



FOREVER MOONLIGHT

By

Shiree McCarver

Copyright©2007 by Shiree McCarver

Cover art by Shiree McCarver

All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without the prior written consent of the Author, excepting brief quotes used in reviews. This work is fiction. Any similarity to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.

DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This is dedicated to all those who believe that things that shifters are real.

Other books by Shiree McCarver

A SATYR'S TALE: SELBY AND DARIUS

FOREVER MOONLIGHT

THE LORD AND THE SCORPION

PROLOGUE

London, England

August 1888

Whitechapel District

“Go t’ hell, you bleedin’ cocks hound!”

“Hell is where ya be headin’ if you don’t get yerself away from my establishment, Polly.” The burly proprietor of the public house raised a meaty fist at the dismally dressed woman.

His dark, beady eyes gave Polly a quick once over. He felt repelled by what he regarded as what was left of the woman. There was a time he thought Polly could have been considered pretty, yet now as his good eye took in her petite stocky frame, he found it near impossible to even decipher her age. She was wearing the hardships of her life, as a drunken doxy of the Whitechapel district, in every pockmark that scarred her mottled face.

He also couldn’t dismiss the fact that she smelled like something he had fished out of the Thames. Could it be because she wore the same filthy rags, consisting of a simple black straw bonnet, resting, upon greasy brown hair and a tattered brown overcoat, with brass buttons fastened up to her double chin?

At least the coat was hiding most of the piss and vomit-stained brown frock she wore beneath. He shook his head, as he finished his observation at the mud-splattered black woolen stockings and well-worn men’s boots.

How could a man not want to help such a wretched soul? Nevertheless, he couldn’t run a business off pity. Polly and the other prostitutes had previously left him holding their outstanding commitment vouchers and he wasn’t budging.

“Come, come, Percy, how’s about generously offerin’ a lady another nip? Just t’ knock the chill off me frail bones is all I be needin’,” Polly slurred, her dark eyes watered as she licked her cracked lips. She gazed at the rows of bottles behind the bar.

“If ya eye a lady walkin’ in here, Polly, I would gladly pour her a snippet, but *you* have already had more than your fair share of spirits out of the likes of me.” He cleaned a glass and set it aside, reaching for another. “Go on now woman...go and sleep it off.”

“I don’t have nowhere t’ go.” Polly whined. “Would you be havin’ a bed for me t’ use, or I can rest me eyes on the kitchen floor out back? I promise t’ repay you on the morrow.”

“Ya pulled this on me afore, Polly, and I never received reparation. So either ya pay up or get out.”

Polly sighed, knowing what he said was true. She spread her thighs for several men and managed to gain nine pence. Instead of acquiring a hot meal and a place to lay her head, she spent it on alcohol. Once again, she swore to herself never again would she do something so foolish. She would go out and get more money and this time she would do the right thing.

"I will be back before the sun comes up. Please save a bed for me. I promise t' have your funds," Polly whispered before staggering from the alehouse.

The night was heavy with its shroud of darkness. In between blinding showers and steady drizzle, only the occasional thunder and lightning brightened the otherwise starless night.

Polly's boots pattered over the wet and blackened cobblestone walkway. She gathered what remained of her kerchief and placed it over her nose to keep from breathing in the soot and rancid smell of lingering smoke from the earlier Shadwell Dry Dock fire.

She knew she could find men in that area easily, but she couldn't risk the Bow Runners, that remained in the area; investigating the fire. As the occasional thunder sounded in the eerie silence, Polly jumped, wondering why she felt so skittish tonight.

She had walked these streets hundreds of nights before, but for some reason it didn't feel the same tonight. She shrugged off the sensation, pulled the collar of her coat closer to her face, and hastened her gait down Bucks' Row, passing several poorly maintained two-story houses.

Suddenly, she was captured from behind. Polly struggled and tried to see who it was but, she was being held firmly with one hand clamped over her mouth and another wrapped around her waist from behind. Lifting her off the ground, the perpetrator proceeded to edge backwards between two of the houses. Her eyes darted this way and that, but no one was out at this late hour. She writhed and thrashed, to no advantage. Her assailant was too strong.

Polly flailed, as helpless as a rag doll against her captor's brutish strength, as terror seized her in its grip.

Was this truly happening? Would he let her go if she stopped fighting and allowed him a free tumble betwixt her thighs?

She received the answers to her questions, when she felt the sharp, intense pain across her neck. Polly welcomed the numbness that quickly followed. *Peace...blessed peace* was her final thought.

Throes of madness continued to seize the beast. By the time the blood lust decreased, Polly's entrails were resting upon, what was left of her breasts.

The sun emerged on another day, clearing off the night's mist. Cobble-row caretakers extinguished burning lanterns. The dockside shopkeepers swept off their stoops. A group of fishermen preparing their boats to set sail shook their heads with woe, as the lone newspaper boy ambled past, yelling the current headline from the *London Gazette*.

"Get your paper! Get your paper! *Jack the Ripper* strikes again!"

“Here lad I will take one of those.” Justus appeared from the shadows of an alehouse doorway. He threw the boy a few coins, as he perused the headlines, noting the location of the last murder.

“I was at this location the night before last.” He wondered if he was still shadowing Lucas, or was Lucas shadowing him? *“Damn you, Lucas, I must stop you before you kill again.”*

He heard Lucas’s diabolical laughter ringing in his ear. *“Try...try...and try again, if you dare, Justus; however, you shall always be too late.”*

Chapter 1

Present Day Huntsville, Alabama

“Sera, I’m sorry. I had hoped I was wrong; however, the biopsy of the tumor has been examined twice by two different specialists and the results are the same.”

She sat there, blank, amazed, and very shaken. She couldn’t believe the doctor could remain so reserved, as if he were telling her what he ate for breakfast.

For the third time in fifteen minutes, Sera reached up and touched the scarf covering her buzz-cut head. Her scarves matched every outfit perfectly. She had even purchased a book on how to make fashionable ethnic designs. Today it was the twist and knot on the nape of her neck.

It was strange to think about such things after receiving a death sentence.

“I am going to die. Isn’t this where one is supposed to relive the entirety of their life or is it the actual moment of death or maybe it doesn’t happen?”

“I will soon find out. God, I think I am going to be sick. Please help me get through this with some dignity.”

She took a quick breath of utter astonishment as Doctor Ryan glanced at his watch, as if she was taking up too much of his time. *“Hell, at least you got time, you unconcerned bastard.”*

Her lips thinned with irritation. Her dark eyes showed the tortured dullness of disbelief.

“There will be no husband or children in my future. Oh, God...oh, God, how am I going to get through this? Why have you forsaken me? I’m only twenty-six years old. I got so much to do. So much I haven’t done. I thought I had a lifetime. Damn it, are you listening? Can you hear me, now that I am dying? Now, are you finally listening to me? So many bad things are happening in this world, are you listening to anyone any more! Give me a sign that you hear me. God, please...please, I don’t want to die!

“Sera? Dear, I would think you would have some questions. I am here to help you and make sure you understand-”

Startled, her eyes glazed with tears that wouldn’t fall. “I have more than questions. You know I ...I have money...and ...I have excellent benefits. Surely, you can refer me to a research center experimenting with special cases. I’m willing to go abroad. Anything.” She couldn’t stop the shrill in her voice.

“No, Sera, there is nothing. *You* better than anyone know traveling can cause an entire new set of complications. The increased pressure of a flight could cause hemorrhaging, an embolism causing a stroke, memory loss, or worse, instant death. Driving, while taking morphine can-“

“Oh, hell! We wouldn’t want that, would we?” Sera released a sob, her voice filled with sarcasm as she continued, and “What are we talking about, Dr. Ryan, instant death? It would be a blessing, don’t you think? I’m a doctor for *chrissake*, one of the best in my field. You know this.”

The silence grew thick between them and Sera’s breath escaped in a long, low hiss of annoyance. “Okay, so my current specialty is wildlife, wolves in particular, but I was in the same profession as you are, before changing my field of expertise; so give me the respect I deserve, if not as a medical doctor, then as a family friend.”

“Sera, it’s not my intention-.”

“Sure it was. Because it’s easier to shut down your feelings, than to deal with the human emotions of diagnosing or giving a death sentence to with someone you know!”

“Calm down, Sera, it won’t do for you to get upset.”

“Come on, did you say ‘*get upset*’? Hell, I’m pissed.” She spread her arms wide and leaned against the large desk. “So why don’t I be the one to get the bad news out on the table! Obviously, you’re not in the mood to be a friend or a doctor today.”

“Sera, I know you are, as you said, ‘pissed’ but you are out of line.” Dr. James Ryan’s eyes briefly locked on hers, before resting on his folded hands.

She refused to back down. Sera remembered the many times she’d had this conversation with other patients and their families. The evening the wife of a deceased patient slapped her and accused her of heartlessness, was the day she decided to change her field.

From the way this doctor was looking at her right now, she realized for the first time what her patients must have felt like and what made the woman angry enough to hit her.

“James, it’s time for you to look me in the eye and tell me...if I’m lucky I will die in my sleep from hemorrhaging or clotting. If I’m unlucky, I’ll lose my mental faculties and control of my bodily functions. See, was that so hard to say?” She said sarcastically. “I know you’ll make sure I’m somewhere where someone can change my diapers and tend to those pesky bedsores that never heal.”

Pace. Pace.

“I can also depend on you to do what you think is best for me out of respect to my dead parents. You will hook me up to tubes, keep me well-hydrated, and as comfortable as possible. That is, until it no longer works, and wow, after all that suffering, I just might get lucky enough to have a stroke or organ failure, so I can die before *fucking* starving to death!”

“Sera, stop it right now!”

“What?” She walked back to the chair and dropped. “Am I not acting the way your other patients act when you’ve given them no hope?”

Her accusing gaze was riveted on him, her hands gripping the arms of the chair as she leaned forward.

“James, I’m not just a patient, I’m your god-daughter. You were at the party the day my adoption became final.” She spoke in an odd yet gentle tone. Folding her hands in a pose of tranquility, she managed

a sad smile. “And, except for calling me Sera, I could be just another stranger who was referred to you by another doctor. When I lost Mom and Dad in the accident, I turned to you and your family. Now, I feel as if you are just giving up on me.”

“Sera, you won’t have to go through this alone. You still have the family and me. There are also staff professionals standing by to assist you-“

“I’m only twenty-six.” Her head bowed. “I’ve worked so hard to get to this point in my life, where I can finally devote some time to more than working. You know what? I hadn’t realized how desperately I wanted children, until this moment.”

“Don’t do this to yourself Sera.”

She twisted her hands together in her lap. “Two, I think; a boy first, so when I have a second child, he or she would have an older brother to look after them. I always hoped Mommy and Daddy would adopt me an older brother.” Her voice cracked and tears fell over the hills of her cheeks. “But with their wildlife research, they barely had time to visit me while I was away in college.”

Clearing his throat while bracing his elbows on his desk, he linked his hands together in front of him and he leaned towards her.

She stared at him. He smiled with kind understanding. For the first time since she entered Doctor James Ryan’s office, she felt she was seeing her “Uncle Jimmy,” the name she called him in less formal surroundings.

“By your opinion, if there are no other problems, how long do I have?”

“You know it is difficult to predict such things.”

“Best-case scenario.”

“Two years.”

“Worse?”

“Six months, if you don’t have a stroke first.”

Sera shook her head. “Then you know what I’m going to do and the less you know the better. I’ll get my affairs in order and I’ll choose when and where I wish to die.”

“Please don’t, Sera.” His voice cracked with emotions.

“I need you to do me one last favor-.”

“I will not help you get more morphine than I am allowed to prescribe, Sera.”

“I would not ask such a thing of you. Besides, I have means to get what I need from the animal research clinic.” She saw the aging lines on his face deepen and felt saddened to have taken her frustrations out on him. He truly was someone who cared for her. The only thing she had left close to a family.

“I want you to know that you, Martha, and the kids have been great friends to me. Thank you.” She cleared the lump tightening in her throat and continued. “This will be our goodbye and I would appreciate you breaking the news to your family, just tell them I’m leaving to spend the time I have left in seclusion...don’t tell-”

“No...no, of course not,” he bobbed his head, rubbing his temples with his hands.

“However, the favor I need is for you to give me a letter of my diagnoses and copies of my files and such. I will be sending it to the appropriate places along with my final notes on wolves and the environmental injustice against them. It is important to get this information to my lawyer to delegate my final wishes.”

He leaned back in his chair, folding his arms across his belly. “Sera, in all good conscience, I can’t allow you to do this-.”

“Even if it means it’s the last thing you’ll get to do for me?”

“That’s not rational.” His lips compressed in a thin line. A mottled flush came across his face as he tried to keep back the emotions.

“Neither is dying when you have yet to live.”

With a resigned sigh, he removed a pen and prescription pad from his breast pocket and began to scribble a note for his assistant. “Give this to Meg on your way out; she will get what you need. We can messenger anything else you might need, once you settle in, if the need arises.”

“Thank you so much...for everything.” She took the paper from his hand.

“Sera, it was a pleasure to watch you take your parents’ research to another level, not to mention the memorial wildlife research and development park you opened in their names. They would have been so proud to see all you’ve accomplished.”

“I would like to think they’ve been watching. As far as being proud, I’m sure they’ll let me know soon enough.” She smiled; he didn’t.

“Sera, will you be coming back here...your remains, I mean?”

“No, I’m going to arrange for a cremation. I would like to have my ashes scattered in Lake Tahoe. If it was good enough for Mom and Dad, it’s good enough for me.” She shrugged her shoulders in mock resignation.

He grunted. Sera saw it was time for her to go; he would try to be strong for her sake and as long as she lingered it would become more awkward for the both of them.

“Till we meet again...in the afterlife, Uncle Jim. That is, if you believe in such a thing.” Putting her hand in his, she squeezed his hand affectionately. “I don’t.”

Within two weeks after Sera’s visit to the doctor’s office, she took one last look at her empty townhouse. She didn’t feel any sadness about leaving the life she had known. Why should she? She spent most of her life traveling for the sake of her work and research and hadn’t had the opportunity to turn her place into a real home.

However, Sera would miss her research students. They had the same drive and dedication to the health and preservation of forestry wildlife that she had.

With their help, Sera had won awards for her hypotheses, filmed a few wildlife documentaries, and written several books on the subject of the environmental science of wolves. Long after she was gone, her work would be here for others to take up where she had left off.

After arranging for her lawyer to disburse her monies between several wildlife preserves for continued research, there was nothing left to do but leave the keys for her townhouse to the new owner; Uncle Jim's eldest son, as a graduation gift.

She was fifteen before she had known what it felt like to be part of a real family. The foster care she received from her high school biology teacher and her wildlife reservist husband changed her life. When they adopted her, it was the happiest day of her existence. Unfortunately for her, the time she had with her parents was to be short-lived.

When they died in an automobile accident during her junior year of college, she gave up dating and partying altogether. She changed her electives and, instead of becoming a medical doctor, she focused on wildlife species-wolves in particular-and botany.

Sera would take her memories of the life she shared with the Tibbs family and their friends to her grave. At least for a moment, life had been everything she dreamed it could be.

With one large suitcase filled with necessities, a purse heavy with morphine, an envelope containing the doctor's diagnoses, in case there was a problem, traveler's checks, and a one-way ticket to Lake Tahoe, Sera Tibbs closed the door on what had been her life.

Sera's plane arrived late in Tahoe and fatigue settled in pockets around her eyes. The rapid pounding of her heartbeat set the pace of the thumping in her head. The first thing she needed to do was find a ladies' room so she could splash some cold water on her face. Next, she would call Tahoe Management Group to make sure they opened and aired out the lakeside rental cabin.

Sera felt frazzled and her entire body seemed to be fighting her every movement. If one more person brushed against her, or bumped into her, she was going to share the contents of her stomach with them. A few times, she had to stand still and think before she took her next step. *Something was terribly wrong. Was this one of the symptoms of her illness?*

Sera felt fear rioting from within. She applied pressure to her temples with the palms of both hands, praying the pain would subside. She whimpered as voices, footsteps, and a baby's wailing became one big, muffled roar. It seem to go on and on without any relief in sight.

She cradled her head with trembling hands, her purse swinging on the bend of her arm; her eyes felt like they were on fire as she squinted against the vivid lights of the airport lobby.

"Please...not now...not now..." she chanted in a broken whisper.

CHAPTER 2

Justus stepped off the plane; his stride purposeful. The hair on his chest, arms, and the back of his neck stood on end. *He was close.* He could feel his journey about to end. After over a century of tracking Lucas, the time had finally come to rectify his grievous mistake of trusting him in the first place.

Instinctively, the crowd parted to allow this intimidating figure of a man to walk through. Being 6'4" tall and over 200 pounds, he was very pleasing on the eyes. Women stopped and stared with open interest.

Justus never noticed nor cared enough to pursue the obvious invitations. He was destined to have one mate, and until he found her, he didn't have desires of the flesh. He was born to hunt the renegades of his pack. He was a *Lamialicos-Bloodwolves*, born on the island of *Lykia*.

With each sure step that brought him closer to his prey, he became energized. His pale, concentrated gaze brushed slowly across the crowd, not missing anything. He opened his tracking senses, dismissing the insignificant things around him.

Justus found humans to be a minor aggravation. They were such emotional creatures, suffering from loneliness. It made them easy prey for a predator such as Lucas.

Lucas took pleasure in doing the forbidden. One of the laws stipulated by the council of the *Darkworld* was that no human creature was to be slain for pleasure or sport. Lucas contracted a disease of the mind and it was his duty to capture him and, because of his own personal interests, he wanted him alive.

There he is, Justus halted. With eyes locked on his target, he realized Lucas was daring him to make a public attempt at capturing him. He knew he could not, no matter how much he wanted to. Lucas knew as long as they were amongst the innocents, he wouldn't transform and attack. A deep growl escaped Justus's throat at Lucas's insolent stare and knowing grin.

"Lucas, please, give this cat and mouse game up, and allow me to help you." Justus reached out telepathically.

"No, you're the one who should give up on the games, Justus. Haven't you realized yet that I can't be contained? After all these centuries, I've evolved into something you can't begin to understand. If you'd join me, feel the power and freedom of a human kill . . ."

Justus felt the compulsion Lucas sent towards him. He was right, his strength had increased over the years and it was becoming harder to resist the urge to join him in his madness. It's taboo amongst his kind to kill and consume human flesh. It's one of the many laws they lived by as members of the *Darkworld*. As the Alpha of his clan, it was his duty to bring Lucas to heel.

Doing it, and taking Lucas alive, was proving to be a difficult task and the other clans were running out of patience. Lucas was jeopardizing the *Darkworld's* secret co-existence with the mortals.

Unwillingly, Justus gave into Lucus's bloodlust and the feeling was wonderfully intoxicating. It was freeing and exhilarating all in one, making him more aware of the blood coursing through the humans' veins. He could smell the rawness of their flesh beneath skin and he had the urge to shift.

"Don't do this to me, Lucus." Justus's black-clad figure stiffened. A sheen of sweat appeared on his brow, his eyes glowed with a savage inner fire. The powerful outline of his shoulders strained against the fabric, as apprehension seized his wits, as Lucian compelled him to do his bidding.

"I can feel it; you want this as much as I do. We are gods amongst these people. They are substance to feed us, just like the flesh of the animals they consume. They are our cattle, a necessary part of our food chain. You know together, in our true form, we could obliterate every mortal in here," Lucus's voice rasped and coaxed.

"No, Lucus! Stop this now!" A moment before Justus felt all was hopeless, serene calmness seized his inner beast. His mental and physical bond with Lucus diffused.

"What the hell?" His voice was full of wonderment and excitement. With his acute smell, he caught the scent of *woman*. This wasn't just any human female. This was *his match*, the one he was destined to someday find. *She* was here. Feverishly, Justus's eyes searched the crowd around him. "Where are you? Who are you?" he whispered.

His classically handsome features opened with the astonishment of a child, as the colorless world around him burst into rippling brilliancy. The yellowish-brown irises of his eyes nearly disappeared, as his pupils dilated like an eclipse over the sun. Shaggy hair resting on his shoulders became more unruly from the static electricity that emanated from his body.

Justus reveled in the amazing sensation washing over his body. He swiveled slowly, taking in his surroundings, his delight growing in leaps and bounds. For the first time in his life, he could see colors. There were varieties of colors all around him, picture-perfect surroundings with light and shadows contrasting between every tint imaginable. Never had he envisioned such beauty. A lifetime of hearing about such things from his kinsmen, who found their mates, and gained these capabilities, came nowhere near the realism of it all.

As a youth, his brother was fortunate to find his mate living amongst their people. Wistfully, Justus stood by, listening and learning, as their father taught his brother the association of colors; the sky was blue, grass was green, an apple was red, yet wine, with its deeper shade, could be called red, too. There was so much for him to see and much more to learn and he had to go through it alone. Even though his father was long since gone, Justus could remember the lessons, as if he was standing by his side, pointing out objects and associating the colors.

He cocked his head to the side in question as his gaze fell on a little girl with pigtails holding a balloon that was almost as big as she was. It looked like a smiley face bear with letters written on its shirt of red. "*P-O-O-H*," he spelled aloud and stepped forward, squatting before the child, his arms resting on his thighs.

“Hello, little one, may I ask what beautiful color is your balloon?”

The little girl stared at him with round innocent eyes, then looked up at her balloon. “That’s *Winnie the Pooh* and he’s yell-woe.” She giggled.

He smiled. “Yellow.” Justus repeated in awe and smiled. “And, your shirt, what color do you call this?”

Her little cherub face look down and pulled her shirt out to look at it, her brow puckered in concentration. She looked up with sparkling blue eyes. “Pink!” she shouted playfully, as if it were a game. “Like my hair-wa ribbon,” she preened.

“Pink.” He mouthed and felt as if he had discovered something miraculous. *Well, it was miraculous to him.* “Pink! It’s a fitting name for this vibrant color. Still, I think, the one in your beautiful hair is a much softer shade of pink.” Justus playfully tugged on her hair ribbon.

“More,” she demanded jumping up and down, the balloon tied to her wrist dipping and bobbing in the air. “You want to know the cul-luh of my hair-wa?”

“Yes, please.”

“I have wed hair-wa!”

Amazed, Justus fingered a curl. “This is red, too. How confusing. It’s not the shade of an apple or the color of wine.” He shook his head. “How is one supposed to know these things if the color is called the same thing no matter what color it is?”

“What color is-“

Justus halted as a woman pushed her stroller and her body in between him and the child. He immediately released the little girl’s hair from his fingers, aware of the woman’s protective stance over the child. With a faint smile, he surmised—human or wolf—the female breed was the same when it came to their babes.

He stepped back and placed an apologetic smile on his lips.

The woman stared over at him warily, before turning her attention to her daughter, her deep concern obvious. “Oh my God, Lizzie! I’m so glad I tied the balloon to your wrist, or I might never have found you. I told you not to leave my side.” She pulled her daughter to her chest in a smothering hug, until the child started to struggle. She released her hold, grasped her upper arms, and gave her a little shake.

“Remember, you are never...ever...ever...to talk to strangers.” She came up on her feet and turned her anger on him. “How dare you! What were you doing with my daughter? I should call airport security.” The woman bustled forward with one babe in the stroller, her daughter clenching her dress and tugging to get her attention.

“Mommy, he wanted to know the cul-luh of my shirt.” The little girl grew animated once more, trying to clue her mother in on the game. Her mother wasn’t listening. She was shooting looks of disgust and anger at him. Justus took two more steps back, his eyes growing wide.

“Look, lady, I didn’t mean any harm to the child. I-“

“You get away from me and my child, if you know what’s best for you,” the mother raged at him before looking back at her daughter. “Be quiet, Lizzie! I want you to hold on to the stroller and don’t you dare let go until I tell you, or I’ll spank your behind,” the woman yelled at the little girl, whose bottom lip began to tremble earnestly, her large eyes filled with tears.

“Don’t take your anger out on the child. It is your responsibility to hold her at your side.” Justus scowled and, seeing the fear that it brought to the woman’s face, he calmed down and ran a hand sheepishly through his hair. “Please, forgive me. I didn’t mean to yell at you. I hadn’t realized the child was lost. I saw the balloon and thoughtlessly came in this direction,” Justus amended with wide-eyed innocence, his palms up and head bowed in a submissive stance. “I could never harm a child.”

