

"I am if you are. I've grown to love Sasha very much, but she's your daughter."

"Soon to be our daughter, Gennive. Besides," Wade looked at her seriously, "what matters most is the love you feel for each other. Like me, she's a child of your heart. That gives you a say in her care." He urged her to her feet before turning to Marla. "If you need us, we'll be in the Elders' Den. If we're not there, we'll be in mine."

Marla smiled. "I hope you find peace, Wade. I think this woman is definitely right for you. She cares. About you. About Sasha."

Wade blessed Gennive with a heart-stopping smile so filled with love it made her heart hurt. "I know. I care about her, too." He dropped a lingering kiss on Gennive's lips. She thought she should be embarrassed at the obvious show of affection in front of Marla and Grandel, but she wasn't.

Grandel, the sly old wolf, had been watching them with open curiosity since Wade entered. Now he cleared his throat before speaking. "Well, now. Let's get you two to the Elders' Den. Wade? You brought Vivian?"

Wade tensed visibly and Gennive wished fervently she could break through the spell that had her telepathy blocked. She needed to know what Wade was feeling in order to help him through whatever happened next.

"I have. Simon sits guard over her with the Elders."

"Shall we go then?"

Grandel led the way. When they reached the den entrance, he stopped and faced Gennive. "I just want you to know that, whatever happens, I know what you did to save Wade, Simon, and Sasha. You're truly a powerful witch, but you're an even more powerful friend. As long as I have any influence over this pack, you'll always be welcomed here."

Gennive smiled. "You'll always be welcomed in my home too, Grandel." She fidgeted a little. No matter the support from one of the Elders, Gennive couldn't help but be nervous. "Wherever that happens to be. Thanks. Thanks for being nice to me and for giving me a chance."

"You earned it. You saved the pack Alpha more than once, and you have a good heart. In my book, that makes you the ideal mate for Wade. Pack Alpha or not. He needs a strong woman to keep him in line."

Wade cleared his throat. "That will do, my friend."

Grandel chuckled as he entered the Elders' Den and held the door open for Wade and Gennive. She didn't know what was in store, but the auras surrounding her weren't menacing. For the first time in her life, she welcomed the auras. Even if she was being blocked from her newly discovered telepathy, the ability to see a person's aura was strong and still with her. Gennive never thought she'd welcome that power, much less embrace it. Now, it seemed as natural as breathing.

Looking around her, even Vivian held her no ill will. For the first time in more than three days, the auras around the room didn't waver. Nothing was dependent on the decisions made today. No one was in danger of death if she didn't act to prevent it. Only the Hunter, Micha, had an aura that shifted. His aura was black streaked with red. He would meet a violent end, but it would happen because of his own actions.

"We have spoken with the Dark Witch, Vivian, as to her part in the incidents today. She has confirmed she was indeed present at your house, but has denied she tried to kill you."

"Gennive suspected as much," Wade said respectfully. "I'm sorry I didn't believe her, Vivian."

Vivian looked terrified, but held her head high. She was obviously a strong woman and would accept her fate with dignity. When she spoke, her voice trembled slightly. "I'm sorry, Wade. I didn't want any of this to happen, including our promised covenant. You're a wonderful man, and any woman would be honored to have you as a mate, but..." She took a breath before continuing. "I never loved you. I know you didn't love me, either. My mother..."

"I know, Vivian." Wade tried to be as gentle as he could. She was guilty of being weak in the face of her mother's overbearing presence, but she didn't deserve the fate that awaited her should she be found guilty of trying to assassinate the pack Alpha. "I saw her backhand you when we fought at my house, and we didn't miss the change in how magic was used against us after she arrived. We could have escaped before she started her onslaught."

"Wade, my mother threatened Sasha. That's why I agreed to force you into marriage with that spell she taught me. It's why I attacked you at your house and why I didn't just tell you or the Elders what was going on."

Wade narrowed his eyes. "But you always said you didn't like children. You certainly didn't take to Sasha easily, and she said you were always yelling at her."

Vivian winced. Tears trickled from her eyes in a genuine show of emotion that she quickly brushed away. "It was to protect her. And myself. Sasha was my sister's child, but Mother had Sasha expelled and my sister purged of her magic and executed. Gods only know what she did to the poor man my sister married. All because she conceived a girl child." She paused and shook her head as if trying to rid herself of the horrible memory. "I was afraid if I let myself get too close to her, Mother would do something else horrible to Sasha to hurt me. Mother intended for her to die when she

abandoned her, but when you found her and took her in as your own, she came up with her 'master plan.' Wade, I think she's lost her mind."