She must have felt his sincerity. She visibly relaxed with a resigned sigh, her eyes locked with his, and he didn’t look away. “I’m sorry too, Mister. It’s just you read about this stuff happening all the time and I don’t know what I would have done if something had happened to my daughter.”

“Again, I didn’t mean to overstep.”

“Well, next time *Mister*, I suggest you immediately contact the service desk, when you see a child alone. You might find yourself in a heap of trouble these days, even if you’re just trying to be helpful.”

“Understood, but can I ask you a question?”

“Uh, I...I guess so.” She looked at him suspiciously.

“What color is your shirt?”

The woman’s mouth dropped open in surprise.

“I told ya, mommy,” the little girl piped in.

“Are you kidding, Mister?”

Justus flushed in embarrassment and decided honesty was always the best approach. “I...I was born color-blind and recently I have developed the ability to see colors-“

“Amazing...a grown man like you just now experiencing colors, didn’t know something like that could be corrected. You must be ecstatic...wow.” For the first time, she smiled at him, tapping him on his arm.

“My shirt color is purple.”

“Purple, it is beautiful. Your hair is red like your daughter’s,” he added.

She laughed. “Not quite like my daughter’s. Hers is real; mine is from a bottle.”

“Color created by pouring it from a bottle.” Justus’s mouth dropped wide. “That is amazing.”

“Oh well, this has been a lot of fun...” The woman quirked a brow at him and he realized she was being flippant. “That’s the call for our flight. You take care.”

“Thank you for your kindness.” He smiled at her. The woman’s head cocked to the side and her eyes took on a vivid shine as she stared at him.

“My...my, I don’t mean to be forward, but you are absolutely gorgeous.”

Justus sighed his relief, rather than replying audibly to the compliment, as the last call for the woman's flight came over the loudspeakers once more. It propelled her into action. She thanked him for looking after her daughter and hurried away with both her children in safekeeping.

Justus felt a tinge of sadness as he watched her meet up with her husband. The anxious man rushed forward, picking up his wayward daughter in his arms. She was smiling and waving his way, most likely telling her father of the "color" game. The man with hair the true color of his daughter's waved and smiled his thanks to him.

Justus felt an overwhelming grief for the loss of his family. His parents were deceased, his brother no longer familiar to him. He was ready for a wife and family of his own and he had waited a long time for her to come to him. With these thoughts fresh in his mind, he once more searched for the mate who brought all these needs and abilities to surface. *Where is she? The one who has given me this exquisite world of colors?*

Justus sniffed at the air again, walking forward until he found the beckoning scent once more. He wondered what other delights she would bring to him. He started walking towards the feminine, welcoming essence, that he knew belonged only to her. The closer he got, the stronger her scent became. It was then the second miraculous thing happened. Justus halted and stood completely still, an intense secretive expression on his upturned face, as an interesting, but pleurably-uncomfortable development occurred in his crotch.

"Remarkable." His voice broke with huskiness. The hardening between his thighs made Justus's mouth quirk in humor. He chuckled, knowing from others what was happening to his body, yet he'd never experienced an erection of his own. This was a true indication he was getting closer to her.

A dark coldness crept over what should have been a joyous occasion, as he remembered Lucas was still in the airport. Even though he had lost track of him once he started developing these extra senses, he had to find *her*, before Lucas realized what was happening. Without his mate, his future would be lost and Lucas would like nothing better than to destroy all of his hopes.

As Justus neared the object of his growing desire, he detected something else in her scent. It was a mixture of fear, distress, pain, and *sickness*. His mate was dying. A sheer black fright swept through him, as he searched anxiously. His heart called out to hers, willing it to keep beating until he reached her.

He jogged forward, the crowd parted, and he saw her. Justus could feel the struggle of her heart beating rapidly to keep up with his own, as he felt the excitement of her nearness. He calmed himself.

After learning that his female counterpart wouldn't be Lykian-born like his brother's wife, he felt as if he'd been waiting for her all of his adult life. This was his woman, human born, with the genes in her composition that would allow her to transform with the aid of his nurturing protein enzymes.

The tight knot of anticipation began to build within him. He couldn't wait to get to know everything about her. He just hoped he wasn't too late.

Lucas was ever watchful of what was transpiring before him. He was beyond curious as to what could have caused Justus to be distracted. It had never happened before and, to his amazement, the hunter was

lustful. That was impossible, but Lucas smelled his heated lust in the air. The scent would only be familiar to a fellow *Lykian* and, for the first time since birth, he didn't feel the psychic bond to the alpha.

His pale wolf-like eyes were hard and filled with loathing as he followed Justus every movement. "*Could it be the Black woman at the phone in headscarf, jeans, and sweater?*" Lucas wasn't sure if she was the one that distracted, Justus but she was a distraction to him. He could feel her pain and it was causing him to become aroused.

"Could it be her agony that is attracting you, Justus? Or could you have finally found your mate?" Lucas chuckled bitterly and licked his lips in anticipation of what this could mean, for him. "Oh, I hope so, for *she* may be exactly what I need to get you where I want you."

Justus's brows drew together in an agonized expression. He could see her obvious pain. She cradled her head in her hands with her eyes clenched tightly. Tears streaked over her ashen cheeks.

His mate was dying and Justus didn't know if he had enough power to prevent it from happening. Could the gods be so cruel as to let him find her now, only to take her from him? He had yet to discover the things that only she could give him, such as love, pleasure, and children.

If she were to die, she would take everything he had to look forward to with her. *I will not let you leave me, woman*, he vowed, taking great strides to reach her side.

She must have felt his descent upon her. She dropped her hands by her side. The heavy lashes that shadowed her cheeks flew up. She lifted her chin, meeting his steadfast gaze straight on.

He thought her to be the most beautiful female he had ever seen. Some may find her common in feature, he surmised. Her facial bones were delicately carved with high exotic cheekbones, generously curved parted lips, full and rounded over even teeth, her nose was straight, short and attractive. It was apparent from the gray pallor, beneath her normal earthy hue, that she must have been ill for some time.

He stopped directly in front of her, the tip of his booted feet just an inch away from her. "I am Justus and you are my mate," he declared. "Let me help you."

Instant astonishment touched her pallid features.

He watched her as her eyes moved over his face, unchecked tears pooling in her dark brown eyes, as he pulled her into his arms, bearing her weight against his frame. She didn't attempt to push him away. It was as if she instinctively knew he truly wanted to help her. Justus held her gaze attempting to enthrall and ease the hurting in her temples. He felt a wave of nausea sweep over him. His head felt as if it would burst. *It's too late.*

Justus felt the exact moment the vessel inside her skull burst and, as quickly as it had occurred, his colors disappeared and his world once more became drenched in blandness. He cried out in raw emotion, his breathing became shallow, quick gasps, but he refused to let go of the mental link with her.

"Stay with me Baby! You must fight to stay with me."

Her long lashes raised and lowered as if in slow motion; once, twice, before fluttering close. Justus's heart thudded in aching alarm, as he felt her welcoming resolution to give in to the call of death.

"No, *damn you*, don't you dare give up! Not now!" There was a possessive desperation in his voice, as he caught her lifeless body as it fell against him.

Justus craned his head up, wondering about the macabre fascination of passers-by who idly stand by and watch someone die. It took all the strength he possessed to keep his link with her so she wouldn't stop breathing. He opened his mouth to speak and it came out as a wail, as he doubled over in pain, dropping to his knees with the weight of her limp body in his arms.

He knew if he could shift it would give him more energy, but it was out of the question in front of onlookers. No, this time, he would have to depend upon human intervention.

After what felt like an eternity, he heard someone yell out, "Don't just stand there gawking, people! Someone, call for an ambulance!"

His dark, thick eyebrows drew together in a cold sweat as he waged an internal battle with death. He could feel her slipping away but he wasn't going to let her go that easily. "No!" he howled in rage. Panic he'd never known before welled in his throat.

Justus would not allow her to give in to the call of death. He couldn't bear to face eternity, knowing she was gone and he was forever alone. He called out to his gods, "Do not take her from me. I beg of you."

The growing crowd was oblivious to the struggle he was going through. Closing his eyes, Justus chanted in silence. Praying and bartering with his soul to whichever god would heed the call for the energy he needed to get her heart pumping.

Shifting her position, Justus placed her ear to his heart while pressing her cold body into his warmth. Gently, he pressed his large hand over her heart, sending her a portion of his inner embodiment.

Within moments, he felt a faint pulse against his open palm. He was barely breathing, as he poured his life force into her, until it gradually intensified to match the rhythm of his heartbeat. He focused his concentration to stop the bleeding in her brain and onward, slowing the internal maggots that festered inside her body. Humans called it *cancer*.

He tasted bile in the back of the throat as he continued to heal. It was only temporary, but it would give them time. As long as she remained completely human, it would continue to worsen, until she died. Soon she would learn her fate was to live by his side and give herself to him willingly. Once the transformation ritual took place, they would be forever as one.

He opened his eyes and looked upon her face with an expression that was the closest thing to love he had ever shown. Now that he had her stable enough to reach the hospital, he could rest.

Bending down, he whispered against her temple, "You alone, woman, have awakened a lust inside me that I have never known." His voice was deep with longing. "If you die, so does my future, for you are the only one who can relieve me from my impotent state. I will walk through any hell put before me, to keep you

by my side. You must heed my words for they are true... Fight to stay with me!" He closed his eyes against the newness of these untried emotions. "If you leave me, I swear I shall lose all that is human in me."

Justus knew that even though she was close to death, she heard him and she would do her part to stay alive. How could she let go now that she realized, as he did, that they were destined to bring together their unclaimed essence?

Lucus's lips spread into a sinister smile. He turned away from the touching scene. Maybe he had just witnessed the end of Justus. This woman had to be his *weakness* for him to react so. They all had one somewhere, even he, but he no longer needed his mate to be whole. Now that he was a god, spilling the blood of the weak appeased all of his needs.

Once he got Justus, the Alpha male of his clan, to join him the others would soon follow and they would take over the world. He waited to see the day when they no longer had to conform to man just to fit in.

This woman will weaken Justus's tracking abilities. His growing love for her will make him weak and emotional. This distraction from his duties will be his downfall and he, Lucus, would be there to sway his reasoning when the time is right.

Lucus laughed and disappeared into the growing darkness of night, ready to pacify his growing hunger.

CHAPTER 3

“Hello, Mrs. Tibbs? Sera, come on dear, I need you to wake up now.”

She moaned and coughed, floating from her quiet, dark world of nothingness. Immediately, she felt a dull aching from her temple to the base of her skull. There was nothing like pain to confirm that you’re alive.

“Come on, it’s time for you to open your eyes, sweetie.” The voice continued to intrude on her drowsy state of consciousness and she forced herself to comply. “That’s my girl.”

“What’s happened?” Sera thought her voice sounded foreign, even to her own ears. She pressed her hands to her temples, as coughing racked her thin frame. Greedily, she held on to the cup of water the nurse held close to her mouth, sipping through the straw with parched eagerness.

“My, you were thirsty, weren’t you?” The nurse removed the cup from her lips and placed it on the bedside table. “I will place your cup beside your bed. As soon as you drink what’s left in that pitcher next to your cup, we will remove your catheter.”

Sera nodded her head and groan. “My head is killing me. You got an aspirin or something?” She continued to cough and moan. “Maybe a lozenge for my sore throat?”

“I’ll check with your doctor and see what you can have, but we need to keep you awake, now that we have you awake. Come, let me fluff your pillows a bit and I’ll raise the head of your bed so you can sit up for awhile.”

“I guess I’ve been working too hard again. I get the flu every time I spend too many hours at the lab instead of sleeping.” She smiled at the nurse and felt a wave of nausea hit her. Reflexively her hands went up to her head. “What the hell? Why is my head bandaged?”

“Sweetie, try not to touch the bandages, we need to keep the area clean. Now, if you don’t mind, I need to ask you a few questions,” the nurse said calmly. “Can you tell me your name dear?”

“Sera Tibbs,” She cleared her throat and lifted the plastic cup from the side table for another drink before returning it to the table.

“Excellent!” the nurse exclaimed. Pulling away, she asked, “Can you tell me what year this is? Who is the president of the United States?”

“Umm...the year is 2000 and Bill Clinton is in his final term,” Sera answered with a sigh. “What about you answering some of my questions? Was I in an accident? And how long have I been here?”

“Don’t fret, dear. I will tell the doctor you’re awake.” The nurse patted her hand.

“Why are you looking at me like that? I was correct, wasn’t I?” she asked the nurse.

“Mrs. Tibbs-“

“Dr. Tibbs or Professor Tibbs,” Sera corrected, hoping that if the nurse knew she was somewhat in the same field, she would be more forthcoming with information.

“Well, Dr. Tibbs, I guess that leads us to my next question. Where do you work?”

Sera quirked a brow at the nurse and said, “I suppose you aren’t going to answer any of my questions.”

“Now, Dr. Tibbs, you know being in this profession that we have an exact order to how things are done. So allow me to perform my duties and then I can get your doctor in to address your questions.”

Sera took in the elderly woman, with her spectacles poised on the tip of her beak of a nose. Regardless of her Marilyn Monroe curves and legs to die for, not to mention the deceptive black-as-night edged haircut, she had some age on her.

She supposed if you were half-blind and looked at her from the back, at a distance, you could believe the bull she was trying to sell. But the moment she came closer, she was every bit of late sixties or older. Still, she had to give the older woman props for trying hard to hold on to her youth.

“Okay,” Sera started out, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “I’m a doctor, an author, researcher, wildlife biochemist, and contributor at the *Foundation for Biomedical Research*.” Sera’s voice raised an octave. She didn’t mean to be snappy, but she worked hard for her career and job titles. It was hard to be anyone’s “Mrs.” when she never had the time to go out and socialize. “Everything but a *Mrs. Somebody*, I might add.”

The nurse stared at her over the rims of her glasses and smiled. “I see. Maybe we need to get that catheter out of you right now. Bothersome, isn’t it?”

Sera bit her bottom lip to keep from smiling. “I apologize, my head is hurting me.” She lifted her hand up towards the bandages. “Also, I’m not used to my questions being ignored.”

The nurse reached out and gently guided her hand away from the bandages, replacing it in her lap with a motherly pat. “Understandable. Everyone knows doctors make the worst patients. Therefore, I will be forthcoming and tell you that it appears you have some memory loss, for it is two thousand and six and President Bush is in his second term.”

“Bush was before Clinton,” Sera corrected the nurse gently, treating her as if she was the one with memory loss.

“You’re thinking of his father, dear.” The nurse smiled politely as if she was speaking to an errant child.

“Oh Lord,” was all Sera could say.

“I’ll tell you one thing, the Lord has had nothing to do with the madness that’s been going on in the world these past few years.”

The older woman placed her hands on her wide hips and shook her head, the lines in her face deepened with woe.

“You know, Dr. Tibbs, I thought I had already lived through some tragic things, but, Sweetie, we are living in the days of madness. Everyone is angry about something or another and I don’t envy your rediscovery.”

Sera didn't understand, but the sadness in the nurse's face told her that she spoke the truth. It also told her *she* had to face the facts that she has lost the past five years of her life.

Anything was possible in that amount of time. The nurse called her Mrs. Tibbs, why not Miss or Ms instead? Could she have met someone, fell in love and married during these lost years, a co-worker perhaps?

"Nurse, what has happened to me? Why can't I remember the past five years of my life?"

"I think it would be best if I let the doctor go over your chart with you. He can answer any questions you may have."

Sera eyes watered as she shook her head in growing awareness. The implications were overwhelming. "You know, I thought my life was hopeless when my adopted parents died in an accident a few years ago, well, more than a few if this is 2006.

A half smile came to her lips. "Anyway, I wondered at that time what else could possibly happen that could make me feel any more cursed than being left alone in this world after it took years to find a loving couple to take me into their home." She turned her glazed stare on the nurse. "You know, I think I got my answer."

The nurse refilled her cup with water. "That's why you can't dwell on such things. There is nothing else to learn from this experience. What you do is accept the fact that you are still alive and God don't make mistakes. So there are still some things for you to do."

"Will you please get my godfather, Dr. James Ryan, and tell him—"

"I'm sorry, honey, but Dr. Ryan couldn't make it here, so he's conferencing with our attending physician Dr. Meeks. He's overnighting your medical history to us."

"Has my godfather been called out of town on an emergency?" Sera asked, thanking the nurse for making her more comfortable.

"Well, he's in Alabama and he couldn't fly here because he's has several patients on the critical list and he just couldn't get away. I'm sorry."

"I don't understand, you mean I'm not in Alabama anymore?"

The nurse was shaking her head before she finished asking her question. "Dr. Tibbs, you are at Tahoe Forest Hospital."

"In Truckee, California?"

"Yes, so obviously you must have been in this district before." The nurse clapped her hands together. "Most people have never heard of Truckee, it's easier just to say Tahoe."

"I wonder why I'm here, visiting my parents' grave site maybe, unless I'm scouting new wildlife reserve areas?" Sera released a deep sigh. "Hard to tell, considering I'm basing all my thoughts on what I was working on five years ago. Tell me, was I in an accident or did something go wrong with one of my wolves?"

"Wolves?" The nurse balked and shuddered. "You must live an interesting life indeed. No, my understanding is, you collapsed at the airport and were MedEvac-ed to our facility." The nurse's voice softened once more. "We were fortunate to get you here in time."

Sera couldn't stop the trembling of her hands no matter how hard she pressed them together. She surmised losing short-term memory was nothing to the alternative. From the sound of things she could have just as well died.

"This is like waking up in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*," she mumbled, dropping her head and closing her eyes to keep the tears from flowing. "I feel that I will wake up in a minute, in a bed I've slept in for the past ten years, in my townhouse.

"I'm so sorry, hon. I know all of this has to seem surreal to you. I will get Dr. Meeks and I'm sure your husband will be delighted to see you are awake."

Sera's head snapped up in surprise. She opened her eyes to look at the nurse. For a moment, everything blurred around her. "Husband? That's not possible."

"Oh, trust me, it's possible, because he is very much for real. Never have I seen a man so in love and protective. Your husband has been here day and night. He's worse than a guard dog in heat holding on to his last bone. Lord, the way he scowls at every male nurse and orderly that cared for you-," The older woman shook her head and her eyes crinkled at the corners with mirth as she continued.

"Those poor fellows were so intimidated they refused to come near you except to drop off your flowers and run. Now, mind you, our female attendants are tripping over themselves to get a closer look at your husband, especially Amy." The nurse giggled and quickly added, "But, I assure you, your man only has eyes for you, dear."

Sera's brow lifted. "So that's where all these vases of flowers came from."

"These are only the fresh ones that were brought in early this morning." The nurse looked around her arms, folding across ample breasts. "Sweet man that he is, he has fresh ones brought in every day for you, and the others distributed throughout the hospital to the other patients."

"My husband does this, for me?" A feeling of warmth coursed through her body. She couldn't believe she had been so fortunate in love but was sad that she couldn't remember him or any of the time they had shared together.

"Yes, and much more. He asked that the staff and those that the flowers are given to pray for you. He believes that with so many voices asking for the same thing, you couldn't help, but be allowed to remain with him." The nurse sighed. "Isn't that something?"

"I don't think I've ever heard anything more wonderful." Sera couldn't stop the smile that came to her lips. "I don't know what to say to him. I never thought I'd be so lucky as to find a man this caring."

"Sweetie, you probably won't have to say a word. He will be so happy to see you have finally come back to us."

"I feel so bad. I don't remember him," she replied in a small, frightened voice. Fear stark and vivid, glittered in her eyes. "How do I tell the man I must have once loved that I don't remember him?"

"Don't worry about something that is beyond your control. He remembers. Take your lead from him, I guarantee," she winked. "You won't have a problem falling in love with him all over again."

After the nurse left, Sera had time to ponder her situation. Feelings of detachment lingered, as she tried to make some sense of what she had learned so far. Somewhere in the past five years, she had met a man and married.

Sera's frown turned into a smile. Her dark eyes drifted over the bouquets of flowers. She reached out, pulled a purple rose from the arrangement beside her bed, and held it to her nose. "How can I not remember a man that loves me this much?" she whispered aloud.

"Sera?"

At a snail's pace, she opened her eyes to see a tall, attractive Caucasian male standing beside her bed. Her eyes grew round with surprise, as she took in the man's shaggy, overly-long dirty blond hair and unshaven appearance. For some reason, maybe it was the aging throwback from the '50's nurse, but she assumed Dr. Meeks would be an older man.

Things sure have changed a lot over the years, when a doctor can walk the halls of a hospital, looking like a heavy-metal musician after a three-day binge. He wasn't even dressed appropriately. How could he breathe in those jeans; they were so tight she could see what he was packing beneath the closed zipper. She could swear his legs looked like they went on forever and then some. *Oh, mercy.*

"Hello, Dr. Meeks. Maybe now I can get some answers," Sera said releasing a long breath. She saw his bushy eyebrow arch in surprise and forged ahead. "Maybe you can tell me why I can't remember the past five years of my life?"

A hush came to her lips as her gazed locked with his. Sera didn't know why but she had a great desire to touch him. She reached out her hand to take his, just to say 'thank you,' she told herself, and as their fingers touched, she gasped from the immediate attachment she felt. She found herself drowning in the hold of his stare.

He grinned, a show of teeth. "I've waited all my life for you."

"What?" She cocked her head to the side in question, but whatever he was about had to wait.

"Excellent! I'm delighted to see you're awake and alert. Dr. Tibbs. Maybe now this husband of yours can finally go home and stop upsetting the hospital staff." He chuckled and cleared his throat, when he realized he was laughing alone. "Yes, er, how are you feeling my dear? Any blurry or doubled vision?"

Sera flinched and released the hand of the man she had assumed was the doctor as Dr. Meeks shone a bright penlight into the pupil of one eye. When he pulled back to jot down some information on her chart, she turned her attention back to the stranger who had moved away from her bed.

He was leaning nonchalantly against the wall allowing the doctor and nurse, to maneuver around the bed to take her blood pressure and temperature.

"So you must be my husband." For some foolish reason, she felt heat spread across her face as his lips curved into a sensuous, slow smile.

"I'm Justus, your eternal mate."

"Please, Dr. Tibbs. I need you to breathe in deeply for me."

Sera took a deep breath and blew out as instructed, but she kept her eyes on 'Justus'. She liked the sound of his name. It was a strong, fitting, masculine name.

"Well, your heart is beating strong. Seems to be a bit fast, but I don't hear anything unusual," the doctor announced

"I could have told you my heart is just fine, Doctor." .

"As well it should be. Her heart beats for me." Justus smiled at her over the doctor's head and once more, she felt the flame of fire on her cheeks.

Sera cleared her throat, with a bit of effort pulled her attention from Justus, and focused on getting some answers. "Now my head, that is another thing, Dr. Meeks."

"The nurse explained that you seem to be experiencing some short-term memory loss. As you know, this is not a rare occurrence for someone that has experienced a ruptured aneurysm. As you know, it's a miracle you survived and in your current condition." The doctor paused and pushed up his bifocals.

"You, Sera, are a talking marvel. With all the hemorrhaging I found in the compartments surrounding your brain, well, let's just say..."

"I should be in a coma or worse...dead." Sera finished for him. She sensed Justus reaching out to comfort her before he actually moved back to her side. She welcomed the warmth of his nearness.

"I'm afraid so." Dr. Meeks agreed. "I've seen people with less damage, and, yes they either died or, at the very least, they're in therapy relearning to use all of their normal motor functions."

"Trust me doctor, I'm not complaining. It's just a bit disconcerting." Sera looked up at Justus as she felt him gently squeeze her shoulder. She leaned into him. "I can't begin to imagine the wealth of information I have gained over the past five years. Thank God, I'm someone who is very analytical about my research. Maybe, when I go back through my things, it will bring back something."

"The mind is very fragile, Sera; you can't hurry such things." The doctor placed his hand on top of hers and she felt Justus tense.

She hid her smile behind a cough, as the doctor stepped back and picked up the chart from the foot of her bed, where he had placed it.

"Let's see here...you appear to have no speech problems, no visual difficulties, your eyes are clear and you are fully capable of understanding what is being said without hesitation or confusion." Dr. Meeks spoke without removing his eyes from her medical chart.

"I need you to be straight with me, Dr Meeks. Will I get my memory back?"

"Sera, in a normal situation such as this, I would be remiss in giving you false hopes. However, your current recovery is already one of the most amazing things I have witnessed in my thirty-odd years of medicine."

"So there is a possibility that this is a temporary condition?"