"And an insane Dark Witch is a dangerous thing indeed," Grandel muttered. "We're going to have to hunt down your mother, Vivian. You know that, right?"

"Yes. Truth be known, our coven would probably hand her over if you approached them carefully. I can arrange a meeting with the Coven Elders if that's what you want."

Grandel looked at her intently. "What would be your conditions?"

"I have none. Any conditions they set would be between the two of you. I agree to approach them because it's the least I can do after being a part of so much trouble and heartache for you and your clan." She bowed her head submissively. "I'm at your mercy."

"Kill her, Elder Grandel."

Wade's head snapped up at the sound of Micha's voice. He'd forgotten the young Hunter was there. Now he was glad Micha had caught his attention. He had questions for the young man.

"Hunter Micha," he started before anyone else had the chance. "Where were you when Simon and I were fighting off the Dark Witches? You were left at the perimeter of my property to guard myself and Gennive and Sasha. Why didn't you join the fighting?"

Wade didn't miss the fact that Vivian looked straight ahead and not at Micha. Her lips were compressed tightly together, and the skin around her eyes wrinkled ever so slightly.

"I couldn't get to you in time. When I got there, you'd already left."

"Simon made it, and he had been miles away." Wade didn't allow the young man any room to maneuver. When Micha said nothing, only stared at Vivian with eyes that would have loved to see her dead, Wade continued. "You were in on it, weren't you." It was not a question.

"The bitch talked. They told you what would happen if you talked." Micha's voice was low and deadly.

"I know," Vivian answered. "It's out of my hands now. If I'm to die, then I'll meet that end with as clear a conscience as I can have."

The movement was so fast, Wade almost missed it. Thank goodness Simon had been prepared. Micha lunged at Vivian, who'd closed her eyes and waited for the fatal blow. Simon shifted and met Micha's attack with his claws. With a deafening roar, Simon lunged and hit Micha square in the chest with one hand. Micha stumbled forward, this time aiming his attack at Simon. With one, swift motion, Simon impaled his hand through the young Hunter's chest and ripped out his heart. Micha had a moment to look surprised before the light faded from his eyes and his face and body went slack. Micha crumpled to the floor without a sound.

Simon dropped the heart and shifted back to his human form, blood dripping from his hand to the body beneath him. "My sincerest apologies, Elders. It was never my intent to spill blood here."

"Sometimes it can't be helped, my boy." Grandel shook his head sadly. "I knew Micha when he was just a pup. Gods only know why he did this."

"He was promised he'd be named Alpha when Wade was killed," Vivian supplied quietly. She turned to Wade. "I was supposed to get pregnant with a boy child, then kill you. Micha was told he could marry me and hold the title of Alpha until our son was old enough to take over. I tried to explain to Mother it didn't work that way, but she insisted she could make it so. Given how her powers have grown since I started noticing a change in her behavior, I'm sure she could have done anything she said she could."

A sudden realization came over Wade. "That's why..." He trailed off, and a flush crept up his face.

Vivian took pity on him and finished for him, taking the blame on herself. "It's why I hexed you. I didn't want to take a chance on becoming pregnant. I just told

Mother that I had been unable to conceive. I thought that problem would keep her busy long enough for me to figure a way out for both of us."

Wade moved to Vivian and pulled her into a gentle embrace. Vivian buried her face in his shoulder and sobbed quietly. "I'm sorry you were put in the middle of this, Vivian."

"It's my own fault. I'm not a weak-willed woman, Wade. If I'd just stood up to Mother --"

"You'd probably be dead, just like your sister."

Gennive turned away. She felt like an intruder at this point. The block was still firmly in place, and she couldn't touch Wade's mind to know what he was thinking or feeling. Did he want to give Vivian another chance, or had he merely connected with her for the first time in their relationship and felt the pain she'd obviously gone through?

She'd just decided to slip out and go check on Sasha when a strong hand grabbed her upper arm and pulled her around. Wade looked at her with such possessive passion she gasped.

"Just where do you think you're going, young lady?"

"Uh, to check on Sasha?"

"Are you asking me, or telling me?" Wade's intense look caused her insides to flutter. This was the man who'd kissed and touched her so passionately only a few nights before. This was the man she wanted to give herself to over and over again.