Sera stirred at the sound of Justus's voice, moving too quickly, pain flickering across her face. He brushed his fingers against the nape of her neck, turning a caress into a gentle massaging; soothing away the pressure.

Voltage ran through his body to her, guttered through his fingertips, and lashed through her blood flow. Her inner muscles contracted and she suppressed a moan.

"If Dr. Tibbs keep healing at this rapid rate, I believe her chances are better than most." The doctor crossed his arms across his chest as he stared at her in deep thought.

Sera broke the growing silence. "What are you *not* saying Dr. Meeks?" She became more suspicious as the doctor continued to steal glances at her husband. "Look at me, Doctor. I'm your patient, not my husband. What are the two of you keeping from me?"

The doctor rubbed at the bridge of his nose causing his spectacles to slip back to the tip of his long nose. He released a deep sigh. "I already know how Mr. Apollon feels about this--"

"Doctor." Justus's voice held a note of warning. "I thought I told you, it wasn't going to happen."

Sera looked from her husband to the doctor. "Justus, please! I want to know. If it's about me I have the right to know what's going on." She caught at Justus's hand on her shoulder and held it against her chest.

"Sera, he is out of line in his request."

"Honey, please. I don't know what I've been like as a wife, but I know, I've always been a woman who likes to make her own decisions."

He grinned.

"Why are you grinning?"

"I like it when you call me honey."

"Okaaay...I will remember that." Sera ducked her head sheepishly, a blush spreading across her shoulders. "Finish what you were saying, Doctor."

Even with her consent, Sera saw the doctor look at Justus for permission. The subtle gesture shouldn't have irritated her, but it did and she wondered how she'd come to marry a man who appeared to be as authoritarian as she was.

After a moment's hesitation, he gave the doctor a half-hearted nod to continue.

"Dr. Tibbs...Sera, since you have short-term memory loss, you most likely aren't aware of your condition."

"What condition are you talking about? I was sick before the aneurysm?" Sera balked.

"Yes. In the past year, it seems that you were being treated for cancer and, after a good fight, Dr. Ryan recently diagnosed you as terminal." Dr. Meeks moved in to give comfort and halted. He stepped back as Justus lifted his piercing gaze from his wife's bowed head. "So...sorry."

"It'll be okay, Sera," Justus reassured.

“Oh, my God.” Sera’s face became ashen. Blindly, she gripped at his sweater and pulled him to sit next to her, needing the comfort of his strength and embrace more than her next breath. “Justus, I can’t believe that after all of this, I’m dying.”

“Dr. Tibbs, please, you must calm down. That is not what I’m saying at all.” Dr. Meeks’ voice became louder with pending excitement. “What I’m saying is we ran the test three times.”

“Doctor, get on with it!” Justus bellowed. “Can’t you see you’re making a mess of this?”

“Oh, my...” The doctor spluttered. “I apologize. No...no, Sera, you aren’t dying.” The doctor’s jowls shook with excitement. “Far from it! Somehow, within the 72 hours of your collapse, surgery, and awakening, your system is healing itself.”

Sera’s mouth dropped wide open and she shook her head, saying, “That’s not possible.”

“I know...I know.” The doctor nodded and shrugged his shoulder. “If someone had told me this before seeing it for myself, Dr. Tibbs, I would wholeheartedly agree with you. However, as I was saying, the lab ran three anti-malignin antibody tests and there is no trace of your doctor’s original diagnosis to be found.”

“There has to be a mistake with the original diagnosis,” Sera argued. The woman in her was happy, but the doctor in her needed to know the how, when, where, and why’s.

“When I went in to staunch the bleeding, I saw the tumor, Sera. I completely concurred with Dr. Ryan’s diagnosis. If we were to try and surgically remove the cancerous tumor, the surety of your death would have been immediate.”

“How?” Sera smiled through her tears. “This is so crazy.”

“No, it’s a wonderful finding for you and the medical community. The *how*, is what I want to find out. With your consent we can start testing immediately and—”

“As I said before doctor, it’s out of the question,” Justus interrupted.

Sera sighed, turning a hard gaze on Justus. “Do you have any idea the impact this could have on countless lives?”

“Mr. Apollon, let me be blunt. We found some interesting and most unusual marking in Dr. Tibbs’ blood-work. It could be the reason behind her healing.” The doctor drew closer to Sera during his explanation, halting abruptly as Justus stepped in his path.

“Mr. Apollon,” the doctor began, spreading his hands with despair.

With the mention of her husband’s surname, Sera looked down at her hand. She saw no ring and the doctor had called her by her maiden name. Was she really married to this man or was the arrangement something more popular such as *living together*? Well, it was popular back in the 90’s.

She shrugged off her suspicion. The emergency room nurses would have removed her jewelry if she wore any and it wasn’t unusual for a female doctor to practice under her established maiden name.

Either way he needed to understand this was her decision in the end, but she would find out first why he was against the testing, before making any commitment to the doctor.

“There is a chance we could isolate this healing antigen, break it down, and create a synthetic serum that could combat cancer, speed up the healing time on surgical patients and God only knows what else,” Sera heard the doctor explaining to Justus as she return her full attention to their conversation.

“If we go forward, Dr. Meeks, I insist on being in the lab and working with the team.”

“Sera.” Justus’s gaze narrowed in protest, bored into the doctor’s face. “I’m sorry, Doctor, but since my wife is healing, I don’t believe these tests are necessary for *her* well-being and must deny you your request. Sera, you have already been through enough.”

The doctor cleared his throat, looked away from Justus’s aggressive stare, and trained his gaze on Sera. “Well, uh, I understand how you feel, Mr. Apollon; however, we are talking about a medical breakthrough that could cure millions of people-”

“Doctor, what I’m hearing is, you want to use Sera as a guinea pig so that you can get your name in the history books for a miracle that has nothing to do with you or your medical expertise and I’m...not...having...it,” Justus declared. His voice, though quiet, had an ominous quality.

“Well...sir...you have my personal guarantee that your wife, Dr. Tibbs, would receive equal recognition in all our findings.”

“That is not the point, Dr. Meeks, and you won’t like it if I must *force* you to see reason, Doctor.” A low growl emanated from Justus and Sera put her hand on his shoulder, her eyes wide with surprise. Would he really resort to violence, she wondered?

He turned his agitated scowl on her, but she didn’t feel in the least bit intimidated, by his bullying. She shook her head, *tsking* at him as if he were an errant child. He had the decency to appear abashed, as he leaned against the headboard of the hospital bed and sulked in silence.

“Doctor, if you and the nurse would give me and my husband some time alone to discuss this matter, I will give you my decision shortly.”

“I understand,” Dr. Meeks mumbled, shuffling towards the door and placing a safe distance between himself and Justus, who swiftly came to his feet, towering by at least four inches over the doctor.

“You heard her, Doc. Get out,” he snarled.

Sera waited for the door to close behind them, then patted the side of her bed for him to sit. Arching her head to look at him was causing her head to ache once more.

“Okay, tell me what’s going on with you. If we can find a cure to help others, that’s a good thing, honey.”

She noticed he didn’t smile this time when she called him “honey,” so obviously he was very serious about her not submitting to more tests. “Justus, I feel blessed to be alive and, maybe, I’m alive so that I might find a cure for others like me. So give me one reason why I shouldn’t share it with the world.”

Justus sighed heavily. “It’s because of me you are healing. The unusual traits in your blood are mine and they’re not human.”

Sera threw back her head and laughed. “Okay, show’s over. Now, I know for sure I must be on one of those hidden camera shows, and this entire day has been a setup. Did my co-workers put ya’ll up to this?”

“I’m serious, Sera.”

The laughter died on her lips. Something in his eyes told her he was being sincere. She paled. “If you aren’t human what are you?”

“Lykian.”

“Lykian.” She repeated.

“Sera, I only gave you enough blood to keep you alive. The healing is temporary. It will take three more bleedings to prepare your body to accept my semen.” His eyes begged for understanding. “....And heal you completely, making you immortal.”

“This is not happening.” She shook her head in denial. “You’re trying to tell me you’re some fucking vampire!”

“Vampire, no. I’m Lykian, *Bloodwolf*.”

“Oh, wow, that makes a real big difference.” She threw her hands up in disgust. Not at him, but at the feeling of helplessness she was experiencing. “Did I know this about you before I lost my memory?”

“No. There wasn’t enough time. You collapsed in my arms.”

Sera saw that he wanted to say something else, but she didn’t encourage him to continue. She wasn’t sure if she could take any more news today.

“By all that is your right, this should have been a decision that was yours to make, after I told you what I am, but unfortunately it wasn’t meant to be.” He touched her hand. “I couldn’t let you die.”

Instinctively she felt the urge to flinch from his touch, but how could she spurn the man that had saved her life? Did it matter if the means were unorthodox? Without doubt, it counted for something in her book. Still, the entire concept that he wasn’t what he seemed and she was walking around with this non-human blood in her system was too surreal not to feel some form of apprehension.

Sera leaned back against the stack of bed pillows easing her hands from his. He let go without complaint, yet his wide shoulders slumped forward with open disappointment.

“Sera, say something,” he pleaded, as the silence stretched between them.

She hugged her arms to her. “What can I say? The last thing I remember is telling my lab partners I would see them tomorrow and going home to bed in my little townhouse in Alabama.” She shrugged.

“I wake up to find my head killing me, looking at the face of a woman I don’t know. I find out I nearly died, but wait, I’m alive. I just can’t remember the last 5 years of my life. I’m married...mated...whatever to a creature that shouldn’t even exist. Still, I should be happy I didn’t die.

“Oh, wait, I still may die unless I continue this blood ritual and I won’t even ask what the sperm thingy is about!” she ended on a screech. “So tell me, what on earth do I have to say about anything anymore?”

Justus flinched. “I’m here to help you acknowledge your destiny.”

“Destiny to be what? I can become whatever you are or die. That’s my destiny.”

“Your destiny is to be my one and only love throughout eternity. Do you think being my mate is worse than...death?” he asked, his deep voice barely above a whisper, as if he had to ask, but was scared of what her answer might be.

Sera heaved a sigh and felt shame sweep through her. How ungrateful could she be? She was only alive because of him; that was the truth of things. What was she actually giving up by spending eternity with him?

He had proven he was kind, thoughtful, protective, and she had no doubt that he would be loyal and yes, even love her like she had never been loved before. All she had to do was accept her...*fate*

“I apologize. I didn’t mean—”

“It’s understandable and I wished we had more time.” Justus lifted his head to look at her. “But it is something you no longer have. I do not regret or apologize for the choice I made.”

“Are you my husband?”

“I am much more. I am your eternal mate and there can be and will be no other woman for me. You are my first, my last, and my everything.” He said it so passionately; Sera forgot to breathe.

“Oh, my,” she held a hand to her burning cheeks and he smiled. She was instantly mesmerized, as she watched him slowly, run the length of his tongue across the full curve of his bottom lip.

Her pulse pounded as warmth spread over her body, as if her flesh was calling to him. Was it his blood or hers that caused her to ache for his touch? “Tell me about yourself. What do you do?”

Without hesitation, he answered her question in a very matter-of-fact tone. “My birth name is Justus Marius Ares Timon Onur Apollon. I’m an immortal shifter, a hunter born of the *Lykian* breed. We are the descendents of the immortals *Apollon* and *Ambrosia*, daughter of *Lycaon*, cursed to walk the earth as wolf and man.”

“This is crazy,” was all Sera could manage as she closed her eyes, willing him to go away.

“Sera.”

She opened her eyes slowly. He was still there and she could see his concern was genuine.

“I wish I could tell you that everything you’re going through is a dream and you will wake up to life, as you once knew it.” He reached out a hand and thumbed the corner of her mouth. “But remember, if I hadn’t found you when I did, you would have died in the midst of strangers, in an airport lobby. I have no regrets for saving your life by any means necessary.”

Sera sat captivated listening to what he said, without further assessment. A part of her found pleasure in knowing he wanted her. Yet, another part of her feared the unknown. She was accustomed to planning every aspect of her life and now her options were gone. She didn’t want to die.

“What do you hunt?” she questioned, remembering he had called himself a hunter.

“I hunt renegade Lykians.”

“Why? What makes them renegades?”

“We live in a secret society and have obligations as members of the Darkworld to uphold not only human laws, but also our own. The law above all others is you do not harm anyone from the human race. When one of my kind breaks the law, it is my duty to find him and bring him to justice before the council.”

“Are you hunting someone now?”

He remained silent; a haunted look came to his eyes before he turned away from her questioning gaze. “Yes, and I haven’t been doing a good job of it.”

“You can’t blame yourself for another’s crime, no more than I can for the crimes of other humans.” Sera reached out and placed a comforting hand on his arm. The tips of her fingers seem to tingle as skin met skin. She pulled her hand away.

“It is harder to bring someone to justice when it’s someone you know and care for, especially when they kill because it’s beyond their control,” he confided

“So the one you’re hunting is a friend. Did they kill a human?”

“You can say that, and not only did he kill humans, his first murders were my parents.”

Sera’s breath caught in the back of her throat. The open vulnerability she saw on his handsome face, nearly broke her heart. The loss of his parents put them on a common ground; even if the circumstances were different, their painful loss was the same. She reached up and placed her palm against his face. Their eyes embraced in a quiet understanding.

“Okay.” Her voice was barely above a whisper.

Justus cocked his head to the side, his eyebrow arched into the locks of hair across his broad brow. “Okay, what?”

She bit down on her bottom lip. “Okay, I will tell the doctor I decline his offer of more tests.”

“Sera, I need to hear you say that you accept me as your eternal mate. It must be your will.”

She felt sick, her stomach churning. “It doesn’t feel like it’s my choice if dying is my only other option.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Sera sighed. “It’s not your fault that I was dying of cancer and I should stop taking my frustrations out on you. I owe you my life.”

“I want your love, not your gratitude.” Justus’s voice was husky, almost hoarse with emotions.

“You must give me time. Even if you are my husband...mate...whatever, I don’t know you.”

“Ask me anything and I will tell you.”

Sera couldn’t help but smile. He looked like an excited boy, anxious to please his favorite teacher. She reached out, caressed an unruly strand of hair off his face, and tucked it behind the curve of his ear.

Justus grasped her hand and turned his lips into her palm. Lightning streaked in her veins, bubbling her bloodstream, causing her to feel a longing she never felt before. She hated this feeling of vulnerability he brought out of her.

She could sense Justus needed her to need him; Heaven help her, she did. She needed him if she wanted to stay alive but she didn't want them to be together out of necessity, on her part. She wanted to know someday what it felt like to be in love. The question was could she love the creature that appeared to all to be just a man?

Justus's roughened shadow of whiskers nuzzled an abrasive trail against the soft, sensitive skin of her inner arm. She felt as if he was marking his territory and the thoughts of his desire for her aroused her deeply. So why was she hesitant about giving in to the change?

"You're trembling," he said against her skin. His breath blew hot, as he spoke. "Now that you know I'm not human, do I frighten you?"

"No, the way you make me feel scares me," Sera admitted and received a devastating smile for her honesty. Her stomach fluttered.

His hand caught her chin. "I have never loved before. Tell me now that you would have me and I promise you'll not be disappointed."

"I don't know if I can share my time and space with another. I'm a loner and my life is already full. I have my research. What about my wolves?"

"What about this wolf?" he smirked.

She giggled. "Seriously, Justus, the first thing I need to do is come to terms with what has happened in my life during the past five years. I can't handle being in a relationship now."

"I'm not something you handle, Sera. I am your eternal mate. We were in this relationship before you were born!"

She lifted a brow at him. "Justus, you know how crazy that sounds to me! You know how many times I dated in my entire life? Once in college and finally when I decided to have sex, it was because everyone else was doing it. I didn't like it," she admitted, waiting for him to call her a frigid prude like her boyfriend had, before he dumped her.

How was she to know women usually lie about such things? Or that he wasn't man enough to handle the truth; namely, that she never had an orgasm with him? Of course, he blamed it on her lack of experience.

"I have never made love to anyone, but I know with you it will be wonderful. Our bodies were born to please one another."

Sera couldn't ignore the thrill it gave her to know she would be his first. But how was it possible? He was gorgeous; he had to have women throwing themselves at him. It hurt her feelings that he would lie to her. "I don't believe you. I don't think I can believe anything you've told me, including that nonsense about you changing into a wolf."

Justus was silent a moment. "Sera, I haven't lied to you...not really."

"Then tell me how is it that you've never made love but you're supposed to be my husband?"

"I never said I was your husband. What I said is I'm your eternal mate." His deep voice indicated his growing frustration.

“Well you obviously allowed the medical staff to believe you were and you didn’t bother to correct me when I assumed you were,” she said accusingly.

“That’s because amongst my kind we are much more than the silly documentation that is created by mankind. Because it’s what you are accustomed to, I will respect it and we will wed as soon as we leave the hospital, but you are mine, Sera, bonded to me heart and soul.” He grasped her upper arms and pulled her closer. “Do not believe that you can ever rid yourself of me, now that I have found you.”

“No man owns me. Not now...not ever!” She gave back as good as she got.

“I don’t want to own you, woman. I want to love you,” he announced in a burst of unleashed passion. He leaned into her, kissed her hard, possessively. “Let’s start anew. Right here and right now, we begin our life. I’ll give you time to get use to the idea of making love with me. But you shall be my mate, my lover, my wife, my everything, Sera.”

Flames licked over her skin from the heat of his voice. She loved the way he sounded. Sure. Powerful in his belief that she was the only one for him. She was the mate of his soul. He had a way of making her believe him. “Will you understand it if I tell you I don’t like having sex? Can you accept the fact that I may be frigid?”

“What the hell is this...frigid? You can’t make love to me if you’re cold?” His face subdued puzzlement. He placed her hand on his face. “Feel me, Sera. I will make you as hot as you make me.”

“Justus,” she managed.

“See, I feel you growing hot already.” His boyish smile dominated his face. “It’s because you were born for me. We will fit. I promise.”

“You aren’t going to allow me to walk away from you, are you?” she asked, already knowing the answer. She already knew in her heart that she didn’t want to walk away from him; she was curious to find out if what he said was true.

Were they destined to be together and could she learn to like her life, with the capabilities of becoming one of the creatures she adored? What would it be like from a scientific point of view, to be able to communicate on a wolf’s level? Would she be able to communicate with the wolves dying from unknown diseases and hear them put their ailments into words?

Could this be possible, or would she wake up one day to find all of this, including Justus, a figment of her damaged mind. Was he an illusion of facts and fantasies, allowing her to associate and impart a physical aspect to the creatures she grew up around, the same wild creatures to whose survival she was dedicated? She read about shifters in romance novels. He couldn’t be real.

“Sera, I will do anything for you; except allow you to die or leave me. I would die without you. I couldn’t bear to live with all these new feelings and the ability to see the world with all this color, without you being in my life, to keep me grounded.”

Sera shook her head in denial. “Men, don’t say things like that, Justus, and they aren’t virgins waiting their entire life for that *one* woman to come along and make them whole. This isn’t real. You aren’t real.”

“Sera, I am not just a man. I’m a Lykian and I’m several centuries old, so forgive me if my words are as old as I am; however, can’t you feel me? I’m as real as you are. Your hand is over my heart. Can’t you feel how it quickens from your touch?”

Her steady bold gaze bore into him, in silent acceptance. She saw the heart-rending tenderness of his gaze and her heart turned over in response, matching the steady beat of his.

“Show me. If what you say is true, change for me right now,” she urged him.

“Ladies first,” he urged, as his eyes twinkled with lingering mirth. Sera’s eyes grew wide with excitement. “I can change right now? I thought there was more to go through before I could change.

He chuckled. “I’m teasing, sweetness. Even though you say you don’t believe, what I say I am is true. A part of you knows it’s true and a part of you can’t wait to join me.”

Sera narrowed her eyes at him in warning even though she had to admit what he said was true. She didn’t know if she truly believed him, as much as she wanted to believe him. She was a doctor and a scientist; the possibilities of this being a fact instead of fiction would intrigue anyone on a professional level, of course.

She voiced as much, ignoring her nagging inner desires to believe him. “I’m a doctor; it would be intriguing to study the biological changes taking place in your body during such a transformation. Do your organs maintain a more human factor even in your wolf state?”

“Sera, as I told the doctor you would not be his lab rat, I don’t intend to allow you to treat me as one.” Justus brow furrowed.

“Well, first I got to see it to believe it. If what you say is true then I should be able to run some tests on myself after I change, right?” With a snort Sera quirked, an arched brow at him, as if daring him to tell her she couldn’t.

“You minx! You’re baiting me, aren’t you?” His frown turned into a delighted smile. “By all that is ancient, I can’t wait to begin my life with you. You stimulate a wit I thought died a long time ago.”

“Dr. Meeks will be pounding on that door soon for an answer. Now Justus Apollon, put up or shut up. If you are telling the truth, you should be able to change, into a wolf. If you do, I’ll have to believe everything you have told me so far is true and I’ll know it’ll be in my best interest to become your...eternal mate.”

She waited for him to retract any lies he may have told her. He remained quiet and she continued. “However, if you can’t do as you say, it’s over and whatever scam you are running you can go and peddle it on another heiress, who has lost part of her memory.”

He appeared completely affronted by her speech. “I don’t want or need anything you have or own. Except you heart to listen to me, your body to bear my children, your soul to blend with mine and for you to love me, as I have loved the thought of you all my life.”

“Wada...wada...more words.” She crossed her arms across her breast and leaned back against the stacked bed pillows. “Bring on the wolf-man.”

“You aren’t prepared to handle the beast,” he said, with honest smugness. With fluid ease, he stood and strolled to foot of her hospital bed. “I will shift completely into my wolf state. It’s easier to control inside this limited space than the beast that lies between the two.”

Sera swallowed deeply and licked her dry lips, in anticipation of the unexpected, one of them being his need to remove his clothing, in order to accomplish the seemingly impossible miracle. Her first instinct was to look away from his nakedness but she couldn’t; what woman wouldn’t appreciate a beautiful athletic male body? Besides, he didn’t seem to have a shy bone in him.

As she watched, Justus tugged his black turtleneck sweater out of his black jeans. He lifted it over his head, shaking his shaggy hair until it became a halo about his face, coming alive, as the room seemed to crackle with growing charged energy. She could feel the light hair on her arms and the moistening lips of her pussy standing on end.

Sera couldn’t take her eyes off him. She liked what she saw. His powerful lean-muscle body moved with easy grace as a well-developed chest cover, with crisp brown hair rippled as he cast his sweater aside. Her fingers dug into the bedding of her hospital bed, to keep from coming up on her knees and crawling across the bed towards him.

Ever so slowly, his big square-tipped hands worked at the button of his jeans, before moving lower to ease down the zipper. Sera licked her lips, as he turned, a well-formed backside, towards her. He leaned over to untie and remove the thick-soled boots. She started to offer her help, as he struggled for a moment to get them off his feet; yet, before she could speak, a shoe dropped, followed with a limp black sock.

Sera admired his long feet, with square and clipped toenails. She found his feet sexy for a man, that is. She didn’t dwell on them too long; he shimmied his jeans over his lean hips, his briefs dropping to the floor along with them and he kicked them aside, before he turned to face her in full-frontal nudity.

She felt stunned by her own arousal, more than by seeing that he was just as excited.

“Uh, forgive that. My cock has never done this before, only since I first saw you. My father had regaled me with enough tales about the mating game between a Lykian and his she-mate, that I assure you, it’s normal.”

“Well, I’ve seen a hard penis before Justus, being a doctor, more than I care to admit, but...uh...” She licked her lips and tried to move her gaze toward his chest. But since *IT* lounged about a half an inch above his navel in its erect state, she might as well not bring too much attention to her flushing face. “You are a bit larger than what one would consider...er...normal.”

Justus' brow lifted and he spread his hands on his lean hips, leaning over and pushing his pelvis forward as he stared down at himself. "Really? Is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

Sera pressed her lips together to keep from giggling like a silly schoolgirl. "Well, to each her own; I don't think any woman would find *yours* disappointing."

He lifted his eyes looking at her cocking his shaggy head to the side. "I don't care what other women think. Is it good enough for you?"

"Just...Justus," Sera spluttered. "You know you shouldn't ask questions like this."

"You are my alpha bitch. We should be able to speak of anything." He sighed impatiently as if she should already know these things.

"Because I know what you mean by that *alpha bitch* statement, I won't hang you by your rather large balls," she murmured and saw him blanch from her statement. She decided to leave him wondering if she truly could do such a thing.

Still, she realized no matter what he was or how he said it, it was true; if you plan on spending your life with someone, or are even considering becoming intimate; you should be able to talk about any and everything.

"Well, I told you that I wasn't that impressed with the entire sex thing. So I suppose it's as good as any other," she fidgeted and scratched at her bandaged head, crossing her eyes in childish frustration. "Don't you think you better get on with it before someone interrupts us?"

"The door is locked," he reminded.

"That's not the point." She snapped, tugging at the hospital gown collar trying to get a little air to her heated flesh. She must have been too active; she felt a fever coming on. "Get on with it already, so you can put your clothes back on."

His hand encircled the head of his cock to cradle it in his hand. His full bottom lip dropped in awe, and for a moment, his eyes closed.

Sera held her breath, as a wave of sensations whooshed through her. A crazed kind of hunger caused her pussy muscles to clinch.

"Justus? What are you doing?" *Hell, what was he doing to her?* Sera had done a thesis on human male arousal in a comparison study; so seeing a man touching himself or even masturbating wasn't new to her. She always saw it from a clinical point of view.

Admittedly, there was nothing clinical about her watching Justus touching himself. His handsome face alight with the discovery of his manhood, was touching and strangely arousing. Her nostrils flared as she caught his arousing scent. Maybe it was her own, for his head shot up and his eyes opened, locking on hers with a knowing closed-lip smile.

"It gives me pleasure." His voice was husky. A dark flush color spread across his tanned skin. There wasn't a tan line in site. "You're in heat. I smell you."

Sera could feel the heat from her toes to her bandage covered roots; if there were still hair up there, even it was on alert. "I'm not!" she protested too loudly for her own ears.

"You lie," he accused, with a tight grin on his face, as he gasped from the movement on his own hand, discovering the concept of a downward stroke.

He moved his free hand up and touched his nipple and it blossomed beneath his touch.

Her nipples hardened to achingly sensitive points brushing against the rough material of her hospital gown. Her fist twisted the bed sheet in her hands. She really should explain that this wasn't something he should be doing in public, that usually if the urge comes upon you, one should go to the bathroom...alone.

She wanted to tell him all those things, but she couldn't. She had never seen anything so fucking gorgeous or exciting, as watching him touching himself. She continued to observe him and lick her own lip, as he licked his.

She was imagining her hands touching him. He swept his hand over the ridges of his abdomen. Her lips parted and she settled lower on her bed pillows. His hand smoothed over his belly as his other hand moved with slow, even strokes.

Her hands smooth up the hem of her gown resting over her thighs. Sweat gathered between her breasts and she could see beads of moisture on his arm straining with each muscular movement, as he pumped.

Her hand found the top of her pussy, fingers delving into the hair. She pressed against her high-setting bone, careful not to allow her fingers to touch her clit or get close to the catheter, that they had yet to remove.

Any residual pain she may have been feeling pooled into a driving need for release between her spread thighs. With each stroke he made, she pushed up against her pressing fingers, matching him move for move. The room permeated with their musky sexual fervor, as they stared at each other.

Sera arched her back, her eyes closing whilst she placed a fist in her mouth to suppress the scream that tore from her as her pussy twitched and rippled her intense release.

She felt the foot of her bed dip and even in her sated embarrassed state; she knew she had to face Justus eventually. There was no way to hide how he affected her now that she'd made a fool of herself.

She loved watching him and yes, she desired him. She didn't even care if he was lying about what he was in order to gain entrance into her personal space. After all, she was a public figure.

Everyone who had ever read *Forbes Magazine*, a medical journal, or visited one of the wildlife reserves, dedicated to her deceased parents, knew she was a wealthy woman, even if she chose to live modestly.

She had to give this man a high score for originality. The thought of possibly meeting a real man, who could become like the wolves she adored, caught her attention. She had just found out she nearly died; of course, his promise of immortality as a shifting human and wolf would be intriguing. Still, enough was enough, she would pay him to forget this little indiscretion and send him on his way.

Sera felt a long swipe of moisture between her sweaty breast and her eyes sprung open. She gasped, “*Holy shit!*”

She received another whimpering swipe of tongue from the huge and beautiful russet colored wolf, this time across her chin and cheek. She wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in his deep soft fur. “Justus,” she whispered.

CHAPTER 4

“I will assist her.” Justus’s voice tersely dismissed the medical staff, while pressing a button on his cell phone. “Bring the car around to the front, Kahn.”

Justus enjoyed the comfort of Sera’s fingers as she reached out and took his hand in hers. It was as if he was finally complete, a feeling he’d never experience before and his heart swelled with newly found love. Only a fellow Lykian could understand how monumental this time in his life was; he only wished he had his family here to share it with him.

He could at least share his good fortune with his Satyr cousin, Darius. Since he had Sera in his life, he had to step up his efforts to find Lucus. It would be impossible for him to continue his searching alone, while keeping her safe.

The downside to calling Darius was his male companion, Sylus de Gauls. Justus could spend an eternity never seeing that pompous ass, but where there was one, there was the other. That is the way of the Satyr.

“Justus?”

“I’m sorry did you say something, sweetness?” He looked down at Sera. He reached out and ran his hand through the short curls of Sera’s hair. It was amazing how quickly it was growing back under the nourishment of his blood; she was healing swiftly and soon he would need to complete the process.

Her earthy-colored skin had lost its jaundiced pallor and her curves were quickly filling out in all the right places. He thought her beautiful from the moment he saw her, but to see her glowing with health, robbed him of his breath every time he laid his eyes upon her. His entire body was betraying him at every turn. He wasn’t accustomed to hardening at the most inopportune times.

He wondered how those species that didn’t remain flaccid until they found their mates, lived with the constant erections from nowhere. Like now, as he looked down at her, he could feel the heaviness pooling in his groin.

After having a brief taste of what it felt like to be a man coming into his sexuality, he anticipated actually sharing this new freedom with her. The thought of discovering the treasure that beckoned him, with each subtle movement and smile. He wanted to feel Sera’s hand touching him as he’d touched himself and to touch her in the same way she touched herself.

The very thought caused him to brush his hand over his crotch to ease the growing pressure against his zipper.

“I was saying, we wouldn’t have needed a suitcase to take this stuff home if you hadn’t bought all these frilly nightgowns. What were you thinking?”

He grinned.

Sera blushed and smiled, reaching for a red concoction that was more acceptable for a Sultan's harem than a sterile and very non-private hospital room. That is why she was packing it away into the suitcase, with tags still intact.

"I've never bought garments for women before, so I told the woman at the boutique that I wished to have one of everything. The rest is at home in your wardrobe."

"I gave you a list of what I needed and the sizes. All you had to do is give the woman the list. Besides, when you put that stuff in my closet, you saw I didn't need anything. If I knew you were going to the cabin, I would have just told you to pick up stuff there." She paused. "What is it? Why are you tensing up?"

"I-."

She cut him off. "Oh, not again." She leaned in closer. "Another erection?"

"No...I mean, yes!" Justus could feel his face growing hot all the way to his scalp. "Will you stop looking at me that way? That's not why I'm tense." He saw her eyes drift to the swell of his crotch. "Well, I'm tense now," he mumbled.

She giggled. "Sorry, I can't help myself. I didn't used to be one of those women who glanced at a man's crotch. You know, as you guys do with our breasts." She quirked a brow, "Just with you, for some reason, I keep remembering..."

"It's because you like knowing what you do to me," he sulked.

"I do not!" He actually would have believed she felt insulted by his accusation, if he hadn't noticed the smug smile she tried to hide, by filling her hands with sexy fluffy concoctions of every color imaginable.

"Did you know you don't lie well?" He smirked and received a poke in his rib. He scowled and rubbed at the spot, more to gain her feigned sympathy than from any pain she could inflict. "You'll have to kiss it to make it better later, when I get you home."

"Do you ever think about anything else?"

"Not since that day." He couldn't stop his hands from reaching out to touch her face. "Sera, every time I think of how your face looked when you found your release...how beautifully perfect. I want to see it repeatedly. I want to be inside you."

"Shhh..." Sera held her fingers up to his lips. As usual, her touch only stirred a greater need in him.

After the brief sexual encounter the week before, he seemed to never get his mate alone again. There was always someone coming in and out of her hospital room for one reason or the other. It exhausted him to just stay on his toes making the sure the doctor wasn't trying to run tests on Sera that could reveal any more information than he'd already managed to claim.

Regardless of Sera telling Dr. Meeks her decision to decline his offer, the man didn't give up. He caught scent of making medical history and he wouldn't let go.

If it hadn't been for Sera's gentle firmness with the doctor and him, he probably would have put a more abrupt end to the man's persistence. He was just relieved he could finally take her home.

Justus rubbed his body along hers, a satisfied wolf. Sera molded him perfectly, the swell of her breast resting beneath the muscle of his chest. He could feel her hardening nipples brushing against his ribs through his t-shirt.

Excitement raced over sweltering skin, spreading through his loins straight away. He wrapped his arms around her waist, spreading his legs to shorten the distance between his lips and hers. His mouth melded to hers. The buzzing activity of the hospital outside her room door was gone instantaneously. There was only intensity, combustion, and the feel of her yielding, feminine frame pressed so securely to his.

“You’re killing me,” Sera moaned against his lips. “You got to stop this or we’re never going to get out of here.”

His chest heaved and he pressed his lips to her brow. “I knew I shouldn’t have allowed you the chance to breathe.”

She pulled away from him and reluctantly he let go. “I’m anxious to see my babies.” Sera shut the lid on the suitcase. “My new litter is due any day. I can’t wait to find out if the serum I vaccinated their mother with allowed her puppies to be born without the genetic material that is killing off her pack.”

Justus grew still. “Sera, I’m sure those wolf pups are grown with pups of their own by now, sweetheart.”

“I forgot again, didn’t I?” she sighed. A somber look came across Sera’s face. “I probably placed them back into the wild years ago. My God, can you imagine all that I’ve accomplished over five years?”

“Don’t worry, darling, I’m sure you probably have a paper trail from here to eternity to help you find your way to the present. Once we are home you can use my computer to your heart’s content and do a search on yourself.”

She chuckled. “Are you saying you’ve looked me up?”

“Well, maybe just a little, after the way the doctor was harping about the research and strides you have made in diseases and renewal of some dying breed of wolves. I was intrigued to learn more.”

“My peers in the medical field thought I was crazy to give up a thriving medical practice and pursue my parents’ dream.”

Justus leaned against the wall, crossing his booted feet at the ankles and his arms over his broad chest. “Why did you? I’m sure there is more money dealing with the human side of medicine, since animals can’t pay and most of the care and research depends on donations.”

“I felt I owed my adopted parents that much and they left me more money than I could spend in a lifetime.”

“Understood and you could have unloaded shameful sums of money in their names and allowed someone else to do the hard work. Tell me why you made the decision to treat animals; wolves in particular?”

“Honestly, I’ve always loved wolves. From the moment I finally received my own room, I decorated my walls with posters of wolves. Something about their eyes has always touched me.”

Justus nodded. He could listen to the soft southern singsong sound of her voice and never grow tired of hearing her.

"I did my internship at the Birmingham Zoo. It allowed me to work with all kinds of animals, but I have a knack with wolves. I don't know why but even the most ornery older alpha would come and eat out of my hands." Sera chuckled, her eyes bright with childish happiness at the memory.

"The wolf in me can feel your pull. I thought it was because you are my mate. I see now you have a gift with my brethren."

"Still, I hadn't made up my mind to branch off into a concentrated field until I delivered the first litter of pups. Their mother died leaving me to care for them, until I could introduce them into a group. It took some time for this last little runt to hunt on his own; some of the other wolves would take him in and the bigger wolves continued to bully him, so I took him back and kept him as my own. I loved Camelot."

"Camelot," Justus repeated with a smile. "Did you still have him? Before all of this happened to you, I mean?"

She shook her head. "During his time with the pack, he picked up this viral infection and I couldn't do a damn thing about it. It was a new strain. The next thing I knew, most of the pack was dying and I decided something needed to be done." Sera shrugged. "Why not me?"

"Did you?"

"Eventually, with the help of some other dedicated people. But it was so devastating it nearly wiped out over two hundred wolves before we were able to stop it."

"Sounds similar to what is taking place amongst my species and we are nearly extinct because of it. It's some form of madness."

Sera walked over to him and placed her hand on his arm. He welcomed her touch and continued. "The few Lykians that I've hunted have given me no choice but to kill them. I've been able to return only about a handful to the council."

"What do they do with them?" She asked.

"House and care for them, while they take blood samples and hope to someday find a cure."

"Could this happen to you?"

Justus shook his head. "Anything is possible but I haven't had to worry about it for several centuries. It seemed to only occur in the male species after they gain their sexual nature."

"I don't understand." Sera tilted her head in question.

"As I said, you will be my first, Sera. The Lykian males are born colorblind and remain in an impotent state until we find our mate; it is our guide to knowing the one for us."

"Wow. Maybe humans need something like that 'cause we go through a lot of bad ones looking for that 'one' Eventually you tell yourself there is no such thing, that maybe you are actually supposed to love several times in a lifetime."

"Do you believe that?" Justus asked.

"I wanted to because I had been wrong about my first partner. I thought he was the 'one' because we had so much in common. Therefore, when I was wrong I thought it meant the theory was wrong, but I have seen those who have found that one and only love. I could see the difference. So, yes, I believe it's true."

"Well, I know it's not true for all species, because my Satyr cousin has two eternal mates. One female and one male."

Sera laughed. "Get out of here."

"No really," Justus replied seriously. "He has a male mate until he finds his female, then the bond is still there, but it's no longer sexual between the males. They can share the one female until he finds his own, but she can only breed off her eternal mate."

"That's interesting, but I was talking about Satyrs. You called your cousin a Satyr. Is that some nickname or something?"

It was Justus's turn to chuckle. Boy, did he have a lot to teach her about the Darkworld and its species. He was going to enjoy every minute of it. "Why don't we discuss this some more once we get in the limo? Kahn, my driver, is waiting for us. There is a lot I need to explain to you and it should be done in private."

Sera lost her smile. "Why do I get the impression that Dorothy is no longer going to live in Kansas anymore?"

"Who is Dorothy from Kansas?" His eyebrow disappeared in a tuft of hair that fell forward.

"After you tell me your fairytale, I will tell you mine."

"Mine is real. It begins like this..." He cleared his throats. "If you were told Vampires, Werewolves, Nymphs, Gods and Goddesses, Satyrs, and all the other things that go bump in the night were not real, then allow me to tell you the truth."

"Why do I have a feeling that you're about to shoot all my years of black-and- white scientific knowledge to hell?" Sera stepped back to look up into his eyes.

"I wouldn't do that. I plan to add some more colorful crayons to your box. It will open up an entire new world of scientific knowledge for you to explore." Justus tapped the tip of her short round-tipped nose with his finger and placed a quick kiss to her lips.

"Oh yeah, give me an idea of what this new world has to offer," she taunted, placing her fingers in his as he held out his hand to her. He pulled her luggage off the bed with the free hand as if it didn't weigh anything.

"How about an eight-hundred-year old Count who studies the arts of alchemy?"

Sera eyes glowed in excitement. He could see her mind already churning.

Both of them dropped the subject as the nurse arrived with a wheelchair. Justus laid the luggage in the wheelchair.

"Mr. Apollon, hospital policy requires us to wheel patients to the exit."

"Now beautiful lady, I have been a pain in your sweet backside, long enough, for you to know I do as I please." Justus winked at the nurse. She giggled and patted the luggage.

"I got it covered, Mr. Apollon," Nurse Ann gushed.

He winked at Sera and she rolled her eyes, turning on her heel, heading down the hall. He paused a moment; watching the way her bottom swayed in jeans, that were loose from the weight she had lost, while ill. Still it didn't take away from the desire he had for her. Small or big, she was his.

"Oh, no, you don't," Justus said and scooped Sera up in his arms, receiving only a gentle protest. "I've been waiting all week to get to carry you out of here and over the threshold into our new life. You aren't going to deny me this simple pleasure."

Sera stifled a yawn and allowed her face to rest against the softness of his sweater, enjoying his masculine scent. "I'm not saying a word."

"Well, that's a first, I'm sure," her spoke against her brow. People seem to move aside without hesitation, but they only had eyes for each other.

"Ha...ha...you're full of jokes today." Sera lightly tugged his hair with her fingers.

"I don't know about that. But I know I'm very happy," Justus admitted in a matter-of-fact voice.

Sera tightened her arms around his neck and whispered. "I'm scared that I'm not going to ever remember what I've been doing with my life for the past five years."

Justus's usually stern features continued to soften under her spell. "No matter what, my love, you won't have to face it alone."

"Yeah, that is a good thing," Sera said tilting her head back to gaze up at him and smiled. "Where are we going?"

"To my home. It's *our* home now."

"Well, can we stop by my family cabin? Is it too far away from where we're going? I was thinking maybe if I go there some things would come back to me. If I was here, I must have opened the family place."

Justus paused in front of the automatic doors, as they slid open and he stepped through, heading towards the driver holding open the door to an awaiting black Rolls Royce.

Within minutes, they sat in comfortable silence in the back of the limousine, while the driver placed her luggage in the trunk. Justus continued to hold her in his arms. He had something to tell her and he didn't want to let go of her until he did. The car eased away from the front of the hospital before Justus spoke.

"Sera, you sold your family cabin about a month ago. Apparently, when you learned that you were...dying, you started liquidating and getting your affairs in order."

"If that is true what am I doing in Tahoe? Where was I going to stay?"

"From what I could find out, you had made reservations at a secluded little place on the lake, but when you didn't show, the proprietor rented it to someone else. I had Kahn to pick up the boxes you shipped there for them to hold, until your arrival. They're at the house."

"So, my townhouse in Alabama?"

“Sold,” Justus answered.

“My bank accounts?”

“You’ve already closed them and divided generous amounts to several charitable organizations. Your godfather and his assistant helped you tie up your affairs.”

“How did you manage to find all of this out about me? Surely, my godfather would have known I wasn’t married.”

“I have my ways. I know people who are part of the Darkworld Organization, they can get me any information I need.” Justus shrugged. “Besides, you were a woman dying, Sera. It’s not surprising for someone to try and put as much living in the time they have left as possible.”

“I just told your uncle, I was one of those things. You married a stranger, because you’ve never been married before and it was on your list.”

Sera shook her head in disbelief. “He actually believed I would do such a crazy thing?”

“I faxed him proof.”

“What proof?”

“Our marriage certificate,” Justus said as if he was telling her the time.

“You forged my signature!” Sera squawked.

“I did not,” Justus defended himself; he would never do such a thing.

“Then how?”

“I had someone else to forge your signature,” he admitted and received a small fist in his side. He grunted.

“All the same to me, bud.” She glared at him with burning, reproachful eyes.

Justus decided to remain silent while Sera seethed in his lap. She tried several times to break his hold and move from him but he wasn’t having it. He could handle anything she wanted to dish out, until they solved the issue. That is how it will always be between them. She just didn’t know yet.

“Let me go,” she growled at him. He found it adorable but thought it best not to put his lips anywhere near her teeth for the time being.

“So, what you’re telling me is I don’t have a damn thing? What the hell was I thinking?” Sera wailed; shock and anger lit up her eyes as she turned in his lap to face him.

Justus felt a familiar stirring at his crotch and reminded his newly-overexcited penis, this was not the time to be getting any ideas.

“Baby, you haven’t lost everything. I have the luggage you arrived with at the house. I only went in it to get the clothing you have on out. I thought you would be more comfortable in something that was your own.”

“Even if I don’t remember buying it,” she pouted.

He thought it was the sexiest thing he’d ever seen. Justus continued the mental war with his body as he trounced his urges to suckle on her moist bottom lip.

"Justus, this is really happening. I was dying of cancer and I came here to just give up." She cried. "I didn't even fight. Had I become that lonely and miserable that with all my money, I didn't even try to fight?"

"Sera don't do this to yourself!" He pressed his lips to her head and buried his head in the silken curls of her dark brown hair. "I just thank the gods I found you in time and now you have time to do any and everything your heart desires."

"I know you're right. Everything I remember is over anyway. Maybe it's best I don't know what my life has been like these past five years. How good could it have been, if I was going to die alone?" She sighed and dashed a tear away with the back of her hand. "I just don't know how I'm going to start over. My research...everything takes money."

"Sweetie, if you want your money back or your homes, I will secure them for you." He grasped her chin and gave into his urge to kiss her mouth. Only with a small, tender, peck on that pouting bottom lip.

"Sera, I will build you a laboratory. You can work to help my people. You've by no means found yourself shackled to a pauper. All of us have lived too long not to have managed financial well-being in this century."

"I suppose I have no choice. I'm sure the charities and foundations I left funds to, have already made plans and I don't have the heart to ruin chances for needy students to gain scholarships and God only knows what else." She smiled sadly up at him. "It's probably for the best. If I go from dying to living forever and never changing, it's bound to cause some problems for you."

"True, we do not stay in one situation past twenty years, before we move on to something else. We invent new lives all the time," Justus reassured her, but he knew she loved her work. He didn't want her to change who she was, what made her happy. "I can't see you wanting to give up your work, Sera, and I swear you don't have to."

"I need time to get used to the changes. I don't have to decide right now." She leaned into him and he held her closely.

"No, you don't have to decide right now," he repeated.

Silence lengthened between them before she pulled back to stare at him. A probing query came into her eyes. "Well? Are you going to ask me or not?"

"What?"

"Well since you been lying to everybody, are you going to ask me to marry you or not?"

He smiled, and leaned forward, nuzzling the side of her face with his. He inhaled her familiar scent and exhaled a long sigh of contentment. "Sera Tibbs, will you marry me?"

She paused, looking up at the limo ceiling. He could see her basking in the knowledge of her power over him. "Mmm, maybe you should marry the woman who signed my name on the marriage license."

Justus nibbled her earlobe. "Can't do it; she is a he and you know you're my bitch."

"You know we may have to talk about this "bitch" thing. I haven't decided if I like the title yet."

“Would you say yes if I begged?” He eased his hand slowly up her naked sides, beneath her blue button-down blouse. “I’ll even get down on my knees.”

“I don’t think so,” she gasped, as he released the hooks of her bra.

“What if I get on all fours,” he asked, palming the weight of her breasts in his hands, his calloused thumbs flickering across her hardening nipples.

“Ahhh,” she released a moan and arched into his hands. “Sounds promising; keep going.”

Every time her smoldering gaze met his, Justus’s heart turned over with deep-seated need. His trusting, open gaze let her know she could easily hurt him. Yet, it was a chance he was willing to take. There could be no other for him, just Sera.

“Justus, do you love me?”

“I can only love you, Sera. I loved the thought of you, long before you were born,” he answered honestly. “You’re alive because I refuse to lose you. Does that not prove my love? I kept what is mine, because I need you.”

She looked him in the eyes. He returned her questioning stare with unflinching boldness. “I just want to know it’s really me you want and it’s not because you have no choice.”

“Listen to what your heart is telling you, Sera,” he whispered against the curve of her ear. “You already know everything about me. It doesn’t matter what you remember. What do your instincts tell you?”

His broad shoulders were heaving, as he breathed heavily against her ear. Her closeness was so female, so restorative and more than consoling. His mind told him to be patient, to wait until she became accustomed to him. The thing was, regardless of her current remission, if Sera hadn’t completed the transformation by the new moon, two weeks from now, she could still die.

He kissed the top of her nose. “Should I tell the driver to make a stop at my friend’s place on the way home?”

“Friend?” She cocked her head in question and he kissed her chin.

“A fellow shifter of the Darkworld. He’s a judge.”

Sera quivered as he planted kisses on her neck and shoulders between each word. His lips feather-touched her with tantalizing persuasion. “Well, in a way we’re already married.”

“In my heart we are.” He planted a tantalizing kiss in the hollow of her throat. “I just know how important documentation is in your world.”

“Mmm, Justus... I can’t think with you doing that.” She licked her lips and he took advantage of her parted mouth. He kissed her with a hunger that belied his outward calm. She wrapped her arms around his neck to keep her world upright

His tongue traced the soft fullness of her lips. “Don’t think. Feel me, Sera.”

“Oh yes, I’m definitely feeling you.” Her consciousness seemed to ebb and then flare more definitively than ever. She hissed and held his head to her breast with trembling hands, as he pushed up her blouse and nibbled at one breast, its brown dusky nipple growing marble-hard between his fingers.