She took a breath to calm her screaming nerves. "I just didn't want to intrude, Wade. I can't read you. I'm still blocked. If you wanted to try to make things work between you and Vivian, I didn't want to hinder you." Gennive couldn't stop her hand as it found its way to Wade's cheek and caressed him lightly. She knew tears formed in her eyes, and she didn't try to stop them. The last few days had left her so emotionally raw, she just didn't have the energy. "I just want you to be happy. No matter what that entails."

"Gennive, I could never be happy unless you're in my life. By my side."

"And what about your engagement to Vivian?"

Vivian spoke up. "Well, that was another reason I hexed him, Gennive." She met Gennive's eyes for the first time and Gennive saw only sincere regret in them. "I don't love Wade. Not like that. But I do care for him. I want him to be happy, too. By not consummating our union, Wade is free to take another mate." She smiled. "I hope you don't think too badly of me, Gennive. I was weak, but I'm not a horrible person."

Gennive smiled. "I was reserving judgment on that one, though I knew you were a pawn in all of this. I'm glad I was right."

"Please tell Sasha I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt her. None of this was her fault, yet I treated her horribly."

"You can tell her yourself. Someday," Wade interrupted. "I know you can't go back home. Your mother would have you killed." He took a breath. "Elder Grandel, how would you feel about Vivian staying here? That way you could keep an eye on her, and she could set about proving herself to the pack as a whole."

"Healer Marla says there are no more blocks on Vivian's mind, that she managed to dispose of them all. She says she senses only good intent and regret at her actions. If you so order it, Alpha, I would have no objections."

"Then, as my last act as pack Alpha, I respectfully request the pack take Vivian in as a contributing member and treat her with respect and kindness unless she proves she isn't deserving of such."

The whole ordeal was very formal. Gennive was concerned about this being his "last act as pack Alpha."

"Wade, why are you stepping down? It's not because of me, is it?"

"It most certainly is. You and Sasha." He smiled at her and dipped his head for a kiss to silence her when she would have protested. "My focus is divided. I can't protect both you and Sasha and still do an effective job protecting and running the pack. An Alpha must have only one main concern, and mine is my family."

"Traditionally," Grandel continued, "when an Alpha steps down, he is banished from the pack, but in this case, we've decided to elect Wade to the advisory council."

That is, if he'll serve. The new Alpha will need guidance, and we'll need help choosing one."

Wade looked startled. Clearly, he hadn't been expecting this. "I'd be honored, Grandel."

"Then go to your den. Unite yourself with your woman and be happy." He grinned and clapped Wade on the shoulder. "Since both Wade and Vivian are in agreement to dissolve their promise to mate with each other, and as there has been no consummation and, therefore, no child conceived of the covenant, I declare their vows no longer binding." His formal stance relaxed and he grinned at Wade. "I'll sit with Marla and keep watch over little Sasha." Gennive didn't miss the gleam in Grandel's eye, and she opened her mouth to say something. Wade cut her off by dragging her toward the door.

"Indeed," was all he said before they made their exit and hurried back to his den. Gennive couldn't help the giggle that escaped her. She very much suspected she and Wade wouldn't be the only ones this night getting a little loving.

She pushed against her block one more time, just because she really wanted to know what Wade was thinking, and the thing just fell in on itself. She caught a glimpse of Vivian smiling sadly before Wade's thoughts overtook her. Gennive's last thought before Wade pulled her impatiently into his den was to send a mental "thank you" to Vivian. Though the act itself would be wonderful, she was sure, being able to experience Wade's pleasure along with her own would be the stuff romance novels were made of.

Gennive was definitely looking forward to this.

Chapter Eight

Wade barely got the door to his den shut before he yanked Gennive to him and covered her mouth with his. He didn't wait for her surrender this time, he simply took what he wanted. Plunging his tongue inside her, he backed her up against the wall and lifted her, urging her legs around his waist.

Mine!

The past few days had been hell. He'd wanted nothing more than to claim her and bind them together. He wanted her to be his wife. His mate.

"Tell me you want me, Gennive." Wade barely recognized his own voice, it was so laced with need and desperation. "Tell me you need me in your life as badly as I need you."

Gennive smiled and kissed him again. "I do, Wade. I most definitely do."

Wade shifted her position slightly until his hard, pulsing cock met the juncture of her thighs. She squeezed and rocked against him, and Wade knew he was in the right spot. Immediately, he started thrusting against her, bracing her back against the wall. He swallowed her screams greedily. Wade wanted everything from her. All her passion, all her pleasure. All her love.

Pulsing with a life of its own, Wade's cock throbbed with the building pleasure. Over and over he thrust and ground himself against her denim-covered pussy. It wasn't enough. He knew it wouldn't be enough the moment he started it, but he couldn't help himself. It pleased her. It gave her pleasure, and he'd make it last as long as he could just to keep on pleasing her.

Gennive's breath came in quick little gasps in his ear when she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled herself as close to him as she could. She rode him, sliding herself up and down his rigid length. The mind link they shared let him know

what she needed, and the sensations were more than she'd ever experienced. She wasn't sure what to do next. Wade had no such problems.

He shifted his position slightly and brought his cock against her clit at the angle she needed. Immediately, pleasurable spasms began and soon engulfed her. Gennive screamed and clamped her legs tightly around him. She ground her pussy into him to get the friction she needed, and Wade held her tightly while she rode out her orgasm.

"Enough." Wade pushed them away from the wall and carried her to his bed in the far corner of his den. With a flick of his hand, he whisked the covers down and laid her on the sheets beneath. "I can't stand it a moment longer." His movements were jerky, and he felt like his hands were three sizes too big as he tried to unfasten his jeans. She slid out of her clothing quickly, too, and by the time he was naked so was she. "I need to be inside you, Gennive. I need inside that wet little cunt." He inhaled deeply, not caring if she thought he was strange or perverted. He needed her scent inside him so he could always find her anywhere.

"I know. I need you inside me, too. Do it, Wade!" She spread her legs wide and bent them at the knees. She reached down and spread her pussy lips with her fingertips, inviting him in.

He'd have laughed at her command except he was so desperate it wasn't funny. Wade started to just plunge home, but the moisture glistening from her pussy caught his eye.

Without another thought, he lowered his head between her parted legs and inhaled again. This time, he simply growled and dove in headfirst.

The first taste of her honey on his tongue was ambrosia. The second even better. Before he realized what he was doing, he was growling and slurping like a man possessed. Her pussy was downy soft and wet with her excitement and recent orgasm. Wade loved making her wetter. He sucked the delicate lips one at a time before latching onto her clit and licking delicately, then with more vigor. Finally, he sucked and nibbled.

All the while, Gennive screamed and writhed beneath him. When he raised his head to watch her expressions, she grabbed a fistful of his hair and pulled him back to her clit and pussy.

Wade chuckled and kept up the sensual onslaught until her body tensed. When her orgasm started, Wade focused solely on her clit. He flicked and licked as she bucked and thrashed. Her mind was totally submerged in the pleasure she experienced, and Wade couldn't help but be a little proud. This woman, this beautiful woman, received that much pleasure from him. He did that.

"Don't even think that was enough, big guy," Gennive panted, pulling him up by the hair until he covered her body with his bigger one. "Now fuck me."

Who was he to disappoint?

Wade moved slowly at first, then with more vigor as he lost himself in Gennive's pleasure. It was a heady thing, feeling one's own pleasure as well as that of one's partner. Their link was truly special, and Wade treasured it along with the woman on the other end.

Gennive knew Wade loved the feel of her pussy. She loved the feel of him inside her. She loved the way he looked loving her, and he loved the way she looked, too. It was magical. More than she'd ever thought possible in lovemaking.

Wade stretched and filled her, yet not so much it hurt. He fit perfectly. They fit perfectly. He knew everything she liked because he was in her mind as she was in his. It was a never-ending circle, and one Gennive knew she'd grow to cherish.

"I freely give my life to you, Gennive. I promise to always cherish and protect you above anyone else save our children." Wade didn't stop his movement but kept thrusting into her grasping pussy over and over again. He hooked one of her legs over his arm and angled himself so he could penetrate her deeper. "Everything I have, I give you freely and ask for nothing in return but your love."

Gennive gasped, and an orgasm overtook her once again. Wade rode out each wave with her, holding her close, kissing her. Sweat slickened his skin in his effort to hold himself back for just a while longer. Gennive loved him for it, but she wanted all

he had to give. They had their whole lives for prolonged lovemaking. This first time, she wanted all of him. Every emotion he carried, she wanted mingled with hers.

"I do love you, Wade. This is something I've never questioned. Now, please, don't hold back," she whispered. "Don't hold back."