"Say, yes...Sera, you know you want to." His hand slid down her taut stomach to the swell of her hips covered by her jeans before grabbing, kneading her bottom beneath the thick denim material.

All the blood in his brain must have pooled between his thighs because he only wanted one thing. He wanted more of her touches, kisses, and something else that he recognized she could only give him.

"Oh, God, you know...considering you are new at this you are...so good with your tongue," she said against his mouth.

"You know, since the invention of televisions and porn movies, Lykian males may be virginal, but we aren't ignorant. I have an entire list of things I want to do with you, darling," he countered, bucking against her a few times for emphasis.

"Justus?"

"Hmm?"

"Did that signature on the marriage license really look like my own?"

"Just like the ones on your medical forms you had with you." Justus sighed against her mouth, as the top button of her jeans gave way under his deft fingers.

"Good," she leaned back as he glided her zipper down.

"Yeah?"

"Oh...oh...yeah."

He moved her mouth beneath his and darted out his tongue over her lips as his hand delved in past her lacy underwear and found hot moist flesh. She pushed against his fingers and his cock about jumped out from behind the zipper of his jeans.

"Marry me, Sera," he murmured, opening her wider and plunging inside, one long finger. Heaven. He could feel her pussy tugging at his finger with each contracting muscle.

She released a throaty groan. "Justus, we're already married, now shut up and kiss me some more."

He leaned into her, kissed her on her mouth. His lips were trembling against hers, his arms drawing her closer. "I can't begin to explain what it's like to be able to feel my body ache with these strange needs. I can see the beauty in the world where before I walked in shadows of light and darkness. It's all because of you and once we are lovers true, there will be no turning back."

"There is already no going back, Justus. Whatever my life was before I woke up in the hospital it...well, it no longer exists for me. I don't care anymore; all I know is that I want you."

Justus's eyes fluttered wide, his nostrils flared, as she continued to arch against his hand, the zipper of her jeans scraping against the back of his hands.

"Sera," he protested but he knew he couldn't remove his hand no more than she could stop thrusting against it. "Sweetness, I'm not sure...I don't want to hurt you, there is a chance I won't be able to control my shifting and your body is still healing. You need more of my blood before I can take you completely."

"Please, I understand but ...there has to be something we can do...I need-" she whined.

"I know...I know...me, too." His deep voice simmered with barely checked passion.

“Yes, harder, right there.” Sera yielded to his touch. He was hers and she was his. Her flesh said things that words never could. “I want you so badly I feel as if I might just die if this aching doesn’t go away.”

“I’m not sure if I’m doing this right. Tell me-” he managed to say between clenched teeth as he instinctively pressed his thumb down on her pubis.

“Oh...yes...just keep pressing there.” Sera demanded as her frustration continued to grow. She reached up to cup his face in her hands and brought his hot mouth down to hers. Still, he felt this horrible yet sweet anticipation clinching inside his body.

“Sera, I love the pecan-brown creaminess of your skin against my hands,” he said against her open mouth. “Something about it drives me insane.”

“I do, too. Put another finger inside me,” she panted, squirming in his lap. Her finger curled in the thickness of his hair, as his mouth seared a path down her jaw line and the side of her neck.

Justus pulled back, his chest rising and falling, while he fought to gain control of the beast raging to break free and mount her in the ways of his canine brethren.

“Sera, I promise I will do whatever is necessary to ease your need but I must calm down. Right now, I need you to be very still.” He eased his fingers out of her. “That’s it, baby. Give me just a moment.” Justus continued to soothe her with the sweet timbre of his deep voice as he stilled the sleeping creature that dwelled inside him.

Even though Sera had seen the wolf and it was something familiar and soothing, she hadn’t seen that which makes him Lykian. That part of him was probably more like the monsters she’d seen in fictional movies and he wasn’t prepared to see her fear and repulsion. He would show her soon, but not now.

Feeling more in control, he returned to kissing and touching her. He wanted her so desperately. His tongue lapped at her lips and in a feathery movement; he ran the tip around the edges of her mouth, inside and out, and then back again.

“See, isn’t it better for you when we go slow?” he whispered against her mouth, watching her long lashes shadowed her cheeks as they closed. He continued licking up the side of her throat and behind her ears with the thick wet softness of his tongue.

He adored her, trailing passionate feathered kisses from her lips, to her nose, forehead, nose and back to her lips. She nearly came up off his lap as he pulled her bottom lip into his mouth and suckled. Justus felt as if a string was tugging tautly between her mouth and his cock.

A panicky feeling was building again, but this time with more intensity. He wondered if a man could die from these feelings. Did their hearts simply explode when it became overwhelming? He couldn’t stop again; it would be cruel to keep teasing her so.

Justus seemed to be everywhere. When she opened her mouth in a sigh, his tongue entered her mouth. When her thighs went lax and opened wide, his hand was back between her thighs. Sera moaned into his mouth. *He had a magnificent tongue.*

He circled her tongue with his tongue. Deftly, his long fingers nestled in the short, coarse hair that covered her pussy and she found the intensity of his face beautiful. He gave her the most breathtaking smile, as he moved his hand in a hard circular motion pressing against her pubic bone, causing her to make involuntary little noises.

The louder she became, the more movement he applied until she felt as if she had taken on some form of erotic madness. Sera didn't know what his fingers were doing but she didn't want him to stop.

"Do you like that, Sera?"

"Oh...yes." It was all she could manage to mumble between panting.

"You are so wet and you smell...so delicious I...I want to memorize your essence on my tongue."

He breathed hotly against her ear.

"Do what you will to me, just don't stop again." She lifted her hips against his hand and cried out as his fingers dipped lower, becoming wet from her juices, causing a slippery quickened swiftness inside the spread lips of her vagina.

He seemed to catch on quickly what parts gave her the most pleasure and she made sure she voiced her satisfaction when he hit the more sensitive areas.

Sera thrust against his massaging fingers, her pace becoming frantic as her awareness intensified. She held on to his shoulders and whimpered as a firestorm of anticipation forced her hands to reach for him.

Her toes curled and tightened as her body finally shuddered with relief. She went limp in his arms, managing only a weak moan against his lips. He continued to kiss her softly, and stroke her. She couldn't believe it when the sensations started to build again as the pressure swept from her vaginal lips to her nipples.

She nipped and suckled at Justus's kiss-swollen lips. He continued to tease her. This time she wanted him to experience what she felt. She reached down and tried to release the zipper on his jeans, but it was impossible in their current position so she rubbed and massaged him through his pants.

The limo hit a bump, they swayed, and Sera shuddered as his inserted fingers went deeper. She became more excited, and rammed herself up against his palm and fingers until she felt the dark sphere nestled between her butt cheeks start to pucker and pump. Her pussy muscles contracted once more, but this time it clinched at his two long, thick fingers buried in her sheath.

Sera arched up off his thighs, her face twisting in sweet agony as she felt an ungodly scream building up in her throat. She turned her head and bit down on the closest thing to her as a second climax rushed through her body.

She heard Justus cry out, just before he buried his face into the side of her throat and grunted her name...once, then again. Her eyes grew wide in amazement and she blinked several times as he shifted between man and beast before her eyes. As her climax eased, she opened her mouth, releasing his hand.

The smell of his blood filled her nostrils and the saltiness of it lingered in her mouth. Once again, he shimmered from man, to something in between a man and wolf, and then a man again. She held him tightly as he jerked hard a couple of times against her.

“Sera, I’m so sorry. I didn’t want you to see me.” His face twisted in tormented anguish. “You must find me repulsive.”

“No. I’m sorry. It just startled me, that’s all.” She sprayed his moist face with kisses. “I can’t believe I got so carried away I bit your hand.”

“You don’t have to be nice to me. You must think I’m a freak.”

“Freaky yes, but a freak...never,” she teased, but she could see he was really embarrassed by what happened.

“Baby, you were doing well. I swear if I hadn’t bit down on your hand when I came, you probably wouldn’t have messed up your jeans, besides it’s evening, and no one will be able to see the wet spot. You think your driver heard us.”

“Sera, don’t pretend with me. I know you saw me shift. I saw the horror in your face.” He moved to set her from his lap. She wouldn’t allow him to distance himself. Something told her what she did or said next was imperative to their future. He feared and expected her rejection. No matter what Justus was, he was the man who saved her life.

She also just experienced the greatest orgasm of her life and women don’t take that shit lightly. “Look, it’s true. You surprised me, but the horror you saw in my face wasn’t because of what I saw. Justus, I’ve never had a reaction like the one I shared with you. I mean, I’ve masturbated and got off, but no man has made me come. It was wonderful. *You* were wonderful.”

“You’re telling the truth. You’re not frightened by me.”

“I’m more embarrassed by me than I’m frightened by you. Don’t you think I can feel what you feel for me? I know in here.” She took his injured hand and placed it against her chest. “You would never hurt me and you only fear what you don’t know.”

She could see the outline of her teeth like a crescent moon on the fleshy part of his hand. She lifted his injured hand to her lips and kissed the spot. “It’s I that need forgiveness for hurting you.”

He remained silent. Her heart pounded. He was all she had; she didn’t want to lose him before they even got their lives started.

“Justus, please look at me,” she commanded.

After a moment’s hesitation, Justus raised his head and she looked intently into his eyes, her kiss-swollen lips parting in a gasp of shock. It was as if she was staring up at the night sky and seeing two partially eclipsed moons.

“You have such beautiful eyes.” Her body still craved more of him. She felt as if there was so much she had yet to discover that they had only grazed a part of the passion that flared between them.

“Don’t look at my eyes. Look at *me*, my love.” His voice rumbled deeply with gruffness. “I know I’ve been very selfish in my wishes. Giving you a choice between this life and death wasn’t fair to you because I tricked you. I showed you the form most pleasing to the eyes. The one that I knew you could accept...maybe even love.”

“Justus—.”

“Sera, allow me this last noble gesture before it’s too late for the both of us.”

“Justus, please,” she shook her head.

He wrapped his arms more closely around her, his hold possessive. “I am the alpha of my clan Sera, and you are the alpha female. You cower down to no man, not even me. Do you understand?” His voice, though still quiet, had taken on an ominous quality. He shook her to emphasize his words and her eyes shot open. “Now that you see what you’ll become, do you wish for death?”

“Yes. I’d rather die than to become a freak like you! Is that what you imagined I’d say?” She scowled at him. “It is, isn’t it?”

“Sera...”

“Damn you, Justus, don’t you see? We’ve come too far and I’ve shared too much of myself with you. I can’t go back to what I remembered my life to be and neither can you, now that you know what you’re missing.” She took his chin in his hand. “Baby, I no longer have the option of dying alone in peace because you’ve given me a reason to live. I want to know what comes next and you can’t go back to never knowing what it feels like to touch me or the yearnings to learn what it will be like to bury yourself inside me.”

His slow smile was without malice, almost apologetic, and nearly as erotic as a kiss. She rewarded him with a larger smile of her own.

“You’re stuck with me now.” She pointed a finger in his chest. “Deal with it!”

“Do you always carry on so fervently?” Justus looked at the perfectly even bite mark on his hand; it was already healing.

“Only when it’s something I believe in.”

His gaze lowered to Sera’s opened zipper and shook his head in amazement. The revelation of what it felt like to have all these desires and needs was overwhelming but also very exhilarating. He didn’t think he’d ever felt so alive. “This new awakening you’ve given my body has left me reeling. I’m still heavy with need.”

“I want more of you, too,” she admitted and cast her eyes downward.

“Don’t even think about it. As much as I would love to take you, right now and right here, we’re nearly home.” Justus said tipping her face up to his. “Be completely honest with me, Sera; how do you feel about becoming my mate in every way?”

“I would be lying if I said the thought of me being something other than human doesn’t scare me. I wonder how I’ll be able to do what I saw you do and I wondered if it’s painful.”

“As your inner body goes through the final conversion, it could be painful. I’ll contact the alchemist friend I told you about; he has a rooted concoction that will allow you to sleep during the majority of the process.” Justus pushed damp strands of her hair behind her ear.

“Will you be with me?”

“Didn’t I stay with you at the hospital?”

She nodded her head, turning in his lap, allowing him to cradle her like an infant against his chest. She couldn’t stop shivering and welcomed the comforting tightening of his arms.

“I know this has been a difficult decision and it puts me at ease knowing you honestly want to spend your life with me. I didn’t want you looking at me across the table centuries from now wondering what the hell you were thinking.” Justus spoke softly, his mouth moving against her temple.

“Oh, I ‘m already wondering what the hell am I thinking, because this is madness. But it’s sweet of you, baby, thinking it’ll happen centuries from now.” Sera leaned her head back to stare at him. “Nonetheless, thank you for making me *think* I had a choice.”

“Damn.” Justus mouth parted in a wide grin. “Got to love a smart woman, even though some would think *smart* and *woman* in the same sentence was an oxymoron.”

“Oh, I see, I’m falling in love with a comedic wolf...ha...ha.” Sera nudged him in the rib and he caught her hand, bringing her palm up to his lips. She sighed with contentment, her body passionately achy from the clumsy but deft pleasure those long fingers inflicted.

His humorous expression turned into surprise and she knew he wasn’t going to let her slip of the tongue pass without comment. *Damn.*

“You’re falling in love with me?”

Sera looked away from his intense gaze and buried her flaming face in her hands. She hadn’t meant to reveal what she had been wondering about herself. She’d never been in love before and she sure wasn’t secure enough with these newly found feelings to be throwing the ‘love’ word around loosely. How could she take it back now? It was out there like an open wound.

Still, would she be feeling this way and so soon if he wasn’t sexy, gorgeous, kind, and interesting, not to mention, he had managed to make her body do things that no man has done before. *Oh God, please don’t let me be one of those women that mistake an orgasm for love.*

She dropped her hands with a moan, their eyes locked, and he was staring at her with exposed expectations.

“I didn’t mean-.”

He placed his hand over her mouth. She could still smell her lingering sexual aroma on his fingers. “Allow me to hope.”

Silently, she nodded her head and he removed his hand. Sera looked away, wearied by uncertainty. Reaching down to refastened her jeans, a brief smile came to her lips. She realized that in his haste and her need, Justus had ripped off the top button.

She chanced a look at him. A twinkle of moonlight caught his eyes as he glanced at her and smirked. “Er, sorry, I’ll have Kahn search for the button later. We can get my tailor to sew it back on for you.”

“A tailor to sew on a button?” she shook her head. “I don’t think so. I don’t remember things from my past, but I know I can sew on a button.” Lifting her bottom, she pulled up the zipper on her pants. “Your accent, is it Lykian?”

“I have lived all over the world at one time or the other, the majority of my youth in Europe. I hardly remember the sounds of my homeland.”

“I’m sorry.” Sera said sincerely.

He shrugged. “I will return to visit. I would like to take you, and someday, our children to see my parent’s burial place.”

“I was too terrified to ask if I had children. Since no one mentioned it, I assume I don’t.” She lifted a sarcastic brow. “Glad to know I hadn’t changed my mind about having children during my lost years.”

Sera slid off Justus’s lap onto the black leather seat adjacent to him. He didn’t stop her, but he also kept his arm around her shoulders so she couldn’t move far.

“You didn’t want children.”

“Nope, and I still don’t,” she said firmly.

She could tell from the tensing of his arm behind her this wasn’t something he wanted to hear.

“May I ask why not?”

“Because I was in an orphanage until I my older years. When the Tibbs finally adopted me, they were good, loving people and they never could give me enough...things. Yet, they had no business having a child in their life at all. They were busy when they were home and the rest of the time their wildlife research took them on crazy adventures and such for months at a time. I swore I would never do that to my children, so I swore I wouldn’t have any.”

“I think you will be a wonderful mother.” Justus assured her, but she wasn’t buying into the family thing.

“I don’t know if I would or not. I just know that I’m the one with the control and as long as I chose to remain in the same profession they were, I will remain childless.” Sera murmured. “How much longer before we reach your home?”

“Things are different now, Sera. You’re no longer alone and now that you have nothing but time there is no reason not to have children,” he paused. The muscle in his prominent square jaw ticked. “We will have children.”

Her jaw dropped with shock. The look of determination on his face made her suppress a shiver. Were they discussing the matter or was he telling her they were going to have children regardless of how she felt? Either way, as far as she was concerned, it wasn’t up for discussion. She wasn’t going to have children; not for him, not for anybody as long as she had control over her own reproductive system.

A cold knot formed in her stomach and she clenched her hand until her nails entered her palm. She was too concerned with her thoughts to offer a reply.

“Darling, you’re shivering.” He pulled her closer and cradled her head in the curve of his shoulder.

Sera breathed in shallow, quick gasps. She was suddenly anxious to escape from his disturbing presence. They wouldn’t agree upon this subject. They probably had reached the first rift in what seemed to be a promising future.

“We are turning onto my estate now, just another two miles to the house.” He broke the stillness. His voice softened when he asked her, “Are you okay? You’re trembling.”

She decided to sheath her inner turmoil for now. “No, I’m just tired, that’s all.”

Justus leaned down and kissed her lips and as if he felt her uncertainties he pulled back and regarded her for a moment. “You’re sure there’s nothing else bothering you?”

She held his stare with an effort and reached up to cup his face. “Baby, I’m good.” She swallowed the despair in her throat. “I just hadn’t realized you didn’t live closer to town.”

“I love my space. I need it to roam when I’m restless. You will love it here. It’s secluded, with plenty of flat and woodlands to explore. There is a lake for boating and fields of wildflowers that would be great for picnics.”

“It sounds wonderful,” Sera replied appropriately.

An invisible web of something far greater than the physical had wedged itself between them. Each of them became lost in their own thoughts as the limo swayed to a stop.

CHAPTER 5

Sera felt refreshed from her shower. She sauntered from the bathroom dressed in a wine-colored nightgown embellished with hand-painted ivory roses and matching robe.

She was grateful Justus had prepared her a bedroom suite of her own. His obvious disappointment that she hadn't protested his kind gesture was evident, but he handled it like the gentleman he was.

Admittedly, it was a beautiful bedroom, in shades of mahogany woods and champagne colored walls, yet there wasn't anything personal about it. There were no family pictures to indicate any lived in warmth. Sera supposed it was appropriate for a guest room because that is what she felt like; a guest in a world she never knew existed, that was now her home.

Strolling over to the huge fireplace in the center of one wall, she discovered someone had come in during her shower and added logs to the fire. She hadn't seen any servants upon their arrival, but everything was spotless.

No one rushed to welcome, his return home, or came out in curiosity to investigate her appearance. It seemed coming home to an empty house was a common factor they had in their lives. It was one of the reasons she sold the family home and moved into her two-bedroom townhouse. It was cozier, with no rooms to close off, so the shadowed corners wouldn't spook you as you passed them.

Unfortunately, Justus couldn't say the same. His home was vast and appeared to have all the necessary amenities of a lakeside bed and breakfast but it didn't feel like a home.

The fragrance of burning wood mixed with cedar chips soothed any tension she had left. Sera continued taking in her surroundings; the jury was still out on if she liked it or not. Slowly her fingers trailed over the coldness of the cream-colored marbled fireplace, with its leaf corners. The faces of what appeared to be females draped in long cloths with jars on their shoulders decorated its height. It was beautiful, but like everything else, a bit showy.

If this was Justus's taste, then they had a problem. She preferred a place where anyone would feel comfortable kicking their shoes off and making themselves at home. Everything here looked like it came straight from a palace showroom. She wondered if he dressed for dinner.

Sera snorted aloud as she pictured a dining room table long enough to seat twelve people on each side, she at one end and Justus at the other. Each one of them taking turns getting up and walking to the other end of the table asking, "How do you like your Beef Wellington, dear?" *Oh hell, no.* Sera giggled, shaking her head.

If this was going to be her new home, there were going to be some changes. Sera made her way to the carved mahogany secretary, pulling down the panel on the hutch she found a lovely writing surface with letterboxes.

She rifled through the stationery, all of it was blank; there were no letters from friends or family. Sera lifted the tapestry covered address book into her hands and flipped its pages. There were no names, numbers, or addresses.

“Okay, Justus, if I’m going to find out anything else about you. I’m not going to find it in this room,” Sera said, nibbling distractedly on her lower lip.

“This room is just one of eight guestrooms, sweetheart.”

Sera turned her head in Justus’s direction. “I didn’t hear you knock.”

“I’m not in the habit of knocking on doors in my own home. Don’t expect me to start now. Besides, you won’t be in here long.”

There was a nip to his voice, the impression of strong teeth grinding. The image of the beast form she had seen briefly in the limo appeared in her mind.

“Oh goodie, look who stepped out of the wrong side of his shower.” Sera sat in the deep-cushioned chair and leaned comfortably against the high back, lifting her bare feet up on the matching footstool.

Justus quietly moved further into the bedroom, the door clicked ominously behind him in the silence. He stopped before the fireplace, a brooding look on his face, his hands stuffed in the front pocket of a silk royal-blue bathrobe. He removed his hands from his pockets and pushed his fingers through his hair, sighing deeply before resting his eyes on her face.

Slowly strolling to stand before her chair, Justus stopped and loomed over her, brooding, and staring in irritating silence. His damp mane appeared darker and more in harmony with the shadowed growth of hair on his chiseled chin.

Once again, she openly appreciated his virile masculinity. She also realized she was the cause of his current discontentment and the guilt of it weighed heavy in her heart. Justus has only been kind and yet she continued to take her frustrations out on him. She wondered how soon he would regret bringing her into his life.

“I’m sorry I was snooping through your things.” Her voice was contrite.

“It is now your home too. I have nothing to hide from you, Sera. That is why it pains me so that you would feel the need to look for things when all you have to do is ask me.” His voice was gentle.

“I know this, Justus. But it’s hard for me to get use to the idea that I’m no longer alone in this world doing my own thing.” Sera shrugged. “I feel lost, nothing here is mine.”

Lifting her bare feet to sit on the footstool, he placed her feet in his lap and started to massage. “Look, no one is expecting you to behave a certain way, or come in and start acting as if you’ve always been here. My concern is your happiness and I don’t know how I can accomplish that if you don’t feel you can come to me about...anything.”

“Tell me the truth, Justus, does it upset you that I wanted a room of my own?”

“Yes. However, I understand.” He answered truthfully and asked, “Do you think by sharing my bed I will take you against your will?”

Sera's sigh was loud in the stillness of the room. She compressed her lips together to keep from moaning, as the even strokes of his fingers caressed over the arch of her foot.

"No. I thought if I didn't share your bed it would afford me the opportunity to think, and maybe, remember." She smiled sheepishly. "For some reason I can't think around you. I can only think *of you*"

"Good," he said with unmistakable satisfaction.

"You've spent nearly three weeks watching over me. I'm sure you've neglected some things of importance because of me." She could feel his gaze, hot, and very interested on the length of freshly-shaven calves he was exposing as he pushed her gown above her knees.

"Nothing that I haven't been doing for the past three hundred years. I'm due a break." He winked and bent his head to place a kiss upon her kneecap. His drying hair spilled forward in soft golden loose curls and waves, sheltering his expression from her view. "I'm sure we can find something to do during my time off; don't you?"

There was something very promising in his voice, almost a taunt. She had the feeling she knew what he would like to be doing to keep busy. "What about the Lykian you were hunting?"

For some reason, Sera regretted bringing up the subject the moment she said it. She saw Justus shoulders tightened before he set her feet aside and pushed up off the footrest. Turning his back to her, Justus strolled to the fireplace, he lifted the poker and jabbed at the wood, flames crackled and popped as the burnt wood split and settled.

"It has been my biggest failure, so why should another day, week, or month make a difference?"

Sera winced at the bitterness in his voice. "It must be frustrating, considering he killed your parents."

"You don't even know the half of it." Justus replaced the poker and braced his hands against the banister. His head bowed and shoulders stooped from the load of his burden. "I feel like a failure to my clan and my council because I want to bring him in alive. They think he is too far-gone and want me to kill him. I just can't give up on him...not yet."

"Surely, if you want to keep him breathing, he must have some redeeming qualities," Sera reasoned.

Justus shoulders squared off and he turned to look at her. "You think so."

"Well, I mean how horrible can he be if you want to capture him alive."

"Jack the Ripper," Justus spoke softly.

Sera frowned. "My God, he committed crimes like *Jack the Ripper*?"

"Not like him. *He* is the Ripper, still alive and still killing."

Sera shook her head in disbelief. A thing like this wasn't possible. What was she saying? She shouldn't still be alive, Justus shouldn't be able to turn into a creature and wolf at will, and Jack the Ripper should be long dead but he is an immortal Lykian who could go on like this forever unless someone stops him.

"Do you know how crazy this sounds? Hell, no one even knew who Jack was, not really, just theories and speculations." She tried to soften her voice, for it seemed too harsh even to her own ears.

"*We knew*, Sera. In those early days, they couldn't tell the difference between razor claws or blades. They just presumed the killer had commissioned his own special instruments to use in the crimes. I knew it was Lucus. I almost caught him but he eluded me and I lost my second chance a few weeks back, at the airport but..."

"Then explain to me why it is so important to bring him in alive. He's unstable and dangerous. He could kill you!"

"I have no choice." Justus shouted back at her in frustration. "Before my mother died from the injuries Lucus inflicted, she asked that I exhaust all other options before putting him to death." Justus closed his eyes and pressed on his temple.

Sera released a deep breath, after seeing his weary expression she realized she wasn't helping matters. She had to remember this is something he has been dealing with for longer then she could phantom. She probably wasn't saying anything to him he hadn't already heard.

"This has to be extremely difficult for you, trying to keep a promise, yet knowing in your heart, he should die for the horrible crimes he's committed," Sera said soothingly.

"Very difficult. Still, I agree with my mother. I believe he shouldn't *die*, Sera. The disease is triggering Lucus and others of my kind to give in to the bloodlust of the beast that lives in all Lykians. We must find a cure. Lucus is just as much a victim as those he killed," Justus finished passionately.

His lashes lifted and he looked directly at her. His emotions so raw and intense she felt as if they were her own. "I can see by the disgust on your face you don't agree with my logic." Justus sighed with deep disappointment

She could understand why he was disappointed. Here he was reaching out to her, as she asked him to do and she was letting him down with her judgmental silence. She was a doctor she was supposed to see the medical logic in curing the inflicted, not exterminating them instead, but for a moment, ethics eluded her as she remember the historical accounts of his crimes.

The Ripper attacks were inhuman and insane. Sera wondered how many other serial killers were of some other unknown species. Even if they could cure Lucus, how could he live with a sane mind knowing what he'd done?

Justus needed her and that is what really mattered. Sera stood and took a few steps to stand in front of him. She hesitated a moment before she slid her arms around his waist and leaned against him. She knew from the desperate way he clung to her she'd made the right decision.

"I want to be here for you, as you've been for me, Justus."

"I know I'm expecting too much too soon. I don't think I would understand if it were you telling me what I've told you. I had hoped all of this would be resolved before my mate came into my life." There was a trace of regret in his voice. "I wanted to be able to concentrate only on loving you and making a real home for us."

“You aren’t expecting too much. I don’t have to know you all my life to realize you’re a man, who keeps his word.” She leaned back in his embrace to look up into his face. “If you almost caught this Lucas before at the airport, you...” Sera tensed, her eyes growing wide with realization.

“You nearly caught him at the airport.” She repeated what he said earlier. “Lucas got away because of *me*.” She paled beneath her complexion. “We weren’t at the airport together were we? You were tracking Lucas and found me, dying...”

“I was almost too late.”

“It’s all my fault.” She tried to pull away. “From here on, anyone who dies at his hands is because of me!”

He pulled her back against his chest and his hold tightened. “No, don’t do this to yourself, baby. You can’t possibly blame yourself for something beyond your control. I barely had time to catch you as you dropped to the ground. I sure as hell don’t regret choosing to save you above all others.”

“Please tell me you will be able to track him down again. Do you think he left Tahoe, since he knows you’re on his heels?”

“He won’t go anywhere else. Not now.” Justus’s menacing voice caused Sera an overwhelming feeling of dread. “He saw me with you. Lucas will know you are my mate and he’s probably started plotting on how he can use you against me. That is why I must keep you safe. You are secure here, but you would be better protected in my suite with me.”

“Whatever you think is best. I don’t want you to be worried about me, when you can be focusing on catching this insane bastard.” Sera felt him flinch from her harsh words and took a deep breath to calm down. “Justus, please tell me that you can catch him again and soon.”

“I don’t know, Sera.” He shook his head, arms dropping by his sides. “I’ve never hunted Lucas blind before.”

“What do you mean?”

Justus chest fell as he released a long sigh. The silken material of his robe stretched across his muscular biceps, as he reached up to massage the back of his neck. “I broke the psychological leash I’ve had with Lucas. I had no choice; it took all of my capabilities to keep you earthbound to me.”

“I’ve been a burden to you from the very beginning, haven’t I?” Her voice was tight. She caught at him. “Tell me what I can do to help.”

His hand ensnared her chin. “You help me by being here and choosing me as your eternal partner. That means everything to me, Sera.” His lips spread in a close-lipped smile. “I know it may have seemed as if you had no other choice, but we both know you did. I know my limitations as a Lykian and a man. No powers would have made you live if you hadn’t wanted to stay by my side.”

In his arms listening to him, she knew. From the moment, she saw him walk into her hospital room, she felt connected. Even now, she could feel his words in her soul and know they were true. She didn’t know

how or why, but she wanted to be with him. Only him, and that explained why no other man could have ever satisfied her need to feel useful and more of a woman.

With Justus, she was not a doctor, or biologist extraordinaire, and with her now- vacant bank account she wasn't his means to a better life. She was simply a woman. Soft, vulnerable, weepy, and dreamy was how he made her feel. Everything she used to resent in other women.

How many times had she threatened to fire the women on her staff who had become distracted from their lab work because of some latest '*man*' drama? Maybe when she got the chance she would send them all a letter of apology and big bouquets of roses. A Mona Lisa smile came to her lips. She loved him.

"Justus, you have me, so use me. There must be something I can do."

His fingertips brushed her face, down her arms, to slide up inside the bell sleeves of her robe. Sera felt her skin warming from his familiar touch. "Help me find a cure for Lucus."

Sera's eyes grew wide, her mouth dropping open. She was offering her emotional support, she wasn't sure if she could try and save this fiend that had been killing for God only knew how long. He was asking the impossible.

"Just tell me what you need, Sera, and I'll set up a lab for you in the basement. I can supply you with all the information, samples and such to get you started. Please, say you will help me."

"I don't know if he can even be saved if we find a cure. Not after all this time." Sera ran her hands through his hair, pushing it off his face as he pressed his heated brow to hers. Standing nose to nose she said, "I think it was wrong of your mother to burden you with the added responsibility of keeping him alive." She closed her eyes for a moment and released a deep groan. "Okay, for you I'll do whatever I can to help, not because I think he needs to be saved, but for the future of your people. We can't keep letting this happen."

"Sera, Lucus is my people. He is closer to me than any other Lykian will ever be." He kissed her full mouth. "And don't judge my mother too harshly. She loved him as much as I still do, in spite of his horrible crimes."

Sera eased back in his loose embrace. Her brow puckered in confusion as she stared into his pale-moon colored eyes.

"Sera, Lucus is my brother."

Baja Tahoe Casino

Ann sat at the bar; her pale blue eyes darted about, hoping someone would notice the extra care she had taken with her makeup and outfit. It has been so long since her love life saw some action. She just wanted to get some sexual fulfillment before calling it a night.

The Baja Tahoe Casino lounge door opened, allowing the sounds of dropping coins, spinning wheels and ringing bells of machines to rush into the otherwise-soundproof room. All eyes turned to the door, including Ann's blue gaze. Her heart raced.

Finally, a familiar face; she surmised this was going to be her lucky night after all. He was as tall, hard-faced, and as gorgeous as she remembered. He was one of those men a woman never forgot; a handsome man even if she didn't know his name, and this time she was getting it. No telling when the next time he would make it into a joint like this. Ann lifted her glass of wine and waved with her other hand.

A knowing wolfish grin spread across his face as he moved towards her with a grace and ease one wouldn't expect from a man of his height and musculature. Ann felt breathless, wondering if he'd remember her. She got her answer when he took the stool one seat over from hers with barely a glance.

Her heart sank and she felt foolish; after all, he was a married man who appeared to love his wife deeply, but if that was so, as usual he wore no ring and he was here, alone. Maybe that black wife of his, Doctor Tibbs', illness had been too much for him and he just needed a break for the tonight. Well, if he was the cheating kind of man there was no reason it couldn't be with her.

Silently Ann continued to watch his every movement. His long manicured fingers removed a carton of cigarillos and a gold lighter from his inner jacket pocket and placed them on the bar counter. There was something different about him since she saw him at the hospital. He seemed to be a little intense this evening; she wondered if his wife had become worse since he took her home from the hospital yesterday.

"Hello, Mr. Apollon, I'm surprised to see you're out tonight." Ann chanced speaking first.

He swung his head toward the petite blond and tilted his head to the side; his nostrils flared as her sexually aroused scent reached nose. "I'm sorry do we know each other?"

Ann blushing shrugged. "No, not really. I just saw you around the hospital. I was your wife's night-shift nurse."

His brow lift in surprise and he smiled a close mouth smile. "My *wife*. Of course."

"I take it Doctor Tibbs is still doing well."

"Doctor Tibbs?"

Ann chuckled and shook her head. "Oh, I see, tonight you aren't playing the roll of adoring devoted husband to your dying black wife. That's okay with me." She winked at him. "I will play along."

"Would you like another one of those?" he offered, nodding towards her half empty glass of wine.

"Uh...no, I'm good for the moment. Thanks."

He nodded and turned his attention to the muted television.

"Pretty gruesome, isn't it?" Ann scooted over to occupy the empty bar seat next to his; her trusting eyes stared at the city morgue ambulance shutting the doors on a blood-soaked sheet-covered body. "I tell you, I've seen some awful things in the emergency room, especially auto accident victims, and I don't think I've ever seen a body in such a mess. This is a real sicko."

She received no response; he didn't even remove his eyes from the television as the bartender set a shot glass of *JB* in front of him.

Ann didn't know why, but his disinterest was a turn-on. She was accustomed to men falling over themselves to get to know her, comparing her features to a young Christie Brinkley.

If her blond good looks weren't enough, the D-cup usually was, but this one was hard to read. Maybe he was one of the good guys after all. Maybe he did love his wife.

"Do you want to fuck me?"

Her eyes grew wide and her mouth dropped open. "I...Excuse me."

"Do I really need to repeat myself? Must I be subjected to your prudish genteel sensibilities before I fuck you?" he voiced as he stubbed out the half burnt smoke. He lifted his lighter and cigarillo box, returning the items to his inner pocket.

"You aren't one to hold back words, are you?" Ann cocked a well-tweezed brow. Her tongue darted nervously over red painted lips. "You seemed more reserved when you visited the hospital."

"Is that a 'NO'?"

She jumped as she felt his large tanned hand on her thigh. She couldn't believe he was doing this and in the open. She wanted to stop him, but she was so hot, she couldn't stand it if he quit touching her.

Ann bit back a moan. His large fingers slid sensuously up and down her inner thigh. Her thighs widened and she welcomed the pressured strokes of his fingers against her sexually damp crotch as he cupped her. Ann's mouth parted, her eyes closed, tumbling on the verge of shattering into pieces in the middle of the bar.

Without any warning, he stopped, peeled a twenty off a stack of bills and threw it on the bar. Ann's passion-filled eyes watched him stroll towards the exit. Feeling anxious, needy, and frustrated, she couldn't just let him leave her this way. She smoothed her short skirt down over her thighs and slid off the barstool quickly, following on his heels.

Ann continued to burn with deep need, enjoying the view of his broad shoulders, tight ass and legs that seemed to go on forever. She silently allowed him to lead her through the hotel casino lobby towards the elevator.

She should have wondered why he never turned to acknowledge her presence; it was as if he never doubted she would follow and he was right. She wanted him so badly she probably would have willingly followed him to hell. Ann never felt this way about any man before seeing Mr. Apollon at the hospital. She felt frightened and thrilled at the same time. He would finally be hers even if it were just for one night.

He paused long enough to hold the elevator door open for her while she rushed forward. Even before the door closed, she found herself pressed against the wall. Her mouth welcomed the needy, lengthy sweeping of his tongue.

Ann held on to his shoulders opening her legs wide as he lift her upward until his hardness pressed against her sopping softness. Fire smoldered in the pit of her stomach. She had never been so on fire.

She moaned her frustrations as she felt her feet touching the floor of the elevator. A bell rang and the elevator door opened, allowing him to lead her down the hall to stop in front of what she assumed was his hotel suite. He slipped the card key in the slot and the lock sounded as the he kicked the door wide open; a rush of cool air swept across her scorching skin.

Ann didn't have time to take in the room's décor before his big calloused hands were on her once more. Her back struck the door, the startled cry that escaped her parted lips blocked by the onset of his bruising mouth pressing hard and passionate against hers.

She locked her legs around his hips, burying her fingers in the debts of his disheveled hair. Ann's hands fisted and tugged. With a scowl, his head came up in askance. "Whoa! At least tell me your first name. I don't think I want to be moaning Mr. Apollon. It will make feel like I'm screwing my teacher." She giggled.

"Didn't your mother teach you that the world is full of scary individuals? You shouldn't be so trusting."

Ann slowly unbuttoned her blouse, released the front hook and eye of her bra, releasing the fullness of her breasts. "I've been watching you for the past few weeks. You were so considerate and attentive with your wife. I envied her and I've wanted you desperately every since." She kissed his mouth. "I won't apologize for wanting to get to know you better."

"Stupidity is a human fallibility." His fingers caressed her nakedness with a lover's tenderness. "Still, you can learn not to be stupid again. Yet, the one thing you can't survive, Ann, is your *naïveté* I can't abide gullibility," he growled between clenched teeth. "You, my dear, have learned your last life lesson."

He leaned forward, taking one of her aching breasts in his mouth. Ann licked her lips with desire. She decided they would have more time to speak later. For now, she just wanted him to make love to her.

Ann closed her eyes and held his head to her breast. Her fingers tangled in the debts of his wild hair. She cried out, inhaling deeply, and caught the scent of fresh blood. A sharp burning sensation burned across her breast.

Her eyes opened in horror, as his handsome features shimmered and changed before her eyes. Involuntarily she opened her mouth to scream but nothing came out. It was too late.

CHAPTER 6

Justus's piercing gaze locked with Darius and his companion Sylus. The deafening silence lingered, becoming palpable until Justus felt the urge to make his words clearer.

"What else do you want me to say? It's been happening for some time now. I called you here because I need you to keep an eye on me. I can't imagine what I might've done during these blackouts." Justus ran his hand through his locks with growing frustration. "Now that I've found Sera, I can't afford to remain ignorant".

"I understand completely, Cousin." The tall dark Satyr spoke up, placing an understanding hand on Justus's shoulder. "You should have contacted me sooner. The bond you share with your brother is very strong. There is a possibility that he would have as much influence on you physically as you have on him."

"That is what worries me, Darius. I couldn't bare the thought of being a stone cold-blooded killer like Lucas."

Darius nodded. "Your will is strong. Perhaps during the blackouts you're just in a deep sleep." Justus shifted restlessly on his feet. Obviously, there was more. "What are you not telling us?"

Justus released a heavy sigh. "I went to Sera's bed last evening. She was having a hard time sleeping. Once she fell asleep, I remembered crawling in the bed beside her just so I could feel her near me for a moment..."

"And?" Darius arched a black brow in question.

"This morning I woke up on my property down by the lake. Naked and covered in blood." Justus closed his eyes for a moment. A brief flash of a woman with pale blond hair flashed in his mind and he shivered at the horror he saw on her face. Could he have murdered someone and not remember? "I checked to make sure I hadn't harmed Sera. She was fine, but I keep seeing this woman's face, her eye vacant forever staring forward, her mouth open in terror---"

"You think you might have harmed this woman? Do you know her?"

"She was familiar; I think she was one of the nurses that looked after Sera when she was in the hospital." Justus shook his head. "I truly don't know if it was Lucas or if it was me, Darius, and that's what scares the hell out of me."

"As well it should," Sylus piped in for the first time. "It amazes me that you haven't said anything before about these blackouts. You should have gone before the Ancients and had yourself removed from the hunt and placed on lockdown, until we found Lucas. I, for one, thought you shouldn't have been allowed to be the hunter of your own kinsman."

"He's my brother and I will not allow vigilante hunters to track him down and kill him. Lucas must be captured alive!" Justus snarled with frustration.

“Why risk so many other lives for this one? There is no guarantee of a cure. Without a cure, the Ancients will not risk Lucus remaining alive...in or out of captivity. If you ask me, you’re as dangerous as that brother of yours,” Sylus de Gauls declared slamming the table with his fist and if it hadn’t been solid oak, it would have splintered under his strength.

“Sylus,” Darius warned. “Enough.”

Sylus puffed out his chest in indignation, pushing the morning paper towards Justus. “Look at this! This murder occurred last night at the Baja Casino Hotel room, just a short drive from this estate. The paper says housekeeping discovered her, naked and torn to shreds.” His voice was cold and exact.

Justus lips thinned with anger. “You don’t want to press me, Sylus,” he replied in a low, tormented voice.

“Look at her face, Justus. Her name is Ann Taylor and she’s a nurse. Look damn you! You must remember if it’s that madman you still call a brother or you. You can’t tell me you haven’t seen the pattern here in your own journals. Even I can see from these aged clippings you have stuffed between the pages, you’ve experienced a loss of time before each of these murders have taken place.”

A stab of guilt set buried in Justus chest. He couldn’t deny the facts; it had been right before his face all along and he hadn’t wanted to see the truth. He never had anything to lose, not until now.

“This is why I asked Darius here. I need him to help keep watch over Sera. He knows to do whatever is necessary to protect her, be it from Lucus or me.”

Sylus cursed aloud, taking a deep swig from the open wine bottle on the table before slamming it back down. “Maybe the reason you haven’t captured Lucus after all these years, is because we’re trusting the wrong brother. How can we maintain faith in you, Justus, if you’ve been hiding these blackouts from us for over a century? Lucus obviously isn’t the only fucking madman in your family.”

“Sy!” Darius scowled. “Back off!”

Justus couldn’t object or get angry with Sylus for speaking what he himself was thinking. For centuries, it had been this way since Lucus left the pack. Nevertheless, wouldn’t he remember if he was turning into the beast and attacking women? Wouldn’t he have the blood lust all the time if he had taken human life? Still, if it’s true, he could have killed Sera last night.

“He’s right, Darius. The only way we can be sure is to capture Lucus, but for now, I need the both of you. I need you to make sure I’m not leaving the grounds when this happens,” Justus stated wearily washing his hands over his face. “Most of all, don’t let me or Lucus harm Sera; she is the love of my heart and I couldn’t bare it if anything were to happen to her because of me.”

“I have faith in you, Justus. I don’t believe you would harm your mate or any other woman, as a matter of fact.” Darius squeezed his shoulder.

“Darius, what am I to do? Soon, I must complete Sera’s transformation before her cancer returns to dominate her organs once more. By the gods, what if I change Sera and I turn out to be a serial killer.” His eyes widened with horror. “If so, you must promise to stop me at any cost.”

Darius's pale green eyes took in his cousin's disheartened appearance. "I know this has to be Lucas's handiwork."

"I pray you are right. My future with Sera depends—." Justus halted, his head tilting to the side. "Damn!" Justus jumped up from his seat, turning over the kitchen chair.

Darius and Sylus stood on alert. "What is it?" they both questioned.

Justus head tilted back as he sniffed the air once more. He could smell Sera's scent mixed with fear. He rushed across the kitchen, pushing the swinging doors wide as he rushed through and up the winding formal staircase, taking two steps at a time.

A black mist came over Justus as the beast bared its teeth with savage fury. He was prepared to battle whoever or whatever struck such fear in his mate. Justus could fight blindly with his fists; however, he wasn't sure how to handle what was to come.

He pushed opened Sera's suite door, running through the sitting room with Darius and Sylus on his heels. He halted in stunned silence grunting as the two men slammed into him and cursed under their breaths before their faces matched his in stunned silence.

Sera had found her luggage his manservant picked up from the airport and thrown clothes inside, not even bothering to fold them neatly.

"Sera, where do you think you are going?" He moved towards her and stopped as she skirted around the large bed putting it between them.

"You stay away from me." She held up her hand. "I'm leaving. I think I'd rather go back to the hospital until I can figure what I'm going to do."

"Sera—"

"Please, Justus, no more lies." Sera interrupted. "My God...I don't even know who the hell you are." She cried. "I can't believe I married a...a monster!"

Justus flinched, the pain of her words catching him like a sucker punch to his guts, nearly causing him to double over. He brushed discouraged hands over his face, sighing deeply. "You are right. In the world, you knew I'm an abomination to mankind, but I didn't lie to you about what I was. You saw me, Sera. What has changed that you would fear me now?"

"I'm not talking about how you look! Do you still think I'm that shallow? I'm speaking of what I read in the morning newspaper that was on my breakfast tray." She lifted the paper from the bed and threw it at him. "I was looking for you to see if you had read what happened to one of the women that nursed me at the hospital and I heard you."

"Sera, you misunderstood." His hands splayed wide, hoping she would allow him the opportunity to explain.

"Justus, don't try to cover this up. I heard you speaking to these men in the kitchen. It doesn't matter how this will affect you or anyone else. If you know anything about this woman's death, you are obligated to

go to the police. You think you are helping your brother by covering his crimes, but I believe it makes you as guilty as he is.”

He saw her growing agitation. Fear thudded heavily in his chest as she placed a frail dark hand to her head and swayed. Ignoring her protest, Justus gently took her arm, guiding her over to one of the overstuffed chairs in front of the fireplace.

“Sit, and calm down. You are still healing.” He took a seat on the floor in front of her chair looking up at her.

His somber gaze moved over her face, dismal, pensive, with a hint of sorrow. He found her earthiness so beautiful his body physically ached for her touch. Every day, these new emotions deepened and intensified. He couldn’t imagine her leaving him and taking his heart with her. He would rather be dead.

“Justus, I wouldn’t have agreed to spend the rest of my life with you if I hadn’t felt that you were a man that could be trusted. I thought you were an honorable man. Now, I’m not sure that I can trust my feelings, or you.” Sera spoke so softly that Justus had to lean in to hear her.

Realizing this wasn’t a moment to share with others, Justus pulled back from Sera and glared at Darius and Sylus, who stood listening intently from the doorway. “Can you two give us some time alone? We’ll do introductions later.”

“I do hope you stay with us, Sera. I look forward to getting to know you better,” Darius spoke up before he closed the door to the bedroom, leaving them alone.

Justus turned his attention back to Sera. “Sweetness, we were born to be one. There is no escaping or running away from that which is destiny. No matter where you go, you will grieve for me as I for you.”

She shook her head in protest.

“It’s the truth. When you breathe out, I breathe in. I need you.” He spaced and emphasized each word. “Whatever differences we may have, we must learn to discuss them and come to some understanding. Running away from me is not an option. Not anymore.”

Justus paused, allowing Sera to soak in what he was saying, giving her the chance to protest, yet prepared to thwart any argument that justified her leaving their home. He didn’t know whether to be suspicious or thrilled by her silence. He chose to see it as a positive sign and continued.

“I can’t begin to excuse what my brother is doing and if I can’t blame it on some viral illness then I’d have to face the reality that Lucus is just cruel and twisted.”

“Lucus killed one of the nurses that helped me during my stay at the hospital. That can’t be a coincidence,” Sera argued.

Justus rested his elbow on his knee. “He probably was sending out a warning to me. In my brother’s twisted mind, he sees me as the one with the mental affliction. In his mind, he believes he’s has the right to take human lives and feed upon their flesh and blood. There was a time we were a superior species. Humans were our slaves and food source.”

He saw Sera pale; a sneer of disgust temporarily marred her features. Still, if she was to be the woman of a Lykian male she had to know their history. "It was so many centuries ago, Sera. Now the law is clear. We protect humans to make up for the enslavement in the past."

"My God, Justus, what he did was horrible." Sera shoulders slumped and big tears appeared in her eyes. "I feel as if it's my fault. If I never came here, if I never met you...don't you see? You should have let me die at the airport and that woman would still be alive."

"Sera, darling." He reached out and touched her fingers. "I'm sorry for what happened to that woman. I hope to stop Lucas before it happens again, but I don't feel guilty for finding my mate." He smiled; his eyes full of acceptance. "I love you."

"I know you do," she said in a tear-smothered whisper allowing him to pull her into his arms.

"Then promise me, no matter how upset you become we will discuss it. You can yell at me, hit me, anything, but don't leave me." Justus smoothed the curve of her high cheekbones.