Wade flipped them so that she straddled his hips, but he didn't give her control. Instead, he held her to him, one hand on her back, the other on her ass. Instead of expecting her to do all the work, he thrust up into her. Faster and harder, he plunged, his grunts and growls a testament to his pleasure.

It wasn't long before the beginnings of another orgasm tingled in the area where their bodies joined. Wade knew this and reached between them to find her clit and circle it with a finger. Gennive sat up on his cock and ground herself onto him, enjoying the new sensation from the different position.

"Oh, God, Wade. I'm coming. I'm coming!"

"Fuck, yeah. Come on my cock, Gennive. Milk me dry, baby."

"Oh, yes, oh, yes!" Gennive screamed her completion, and as she came, Wade sat up with her and held her to him as he emptied himself inside her. His sex pulsed and throbbed, and hers contracted, indeed milking him of all he had to give her.

Wade's heart pounded, and his lungs heaved for every breath. Gennive clung to him, needing his strong body as an anchor in the sea of incredible pleasure he'd created within her. Within them both.

"That was amazing, Wade." Her voice was a breathy whisper. "Simply amazing."

"I know," he chuckled. With one last kiss to her shoulder, Wade laid her back on the bed and covered her. He retrieved a wet washcloth from the bathroom, uncovered her and washed the evidence of their lovemaking from her cunt and thighs, then from himself.

When he climbed back in the bed, he pulled Gennive into his arms and tugged the covers over both of them, snuggling her into his body as much as he could.

"You know I bound us together tonight. Between two people who love each other, there need be no witnesses. It is enough that we both say it happened, but I would give you a proper ceremony when you're ready."

Gennive touched his mind tentatively. From his words, she expected to feel uncertainty. Instead, she found only respect for her and the culture he knew she had been raised in. "I appreciate what you're trying to do, but it's not necessary. I know I don't belong in that world. I'm not entirely sure where in your world I belong, but as long as I have you and Sasha with me, I'll make it. Thanks for the offer, Wade, but binding our lives together in the way of your people is plenty good enough for me." She smiled. "I love you. You love me. That's all that matters in the end, anyway."

Wade smiled. "I suppose it is." There was a pause before he said anything else, but there was the matter of her extraordinary abilities to discuss. "I'm sure you realize you're a witch. Right?"

"Well, yeah. Kinda got that one on my own. If you're wondering if I know anything about my past, I don't. My mother did, but her secrets died with her."

"Perhaps we can go see the White Witches when you're ready. They may not have all the answers, but I'm sure they can tell us where to start looking."

"Sounds like a plan. At some point. Right now, though --" She kissed his chin and snuggled back into his body. "-- I just want to enjoy being your wife. If Sasha will let me, I'd greatly enjoy being her mother, too."

Wade chuckled. "I'm sure that won't be a problem. She loves you as much as I do."

"She's a special child, Wade. I'm glad you found her. It sounds like her life would have been horrible without you."

"I don't want to think about it."

"Then don't. Tomorrow, we get a fresh start. We both have new roles to settle into as well as a home to build."

"Yes. Gods willing, tomorrow will be painfully uneventful."

* * *

Vivian knew she couldn't stay with the pack. Much as she wanted to, she knew she'd never be accepted. If her mother knew the things that had been happening to her lately, she'd not only not welcome her back into the coven, but she'd likely kill her.

Even now, her skin itched, and she had to concentrate with all her might to keep her mother out of her mind.

"You're a fool if you think you can keep it hidden for long, Vivian."

The deep, rich voice was low and right in her ear. She could feel his warm breath against her face and shut her eyes tightly. No. Not him. Not now.

"Your father knew it would come to this, though your mother stopped his heart with a mere spell for his trouble. Will you do the same to me, I wonder?"

"You know I could never do that, Julian. You're the one person in the whole world I could never do that to. Why do you mock me with it?"

"I don't mock you, precious. I merely remind you from time to time that your father bound us with the most powerful magic available to him because he knew." He circled in front of her now, never touching her, yet caressing her mind like a lover might caress her body. "The way I see it, you have three choices. You can go back to your mother, who will likely kill you. You can stay with this pack and hope they don't decide to do the same. Or you can come with me and possibly face the same fate..." He grinned wickedly at her, letting the last word trail off, "...but have a hell of a lot better time before the end. What do you say, precious?"

Marteeka Karland

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