Justus experienced relief as he felt her nodding in agreement against his chest. He loosened his hold as she pulled back to stare up at him, her perfect features spoiled by concern.

"Then I want to discuss something with you."

"Anything."

"I hope you feel that way once I tell you what's been bothering me. I hope you won't think less of me, but in my field of expertise it would be remiss to not address the possibilities."

Justus's heart sank. She must have overheard his concerns about his own mental stability. He prepared himself for her next words.

"What if Lucas's affliction is hereditary and you some how lucked out but our son won't? Would you be able to kill your own son, if necessary?" Sera shook her head. "I think as long as that possibility hangs over our heads, this only adds to the list of reasons I won't have children."

He wasn't prepared. "So now you want to use this as an excuse not to have children? I thought we already addressed your adoption issues," Justus cursed softly. He wasn't handling this well at all. He knew he was being defensive and ignoring the fact that Sera wasn't saying anything he hadn't worried about in his own private meanderings.

"I guess being discarded as a child has given me issues, but I'm also a doctor and if your brother Lucas is insane it is something we must consider for the sake of our own children." Sera put her hands on her hips and took a step back from him. "I won't risk getting pregnant until we get the chance to test Lucas."

Justus dropped his hands from her shoulders and walked slowly across the room. He was so hurt he could barely breathe. "If madness does run in my genes, are you saying that we'll never have children?"

"I don't know. How can I say never?" Sera questioned, moistening the dryness of her lips with the tip of her tongue. "For the first time that I can remember, I have allowed myself to imagine the possibilities of having everything I saw other families have. You have given this to me, but I won't pretend to not be frightened by all that is happening to me."

Justus followed the coral tip of her tongue as it dashed across her full lips, suppressing a deep need to moan as his cock hardened. She was unaware of how such a simple movement could arouse him deeply.

Sera had no idea that just being in the room with her and her heated scent, drove his need to copulate. He supposed it wasn't asking too much to wait on starting a family. They had plenty of time, once her transformation was completed. Meanwhile, he would continue his hunt for Lucus so he could put an end to both of their worries.

"If we wait to have children, does this mean we can't make love until we are ready to breed?" Justus asked softly, his voice deliberately lulling her into a relaxed mood. He didn't want Sera to become more upset.

He reached out, lacing her fingers with his own; her fingers were cool and baby-soft as they touched his.

An electrifying shudder reverberated through him as the thick padding of his thumb massaged the pulse point at her wrist. Her heart was racing and the fragrance of her growing arousal reached his nostrils.

"Remember when we were in the limousine and you touched and kissed me?"

"How could I forget? In your exquisite passion you bit me."

"I still want to make love to you so badly I ache. I don't want to wait, but we must use protection," was her blunt reply.

"Sera, in order for you to finish the change, it requires the essence of my sperm. We can't use protection until the transformation has been completed."

"Uh-oh, I suppose we have a problem."

"There is no problem; we will finish the process. I've told you I won't allow you to become ill again and I definitely will not let you die."

"So it seems we are back to me not having choices," she scowled. "Have I told you how you're bossing me around is pissing me off?"

Justus ducked his head to hide the smile that spread across his lips. "Unfortunately for you, my love, your mate is the head of his clan and it is my duty to make decisions, in regards to life and death matters, for the good of those too foolish to see what is in front of them."

"Well, I...I'm used to being on my own and making my own decisions," Sera spluttered at him as he put his hands on her waist, lifted her high off the carpeted floor, turned and tossed her on the bed. "Justus, what do you think you're doing?"

With one swift movement, he was on the bed towering over her. "Your scent is driving me crazy. I can hear your mouth saying one thing, but I can smell that you desire me. You're sending me mixed messages, Sera, and I choose to listen to your body."

"Oh, sure you would, you big bully. Let me up." She bucked against him but it only allowed him a more comfortable position between her spread thighs and he took full advantage.

"I love the way you smell," he said by way of compromise. "I think I'm going to like sharing my bed with you. I can't wait to wake up early in the mornings and find you beside me with the smell of me all over you."

"You...you shouldn't be saying these things. We have a lot more important matters we need to discuss before you-we..."

"Sweetness, this is very...very...*very*...important." He thrust against her with each word, regretting his jeans and her underwear that were between them. "I don't know why human males crave big false breasts when it is so unnecessary. How can a man not appreciate the small breast with huge beckoning nipples?"

"I know we are not laying here discussing breasts," Sera rolled her heavenward.

"We aren't; I am. You're just my muse." His lips spread into a wide appreciative smile. "Never have I seen such wonderful dark nipples. Your breasts please me. They will be perfect for suckling my children and me."

"What!" Sera gasped. "Don't you dare pull my breast from my bra, Justus...what?" Her voice trailed off on a sigh.

"Too late." Justus pulled back the lacy bra cup exposing a hardened nipple. "Simply beautiful and perfect."

Before she had the chance to stop him, he cupped her right breast, polishing his thumb back and forth over the bare nipple. His eyes went wide with wonder as her nipple continued to grow larger under his nurturing touch. He gently tugged on it and her positive response caused him to want to do more.

Justus released her other breast from her bra. He adored the way her nipples blossomed and peaked against the palms of his hands. His warm lips enclosed over a nipple, his rough tongue lapped and licked at her like a newborn pup.

She held his head and he could feel her hands trembling.

"Sera, are you, too, a virgin?" Justus paused to ask. She looked at him with wide, questioning eyes.

"No, does it matter?"

"Not to me. It is your loyalty to me after you become my mate that matters." He said bluntly, lowering his head to gently kiss her mouth. "Will you be loyal only to me, sweet Sera?"

"I've only been with one man and I was loyal...he wasn't...end of story," Sera said.

"You need not worry you will be my first, last, and only. I'm yours Sera, to do with what you will. So, see, I need you to love me. Do you think you could love me?"

Sera reached up and swept his long hair off his face. He remained unmoving, awaiting her response. He wondered what she was thinking as she stared up at him in deep thought as if studying his features. Did she find his paleness as pleasing to the eyes as he found her dark loveliness?

"God help me but I think I already love you." She broke the silence with her confession. "It just scares me that I don't know what loving you will mean to the rest of my life. I feel like so much is happening, so fast and I don't know if I'm ready."

“Do you trust me?”

“I want to.”

“If you give yourself to me, I swear upon my life I will always protect you,” Justus declared and he knew he meant it with every fiber in his being.

“Even if the person you have to protect me from is your brother Lucas?” Sera asked.

He could see she was holding her breath, waiting for his answer. She was human and had no idea of what it truly meant to be the everlasting partner of a Lykian. She was his everything, his lady, and his queen. Sera came before all others from the moment he found her; including his flesh and blood.

“Especially Lucas. Because of me, he has become a threat to you and I know I have argued the point against taking his life. Still, you are a different matter altogether Sera. I swear if the time should come where I must choose. I will always choose...you.”

Justus didn’t know what he had expected but he hadn’t expected the look of relief followed by tears. Lovingly, he lowered his head and placed gentle kisses upon her face, crooning soft words of comfort.

“I wanted to show this to you when I found it earlier, but I needed to be sure you would choose me.”

Sera pushed lightly at his chest and he rolled to his side. A brief look of disappointment came to his features as she pulled her bra back into place. He held on to a bit of hope that they would continue where they left off when she didn’t bother to close her blouse.

“What are you looking for?” Justus asked watching with growing curiosity as she reached under a bed pillow and pulled out a folded piece of paper. “What is that?”

“When I was unpacking my suitcase earlier, I found this note in between the lingerie.” Sera handed him the folded letter.

Justus silently read the contents. It was from Lucas. He had managed to get this close to Sera without him knowing. Since the bond between him and his brother had been broken, he had to become more physically vigilant.

“He said he wants me to make you see reason or I’ll pay the price.” Sera touched his arm and he looked up from the letter at her. “See reason? What does that mean?”

Justus cursed and crumbled the paper in his fist. “I can’t believe he managed to get this close to you and I didn’t even feel him. I don’t know if I can function this way.”

“What are you saying?”

“In my brother’s madness, he believes that things can return to the old ways when Lykians rule over mortals. He believes he is fighting for the future of the Lykians and he wants me to join him,” he explained and wasn’t surprised to see the stunned disbelief upon her face.

“So what does he think I can do, if he hasn’t managed to convince you after all these years?” Sera asked.

“Sera, don’t you see yet? You are my eternal mate; I would do anything for you and even more to keep you safe. Lucas knows through you he can control me.”

Sera shook her head in disbelief. “Well, there is no way I would convince you to become sick and evil like he is. This is getting crazier by the minute.”

“Of course not and Lucas know this, but Sera I can’t even began to tell you how dangerous it would be for you if Lucas is able to get his hands on you.” Justus slammed his fist into the mattress. “I have failed watching over you. He should not have ever gotten this close.”

“I’m scared, Justus. If he has managed it once, what’s to say he won’t again?” Sara’s eyes were wide with horror.

He reached out to soothe her furrowed brow with his fingers. “Baby, that is why we must get you changed over. You are more vulnerable in your current form. As a shifter, you will become stronger and faster. It is not easy to hurt an immortal.”

“I know it took me awhile to get all of this in my head.” Sera wiped away her tears with the back of her hand. “I still keep waiting to wake up from a coma and find it’s all a dream.”

He nodded his head. “I have waited for you so long, Sera, that it all seems surreal to me, too. Only when I touch you, smell you, and taste you, I know I’m not dreaming, but I need to know you are truly ready this time. I can’t promise to keep my desire for you at bay any longer. I want you.”

“I’m truly ready. If I had any fears before, you helped me to overcome them. I needed to be sure that you truly want me above all else. I didn’t want to find myself living forever...alone.”

“Never.” Justus gave a little mental shout of victory. “Now, where were we?”

CHAPTER 7

Justus allowed his eyes to feast on Sera. There were no deliberate sexual movements on her part; she simply stepped from the bathroom wrapped in a towel. Yet the play of delicate muscles under dark skin, as she pulled her growing hair back into a mini-ponytail with something she called a '*scrunch-ee*,' caused him to harden.

He thought he would shatter into a million pieces when she insisted on putting their lovemaking on hold until they retired for the evening. She insisted that they see to their houseguests. Justus started to protest because he didn't see Darius and definitely not Sylus as *guest*. *Hell*, they stayed here more than he did. Still, he never realized he was such a softie, until now. He couldn't deny her anything.

It was a refreshing change having a woman's laughter at the dining room table and he found Sera to be an intelligent and elegant hostess. Even Sy couldn't remain aloof in Sera's company and he usually never tolerated anyone of the human persuasion.

When he entered his bedroom to prepare for bed, a private thrill ran through him at seeing her things occupying space besides his. When she caught him fingering the delicate lace underwear in the drawer, beneath his, he couldn't help but feel like a perverted idiot, but she just smiled sweetly at him and kissed him on the cheek.

Justus decided he was going to like having a female in his life; two hours later still lying in bed waiting, he wasn't so sure. He would swear she was deliberately prolonging coming to bed.

He lounged back against the stack of blue silk pillows, with his arms folded across his chest. A slight scowl furrowed his brow. *Why is she doing all of this to get ready for bed? I'm going to just make her sweaty all over again.*

All he could think of was sex and everything associated with it. Soft skin. Small firm breasts. Huge nipples. Silky hair. She smelled like fruit, mangos to be specific. His dick felt heavy and his balls ached, worse than needing to piss, while on horseback.

He felt punch-drunk with need and she was dallying as if she had all the time in the world. *This is what it was like to have a woman.* Surely, she wouldn't go through this ritual every night before she came to bed.

Justus released an inward groan as she sat and applied more lotion. She was already shining like a new copper penny, how much lotion was she going to put on? He was just going to lick it off anyway. *How silly* He released a loud sigh and he could have sworn the vamp hid a grin as she leaned over, giving him a sweet but brief shot of naked brown ass.

His scowl deepened, as the throbbing in his cock matched the quickening patter of his heart. He had killed hundreds of men in battle and never felt as fearful as he did at that moment.

Sera made him feel and he wasn't sure if he enjoyed having these feelings all the time. He wasn't use to the distraction that an erection could cause, or how easily she could make him forget whatever he was thinking with a simple look or smile. *Hence, this is what it is like to be in love with a woman.*

He was sinking fast and it was nonsense. The more he pondered on it, the more frustrated he felt. *I'm the alpha male and here I sit waiting like a whipped hound. As a result, this is what a woman does to you when she got you by the balls. Aching balls.*

"Sera?"

"Hmm?"

His eyes close briefly. Why did that sound as if she was moaning? *Because she's going to be moaning in just a minute.*

"Are you about to come to bed?"

Her eyes met his. "In a minute."

Yeah, baby, you will be coming in a moment. No, I'm going to shoot my sperm in a minute and I can't waste it. I need it to complete the transformation.

"Sera?"

"Hmm?"

"You said that *ten minutes* ago," he reminded between gritted teeth.

Sera laughed softly. "I can't believe you're actually keeping count."

"Believe it."

She glared at the tone of his voice. "Are you upset with me?"

"Of course not. It's just you were already perfect before you got into the shower, I don't know why you are going through all this grooming, just to go to bed."

She placed the lotion bottle on the dresser and padded slowly across the carpet to stand at the foot of the bed. "I haven't been with a man in sometime and I'm nervous, that is one reason. The other is that there is something about being with a person for the first time. You want to make sure there are no odors; you want to shave, pluck, and pamper. You know, make sure there is no food in the teeth..."

He smiled as she trailed off. "I love your natural smell, and you're about to be changed into a she-wolf, so hair will become your best friend; besides if you are trying to please me, I believe I would prefer unshaven."

"How do you know if you hadn't been with a woman?" She lifted a newly arched brow.

"I know when I stroked you in the limo you had hair down there and I liked it." He grinned.

She blushed.

"Look sweetheart, things are going to change for you." He shrugged. "I'm sorry, it comes with the territory. You'll be shaving all the time, if you try to stop what is natural for wolves and humans. From what I've gathered over the years, when a Lykian female shifts into her wolf form and back to her human form the hair in her pubic region returns."

Sera's mouth dropped wide. "That is going to take some getting use to." She tilted her head in question. "Now, if I don't shave, when I change and go back to my human form will it look like I sprouted the rain forest?"

Justus couldn't help but laugh. "Enough with the delay tactics and enough talking. He peeled back the covers. "I'm the one that should be nervous, so drop the towel and get in bed."

Sera gave him a drop-dead look, but he didn't care; his attention was riveted on the glorious nudity before him, as the towel fell to the floor.

"You're right, big fella, I'm the one with the experience here so you're ready to play doctor?"

Justus knew he had a big silly grin on his face as he lounged against the pillows with his hands tucked behind his head and waited. "Cure me of this wretched virginity, dear doctor. It's has plagued me all my life."

She straddled his hips and his body tightened as he felt the crease of her bottom against his penis.

"You're sure you aren't using this virginity thing to get me hot?" Sera braced her hands on his chest and leaned forward whispering in his ear, "You know, I like the idea of being your first. I'm already wet."

"By the gods, I don't think I'm going to be able to stop from embarrassing myself. I want you so badly." He grunted, reaching up to touch her breast. She grasped his wrist and forced his hands back down. Well, not actually forced, she pressed and he allowed it. There was no reason to interrupt her teasing. He found this unconstrained, mischievous Sera quite charming.

"If you find you can't hold it, then I will have to do my best to breathe some more life in it." Sera chuckled softly.

At her words, his cock beckoned like a waving flag against her curvaceous derriere, causing her to lift her eyebrow in a knowing look. She buried her face against his warm chest and he could feel her soft breath blowing against the silky, sensitive hairs.

"Justus, you smell wonderful. Like forest foliage. Every time I'm near you like this, I think about running naked in the wild. I don't know why, I just do."

"Have you ever run naked in the wild?" he asked.

"No, you just make me want to do it."

"Then we'll do it. We'll run naked through a field of wildflowers and I'll teach you to shift in mid run and show you my favorite places in the forest."

"I can't wait," she spoke softly, her voice husky with need.

He arched against her as she nuzzled his chest and swirled her tongue over his nipple, drawing it into her mouth, suckling tenderly. He took advantage of her loose hold; his arms crept around her back and cradled her close. He welcomed each caress, every soft kiss, and attentive nip.

His hand moved over her body affectionately, luxuriating in the smooth flesh. It was enticing, appealing, and an enchantment he could hardly believe he was capable of experiencing. He cupped her head in his hands, lifting his mouth to hers. His heart pounded madly.

He adored the pillow thickness of her lips. He caressed and cajoled her lips apart, inserting his tongue and began a sluggish rhythm in time to the sexual riding of her damp pussy against his hard abs. She moaned and he swallowed it into his mouth, releasing a moan of his own.

Justus was so aroused, his blood raged and his cock pulsed. If he didn't calm down, he would be coming...alone. This first coupling was too important for him to waste the nectar Sera would need to receive immortality.

Sera suckled his bottom lip. He liked it. Very much. Their kissing became ardent, carnal, and wet, as their tongues teased and tortured. Fucking in a way their bodies had yet to do.

"Damn," Justus panted, dropping his head back against the pillow while holding her at bay by the shoulders. "If I don't slow this down, it's over."

"Just relax and allow me to make love to you." Sera smiled down at him, her eyes darkened in restrained passion. "Trust me, I know what to do and when to do it."

He didn't doubt her words. He just doubted his foolish body. It seemed to have developed a mind of its own since meeting Sera. It was embarrassing. He could conquer warriors in battle but he was wilting under the tender administrations of this slip of a woman. If Darius and Sylus could see him trembling like a female pup, he'd never hear the end of it.

His eyes went wide as her kisses and tongue made its journey lower. *She wouldn't. She would. Hmmm...gods help me...she did.* His toes curled. How was this supposed to relax him?

Justus groaned a purely masculine sound of sexual rapture. His chin rested against his chest as he strained to get to watch her bobbing head. As if sensing his gaze, she lifted her head from his cock's head. Her mouth was wet and kissable, her eyes heavy-lidded with arousal.

"What are you doing to me?"

"Do you like it?"

"Oh, yes." He arched trustingly into her mouth, as her hot tongue traced a bulging bluish-green vein to his testicles, on which she proceeded to lick and suckle loudly. His head dropped back against the stacked pillows, as his eyes rolled in the back of his head. They closed, enhancing the sensation flowing from his groin to his mouth. He touched his bottom lip as if he could feel her mouth still on his.

It seemed as if a string pulled tautly from his cock to his bottom lip and he wasn't sure if he could take any more. "Se...Sera, I think I'm about to co...come."

"Not yet," she said assuredly.

Justus didn't know what she did but almost immediately, he felt the urgency ease. The pressure was still intense but at least now, he didn't feel like he was about to piss on himself.

She eased her hands up his legs and thighs. His cock jerked as it grazed through the crevices of her breast. Sera moved until she was on top of him, pressing her lips against his mouth in a deep soulful kiss.

Justus moaned the loss of her mouth when she eased up on her knees. Sera braced her hands against his chest coming up on her feet lowering herself over his crotch. His hands held on to her ankles while

watching her hand ease between them grasping and guiding his penis toward her hair-covered pussy. They both released a contented groan as core brushed against core.

“Oh man.... oh...oh that feels good.” His wide mouth parted in awe. Sera was tracing the wetness of her thick vaginal lips and grazing his cock back and forth against herself from the hard pubic area to the weeping opening. He never...ever...felt anything so wonderful.

As her hand pumped him when he neared the opening he trusted forward and she gasped and cried out releasing a silly girlish giggle.

“You cheat!”

“You feel like a hot, wet glove...ahh...shit.... how did you do that?”

“Inner muscles,” she managed as she braced herself against his chest and lifted her hips, before lowering herself again slowly.

“Oh...that is good...you’re good.”

“You’re lucky,” she teased.

“Oh, yeah!” He grunted and took hold of her lean hips he began pumping and gliding in her pooling lubrication.

“Ahh, yeah baby...do it like that,” she whimpered; her bottom lip dropped and quivered. “Thank God you’re a quick learner.” Sera moaned, her head falling back on her shoulders as she thrust her hips forward and placed her hands back on his thighs.

He took full advantage of her mounted position, running one large hand over her breasts, squeezing each in turn. His fingers caressed a line between her breasts to rest against the light snatch of hair, just above the budding nub peeking out from between her spread pussy lips.

Justus pressed with his finger and his thumb, brushed back and forward over her clit, all while watching the way her vagina swallowed his cock inch by inch. It was enough to push him over the edge.

“I...I’m coming Sera.” He cried out, his body tensing, his fingers rubbing her faster hoping to bring her some satisfaction. “Fuck...fuck...arrgh!” A lone tear slid down the side of his face. It was the most miraculous feeling he had ever experienced in all his centuries.

Sera cried out as an orgasm racked her slender form. She fell forward, her hands fisting the pillows as she buried her moist face in the curve of his perspiring neck and shoulders.

“Bite me, Sera, and hold on,” he barked gruffly.

“Huh?”

“Do it now...hard!”

Justus cried out again, as a more powerful orgasm racked his tense body causing a burning sensation to rip through his body. The nectar of the gods secreted from a separate gland in his Lykian makeup raged through his veins in his blood and spurted out of his penis into Sera. It was a one-time deal, lying dormant inside until one found their eternal lover. This was truly an ingenious genetic makeup to all immortals, from the gods.

She bit harder, drawing blood, whimpering yet struggling against him. He held her tighter, locked to his body. Justus shifted and shimmered a moment between man and beast, before calming into his human form.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I know it hurts. Hold on to me, it will be over very soon." He stroked her back as she convulsed and shivered against him, feeling like a heel. He felt her hot tears dropping on his chest and shoulders.

Minutes later, after his penis softened and slipped from her body, he continued to hold her long after sleep came, to give her temporary ease from the pain to come as her insides continue to shift and adjust to her wolf form.

As he she rested, he turned on his side bringing her sleeping form with him, he spooned her from behind and from that position he could look out the parted window blinds. He noticed the moon for the first time and cursed. It was the night of the New Moon. Sera would never believe he hadn't intentionally chosen this night to mate with her. She would hate him for sure. Justus close his eyes with a shuddering sigh.

"Forgive me, sweetheart."

One lone beast stood in the wooded glade outside of Justus's reclusive Lake Tahoe estate howling in rage. He was too late. Justus had called in reinforcements. Now capturing the woman would prove to be more complicated than he originally thought.

Lucus hadn't expected their Satyr cousin and his male mate to come to his brother's aid so soon. With all of them watching over the new alpha bitch it would complicate matters. He would have to think upon an alternate plan to get his brother's mate from him and the others.

CHAPTER 8

Sera stared in awe; always amazed at the ease Justus took in shifting. She watched intently as he closed his eyes, embracing the beast, then the wolf.

One moment he was standing there, devilishly handsome, a tall figure of a man, big and powerful, with a beautifully proportioned body and suddenly, with barely a movement, he shimmered into wolf form. Even as the creature, he carried himself with a commanding air of self-confidence.

Sera's heart pitter-pattered in delight and fear as the massive wolf stalked closely to her nude form lounging on the picnic blanket. A wan shaft of sun struck his fur and it gleamed like melted chocolate. Man or beast, he had a monopoly on virility.

Looking at Justus as he approached, she quietly continued to study him, wondering just how much control he had over the beast once he shifted. Could he possibly hurt someone while in wolf form and not remember it?

Since they had been sharing a bed for the past few weeks, he hadn't experienced another blackout, probably because they'd make love until they passed out from exhaustion. Even though they didn't speak of it, they also noticed that since Justus hadn't had another lapse there hadn't been another reported murder.

Everything was wonderful and too quiet. It made her nervous, but she didn't want to reveal her fears to Justus. He already seemed to be preoccupied since the night of her completed transformation. She wondered if he felt guilty about the pain she suffered afterwards. She reassured him she was fine. Still, she caught him sitting and staring at her as if he wanted to tell her something. Sera fretted over what he was keeping from her. Maybe he would confide in her soon.

Sera also wondered why he only spoke of Lucas in hushed tones amongst Darius and Sylus. She figured, because of her feelings about Lucas being unstable instead of virally infected, he no longer felt free to discuss his feelings about him with her.

Sera shook her head with a smile as Justus's cousin Darius and his friend Sylus came to mind. *A Satyr, how mind-blowing is that?* Having Justus in her life had opened up an entirely new spectrum of research possibilities. The thoughts of exploring the biological genetic makeup of these different species of shifters sent a secret girlish thrill through her.

Sera also found it easy to search the computer and find out what she had been doing for the past five years. She found she'd had a very lucrative career before her cancer diagnosis and then she seemed to disappear from the public eye. She touched her shoulder-length hair with her fingers, amazed at the speedy growth and difference from the one picture she found online of herself that someone had snapped and posted of her sheared and incision-scarred head. It wasn't pretty.

She watched as the large wolf strayed from his path towards her and pranced about the estate grounds. His long snout pressed to the ground, as if he had picked up the scent of something. She wondered what or whose scent he was sniffing, for the wolf's movements had become erratic, before stopping to pace in one concentrated area.

"Justus, what is it?" Sera called out.

Justus the wolf cut his soulful eyes at her and turned back to look about the ground, his long tongue hung out of his mouth as if tasting the air around him, and his lips pulled back over his canines. Light growls emanating from his throat.

Sera became worried. She looked out over the grounds from her perch atop the hillside. It was hard to believe anything dangerous lurked in the place she began to call home.

Justus's home was a mountainside estate named New Moon Lake. The eight-bedroom mansion was situated on nineteen acres of pristine wooded grounds, with its own private lake, docking bridge, boathouse and helipad with his own helicopter. The location was very private, unless you knew the path through the woods well enough to find the road leading to the main house.

Even though she knew it was practically impossible for strangers to spy on them, noticing Justus's vibes made her suddenly feel exposed. Sera reached for Justus's discarded t-shirt to cover her naked body.

She decided to pack away the leftover potato salad, French bread, black olives, steak tartar for Justus, and cold roasted chicken for her; she wasn't quite ready to grasp eating the raw beef with its onions, seasonings, and raw egg just yet.

By the time she finished packing the ice chest, Justus the wolf was standing before her, his large head tilted to the side and now, instead of the menacing alpha wolf, he looked like an innocent puppy. He was beautiful. Sera removed the can of whipped-cream and shook the can before spraying some of the snow-white cream on the palm of her hand. She held her whipped-cream covered palm out to him.

He whimpered and moved closer. Her eyes closed as his long, abrasive tongue licked the cream from her palm. She felt a familiar dampness between her legs and her nipples grew erect against the t-shirt she was wearing. She released a shivering sigh.

Sera opened her eyes and they froze on Justus's long, muscular form. He was no longer a wolf; he was once again a man, *her man*, licking the whipped cream from her palm, tracing his tongue along her long lifeline. She admired the way the sun caressed moving lean muscles across his shoulders a yard wide and molded his skin into bronze.

"So do I get more whipped cream or what?" His mellow baritone voice was edged with barely checked passion. He nuzzled his face against her palm, a swath of silky, unruly hair falling casually on his forehead. Justus laid his head in her lap and waited, his mouth opened wide for her to reciprocate.

Sera tilted the can, pressing down on the long spout. With the sound of released compressed air, white cream entered his open mouth. "You're becoming pampered and spoiled," she chuckled; bending her

dark head, her hair fell forward and she tucked it behind her ear before licking away cream from the corner of his lips.

Justus ran his fingers into the depths of her hair, holding her face to his for an upside-down mating of the lips. The kiss was slow and lingering but she didn't care, they had nothing but time.

After what seemed like forever, but wasn't long enough, Justus released her and Sera sat up, glowing in the serenity of their quiet time together. Tenderly, she fingered massaged his scalp with the tip of her fingers, swirling at the temples.

"I can smell rain in the air," Justus said as he chewed on a blade of grass. "It's beautiful up here in the fall. In the winter, it'll be covered in a sheet of white and the lake will freeze. Do you like ice skating?"

"How many black people you know ice skate?" Sera chuckled.

"You forget I've been around awhile, so I know a few." He smiled deeply; exposing a dimple she had never notice before in his right cheek.

Sera's hand moved lower to caress the side of his long angular face with the back of her fingers, a serene smile on her full lips. She didn't know much about him or his life, yet she didn't feel worried. She had a lifetime and then some to find out. He turned his face into her touch and kissed the back of her fingers twice.

"I use to love watching figure skating on television. Don't tell anyone." She smiled. "I envied their gracefulness and they appeared to be so free, gliding like that across the ice. You ever notice how they never stop smiling? I thought maybe if I could skate I would be happy."

Her voice took on a dreamlike quality. "I promised myself I'd learn someday, but I never got around to it. I was always too busy."

"I will teach you to ice skate," he promised. "Once you can shift completely, I'll show you how to ice fish in wolf form."

"I would like that. You know I've always felt like I'd have time for happiness later. Therefore, I worked myself and others around me like a mad woman. I never realized how short life could truly become, until now. One shouldn't procrastinate," Sera reflected.

"I suppose that is true of humans, but as immortals, time has no significant meaning to us. I suppose the first hundred years you feel as humans, that you only have so long to live and that you've got so much to achieve in that span of time. Then you do it all and nothing happens."

Justus's chest heaved with a deep sigh and continued. "Then in the next few hundred years, you live reckless and wild truly living like a person who is guaranteed forever. You participate in every battle you can find, to relieve the boredom. War was the only thing that seemed to make the numbness go away during the waiting. When the Darkworld Ancients ruled that we must blend into the world, hiding what we are, everything changed."

"How did it change?"

"I don't know if what was asked of us had anything to do with it, but it was around this time that my brother became disillusioned and resentful. He started spouting nonsense about us being gods and mortals being beneath us. Why should the immortals give way to the old ways and allow the mortals to rule the earth? Our parents tried to keep Lucus's illness quiet, knowing the elders would insist we sequester him, even put him the death if he worsened. We tried everything to help him, nothing worked and we had no choice but to turn him over to the Elders."

Justus tensed.

"I'm sorry. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to."

"No. I want to tell you. I've held this in so long. I think you have the right to know about my family." He closed his eyes for a moment, as if gathering his thoughts.

"By the time my parents were convinced Lucus was a danger to others and himself, he had killed at least fifteen villagers. My parents became number sixteen and seventeen."

"My God, I can't imagine what you must have felt like." She reached out, lacing his fingers in her own.

"Can't you? You've lost your parents."

She nodded her head. "Yes, and I'll never know my birth family. I searched for them after my adopted parents died. I buried my life in work after I found out all of my birth family was deceased, except for my grandmother's sister. She died last year...well, actually six years ago, I keep forgetting five years has passed since my last memory." Her voice softened. "Still, to lose your parents at the hands of a family member is something unimaginable."

Justus kissed her palm, his soothing touch encouraging her to continue. "I always had this *TV family* idea of what a family means. I believed a family should be the *one* safe haven you have in the entire world. Your brother took that from you. It's has to leave some bitterness."

"It did at first, and because of it I was hunting him to kill him. As time passed, I realized my brother is the only family I had left. I started to remember how Lucus and I did everything together. We were inseparable through the happy years. I have to believe that if I can get him in my possession, eventually he too, will remember our bond."

"I want to believe for your sake it will happen, but not at the risk of your own life. I couldn't bear to lose you Justus."

He seemed pensive, but not disturbed or angry from her words. She was relieved.

He tilted his head resting in her lap to wink at her. "You've given me new reasons to rise in the morning. Finding my brother is all I've known these past few centuries. Now, I look forward to going to bed and rising in the morning knowing you'll be there."

"Oh baby, you *'rise'* more than just in the morning," she teased deciding to lighten the mood. Sera reached and stole a strawberry from a plastic container. Releasing his hand, she lifted the can and sprayed

whipped cream on the strawberry. Ever so slowly, she shaped his wide mouth before allowing him to take a succulent bite.

“Now, are you going to tell me what had the hair on the back of your neck rankled earlier?” Sera finished the last bite of strawberry.

Justus heaved a sigh; his long lashes shadowing over his cheeks. “I picked up Lucas’s scent; he has been on the property. I used to be able to sense his nearness and now I can’t. It makes me feel as if he has the advantage and I don’t like it.”

“It scares me how close he can get to us.” She fed him another strawberry. “Justus, maybe we should consider leaving. There must be somewhere we can go, somewhere that he couldn’t find us.”

Justus finished chewing, licking the sweet juices from his lips. “Lucas is my responsibility. It’s good that he’s seeking me out for a change. It may be the one opportunity I’ve been waiting for to capture him.”

She ran her fingers through his hair, distracted and worried. “It could also mean death for both of us.” Sera suppressed a shiver.

“Darius and Sylus, along with my driver, Kahn, and security are here on the property. They’ll watch over you. If for some reason,” he paused. “I find that I can’t be with you, I’ve arranged for Darius to take you to his home. His older brother Quinton will place you in the safety of the Ancients. They will assure your safety at all cost.”

“No, don’t. I only feel safe when I’m with you. I don’t want to leave you behind to face all of this alone.” Sera had to express her feelings, even though she sensed his building tension. “You don’t have to live that way anymore. I’m your mate in every way and that includes the good and the bad.”

With a deep-hearted sigh, Justus sat up in his naked glory and Sera couldn’t help but glance at his thick flaccid penis. As if aware of her admiration, it started to harden. She licked her dry lips, looking up into Justus’s knowing face.

Regardless of the visual presence of his growing physical needs, his concern for her well-being was more important and she loved him for it. Sera wanted to make love rather than continue this current line of conversation. She wasn’t going anywhere without him and that was that.

“Please, sweetheart, don’t let this distress you. I couldn’t stand knowing you’re so worried about what may happen, that you can’t enjoy the beginnings of our new life together.” He held her by her shoulders. “As a matter of fact, I want you to change the house, make it yours. If there is somewhere...a certain country or city you’ve always wanted to live in, we can call some real-estate brokers...”

“Shhh,” she placed her finger against his lips. “Your home is vast and could use some more female personality but I’ve never been a *Suzie Homemaker*.”

“A Su-zee what?” He cocked his head in question.

“Never mind. I’m just saying I lived in a small townhouse, had a cleaning service to come in once a week, and hardly was in town or at home enough to care.”

“I see. Work again.” He rolled his eyes.

“Work always.” Sera shrugged. She wasn’t going to apologize. She had accomplished too much good during her career, to have regrets. “Baby, I’m beginning to feel wonderful and you didn’t marry some weak-ass woman. I won’t be tucked away somewhere, twiddling my thumbs waiting for my man to come home.”

“I wasn’t saying—.”

“I’m a born survivor and losing a piece of my memory or becoming a *wolf woman* isn’t going to change that.” She put some space between them, turning to pack the strawberries and whipped cream away. “I think you’d understand. Haven’t you made tracking your brother your life’s work?”

Justus caught her waist in his hands and turned her to look at him. “I loved the fact that I’m bonded to a beautiful, strong, and intelligent woman. It still is going to take some time for me to get use to having someone around me all the time, who doesn’t do as they are told.” He kissed her forehead before he bent his head and found her mouth with his, straightforwardly and precisely, as if he’d die from the lack of her lips. “But change is good.”

At once, she leaned into his kisses and caresses. “Yeah, it is and you’ll see that carrying the fate of the world is easier on two sets of shoulders than one.”

“You’re weakening me, woman. My fellow Lykians will think I’m tit-bound.” He held her tightly. She took pleasure in the feel of her supple body against his. He buried his face against her smooth neck, breathing in her heady scent. “I can’t seem to get enough of you, Sera.”

“Good, it’s too soon to be growing tired of me just yet.” She rubbed her face against his shoulder, spraying his hair-covered chest with wet kisses. He threw his head back and gasped when she curled her tongue around his nipple; it hardened between her lips.

He buried his hand in her hair, as strands caressed him across his chest, like silken fingers. She created a path across his stomach, swirling the tip of her tongue around his navel, while pushing him from his sitting position, onto his back.

Sera squealed and giggled as he caught her to him and rolled. “Oh no, I think I’ve learned well from you, *teacher*. I’m no longer a pupil, but a *master*. I’ve been reading some interesting tidbits off the Internet and found some interesting couples all too willing to demonstrate in the ways of pleasure. You think you might like to go on camera sometimes?”

“Uh...no!” Sera eyes grew wide. “My face is well known and I’ve no desire to ruin the reputation I’ve built, not to mention my parents’ good name and—.”

“Sera, sweetheart, I was teasing,” Justus grinned mischievously. “But only about us getting all this action on camera, not about what I have learned. Let me show you.”

On his knees, he reached under her and lifted her by the bottom, bringing her up towards his mouth. Then he showed her all that he had learned and some things she was sure he had made up. With his tongue, teeth, and lips, he teased her fleshy vaginal folds until they were plump and she was moaning loudly enough to wake the dead.

Every part of her body, but especially her breasts and clitoris, throbbed and ached, pushing her towards the evanescent peak of no return. Justus inserted two fingers into her inner chamber. Sera clasped and unclasped around him.

Then she came. Her body fell into hundreds of quivering pieces of sensitive flesh. Sheer, magnificent gratification and sanctified relief, as her body went slack in his hands.

“Mmm, never have I partaken of anything sweeter,” he said shaking his head.

“*Whew, Lord!*” she shouted to the sky and foolishly giggled. Sera felt so lush and alive. She’d never made love outside where anyone could be watching or could walk up on them at any given minute. Admittedly, the thought added to the excitement and she felt her body tensing once more in need. “We need to send thank you notes to everyone that had a hand in your schooling.”

He lifted his t-shirt over her head and cast it aside before resting on top of her; she spread her legs wide for him. The hardness of his cock nestled against thick and slippery vaginal lips. She placed a loving hand on his cheek and let the fingertips outline his strong jaw. “Well, then I will start with a personal thank you to you, wife. You are my inspiration to always exceed expectations.”

Justus raised her knees and spread them wider; he reached between them and poised himself directly at her entrance. His other arm braced on the side of her head. With a long satisfying groan, he eased forward, not stopping until he was buried deep.

Sera could feel him continuing to thicken while inside her. Easily, her inner cushioned muscles tightened and milked him. He hissed an intake of breath and cursed softly. His body hardened with tension as he moved to withdraw and she held him to her.

“Do you know how amazing you are?” he managed to say, ending on a grunt.

“Uh-huh.”

“Sera, you’ve got to let me move or you’re deliberately trying to kill me.”

“Great way to die, don’t you think?” she giggled as he tickled at her ribs forcing her to give way.

As he moved in and out, Sera could tell her was trying to be gentle. She didn’t want gentle this time. They were in the wild, a new element that was apart of who she had become and had yet to explore. She wrapped her hands around his back, holding him to her. She nibbled at his earlobe and whispered, “Fuck me.”

It was all he needed to hear and with a savage growl his long, slow strokes turned short and hard. Sera bucked her hips, meeting him pound for pound. She tensed and held on as his pace quickened. Shouting his name to the wind, she rode the languid waves of rainbow colors and total recklessness as he stiffened. The muscles in his body hardened and involuntary spasms racked his frame. Shimmering between man and beast, he howled to the heavens.

Sera held him tightly, wrapping her legs around his lean hips and locked him to her as he collapsed over her. It never failed, even though they both felt as if their bones had melted into liquid fire; she adored how he always finished a bout of loving with a long, endearing kiss.

She opened her mouth; he dipped his tongue inside, kissing her long and deep until she felt completely cherished and unquestionably loved.

He lifted his head his brow touching in concern. “Sera, there is something I need to tell you.”

She brushed his hair aside. “What is it?”

He looked away and squared his shoulders before returning her stare. “The first night we completed the requirements of your transformation I hadn’t realized it was the night of a new moon until it was too late.”

“Okay, and is that suppose to mean something to me?”

“Not normally, but as a Lykian shifting female it does now.”

Sera’s eyes narrowed in suspicion her heart began pounding loudly in her ears. So loud, she wondered if he could hear it with his sensitive hearing. “Justus, what is it?”

“The night of the new moon and three days afterwards is the period of fertilization. You may have conceived a child.”

CHAPTER 9

"I can't do it, Justus!" Sera grew more frustrated with each passing moment. She had been trying to picture her body shifting like Justus but for some reason she couldn't focus. How could she focus when she might be carrying a baby? She was just wrapping her brain around the idea of living forever and then being able to become a wolf. Now this was just too much. She still hadn't decided if she even wanted children. There was too much unresolved.

"Baby, don't get upset. You're a fledgling at this." He kissed the top of her head, pushing strands of hair behind the shell of her ear.

"I don't see why it would make a difference; if I know that I can shift, I should be able to just do it," she argued, childishly turning away from him and stomping over to gaze out the window, facing the lake.

Sera didn't welcome any suggestions from Justus or anyone else. She should be the one to decide on when or if she had a child.

"Okay, let's take a break. You can work on shifting later. How about we discuss you sending Darius on a fool's errand to get your shawl yesterday while you disappeared for an hour?"

Sera shrugged her shoulders. "I didn't disappear. I needed some time alone to think, and I didn't want another *man* tracking my heels."

"Sera, it's for your safety."

"Whatever."

Justus eased closer, his hands remaining in his trouser pockets. She could understand why he would be hesitant to touch her after the way she had been acting the past few days. She couldn't help it. Her emotions seemed to be all over the place and she didn't even want to think about why. She had questions about her body and the changes that were taking place. There was not one person in this house that she could talk to about it.

"Baby—."

"I don't think that is a word you want to be using around me at this time." Sera cut him off, refusing to look at him. She was too angry and hurt. Even if he hadn't intended it to happen, a part of her still felt betrayed. He knew about these things and she was flying blind.

"Honey, I said I was sorry. It wasn't like other things haven't distracted us. It just hadn't occurred to me about the timing. Hey, for all we know you're not pregnant. It is possible, because you hadn't completely altered internally, that my sperm didn't take hold."

"Well, after the all the pain I went through, your what-you-call-it, 'god's nectar' was successful, so why wouldn't your sperm be?" She turned to look at him. For a moment, she almost gave into the sincere

sadness in his pale eyes, but her pride and fear wouldn't allow it. She just needed some more time alone. "Just forget it, I'm going to go and take a hot shower."

He moved to follow.

She turned on him. "Don't you dare, I need to wrap my thoughts around what is happening to me, without you to muddle my mind. When you're around, all I want to do is feel."

"Sweetheart, feeling is good." He opened his arms to her.

Sera wanted to jump into his arms and allow him to kiss her senseless. She knew in his arms everything would be easier for her to deal with. But that wasn't her way. She handled her own problems.

"As I said, Justus, everywhere I turn, there is a man on my heels. You have Darius and Sylus following me non-stop when you aren't here, and your driver Kahn tells me he's not allowed to take me into town to shop without you! I'm a prisoner in my own home and you're smothering me, damn it," Sera cried, closing her mouth abruptly.

His astonishment was obviously genuine and she regretted her outburst. He was only concerned for her welfare. Since his brother Lucus had made his way onto the estate, without tripping any alarms, the entire household was on alert. Even Justus was running on adrenalin.

"What's wrong with me?" Smothering a sob, she fled, running past a scowling Sylus who confronted Justus.

"What the hell did you do to her?"

"Will you shut the fuck up before I throw you out on your ass?" Justus's eyes glowed with warning, Darius appeared, as if on cue.

"What is it this time between you two? You are exhausting me to no end." His pale green eyes looked from Lykian to fellow Satyr.

"This beast you call cousin hurt our Sera," Sylus accused.

"There is no *our* Sera. She is mine." Justus bellowed, beyond weary of Sy's constant overstepping.

Darius eyed Justus. "Justus, did you touch her?"

Justus eyes rolled in frustration, had everyone in this house gone mad? He drove his fist into the palm of his hand releasing a growl of annoyance. "She is my woman and I will touch her if I damn well please, but I would never hurt her." He walked over and dropped down onto the black leather executive chair behind his large mahogany desk.

"What's up with her, anyway?" Darius straightened his stance. "She has been a bit erratic lately; is that the way human women act after the change?"

"No, he's just being an ass with her. He should get her out of this house, go have a couple bottles of wine and party all night. She's probably dying from boredom." Sylus received two looks that plainly suggested he keep his mouth shut. He sighed and dropped into one of the chairs by the fireplace, crossing one knee over the other, his long slender fingers tee-peed in front of him.

Justus waved his hand nonchalantly at Darius. "It's my fault."

"Of course it's your fault she's upset, dumb ass." Sylus's scowl deepened. "I, on the other hand, know how to keep a smile on a woman's face. Even if human females are boorish, I really don't care much for them. But Vampires and-"

"Shut up, Syl!" Justus and Darius said simultaneously.

"What happened?" Darius asked.

"Sera might be pregnant. I knew she had reservations about having children and I should have been more aware. She trusted me to know what was best for her. All of this is new to her, and I failed."

Tense silence enveloped the room. The other two men waited and stared at him as if he had developed two heads. Justus pushed a black oriental decorative box towards Darius, who was standing attentively in front of the desk. Slowly, he opened the box and tilted it.

"Might as well have a cigar, there is a possibility I'm going to be a father and even though it's too soon and it wasn't planned, I can't help but feel happy as hell about the prospect." His mouth spread into a wide grin. "Of course, I can't tell Sera how I feel. If I did, she would swear it was intentional."

"You sure it wasn't, you selfish son-of-a-bitch?" Sylus snapped.

"You can leave. I asked Darius here, not you!" Justus revealed his canines.

"Okay, head to your corners." Darius raised his hands, shaking his head.

"My gods, I can hardly wrap my thoughts around all the changes that are taking place in my life. I went from being so alone with only one focus in my life to an entire new beginning ahead of me. All because of one mere slip of a woman! I'm getting everything and so much more than I have dreamt." Justus voice cracked with overwhelming emotions. "I love her so much and I'm terrified she will not be able to forgive me for this."

"Well, if she is pregnant then you have to tell her the worst of it." Sylus said.

"What can be worse than a woman being pregnant when she doesn't wish to be?" Justus lifted a brow in question.

"Obviously being older and smarter than you, I might add, know that the *Lykian* female's gestation period is sixty-three days. So that means your lady is going to have to get used to the fact she is going to be a mother...very quickly."

"Oh, hell!" Justus slapped his head with the flat of his palm. "I knew that."

"Hmm, well then maybe you need to save those little Cuban cigars, you might have to peddle them on the street once she kicks you out of your home," Sylus chuckled.

"You know what I would do with these cigars, if I didn't think you would like it?" Justus yelled.

Sylus shot him the finger and poured himself a glass of wine.

"What the hell am I going to do? I can't tell Sera that she doesn't have nine months to get use to the idea," he groaned. "What a mess."

"I think it's a good time to call Mariah," Darius suggested.

“No, not Mariah.” Justus and Sylus groaned aloud, for once agreeing on something. Darius chuckled because Mariah adored *him*.

Sera really did love what she did for a living, but would Justus understand if she wanted to go back to work? Sera blew her nose on the tissue. How could she think of going back to her research when Justus wouldn't even allow her out of the house without her guardians? What kind of life was this? Was she supposed to go years living in fear of Justus's brother Lucus, as he had spent years tracking him?

If she was pregnant, how could anything complicate matters more for her and Justus? She needed something to do to occupy her time. She couldn't stand this idle lifestyle; it was making her restless and allowed her mind to imagine all kinds of horrible things. Sera stifled a yawn.

She was researching a rabies epidemic amongst the rare Ethiopian wolf population when she found out about her cancer. Not only were the wolves affected, so were the local household pets and the families that owned them. What if the same thing was happening amongst Justus's people and they were dealing with some form of rabies, viral infection, or animal syphilis? Could that be what happened to his brother?

“I remembered.” Startled, Sera set up on the side of the bed. “I can remember what I was working on and I remember when I was first told of my cancer.” Her first instinct was to run and tell Justus, but she quelled the urge. She would wait until she had more to tell him about her theory. She couldn't even begin to surmise such a thing, without blood from a tainted Lykian.

It didn't matter anymore if she wanted a baby or not. There was a likelihood she was pregnant and she needed to make sure that when her baby was born, it wouldn't have to worry that whatever disease was plaguing its uncle might be hereditary.

Sera touched her flat stomach in wonder. Could it be possible? Would it be a boy or girl? Either way, it would be a beautiful product of love. How could she be resentful over something so innocent? She had once been innocent and unwanted. She wasn't going to do that to her babe.

Sera immediately felt better and her thoughts were on fire with all the possibilities that were unfolding before her. She supposed putting off the inescapable was silly. She needed to take a pregnancy test. The sooner she knew for sure, the sooner she could learn to get used to the idea.

Justus stood outside his and Sera's bedroom door. He loved Sera with his body and his soul. He couldn't get enough of her. It broke his heart that she was the one who had to become accustomed to so much, and so soon in their relationship. Now, as delighted as he was to have a child with her, it wouldn't be easy to explain that she wouldn't have time to get use to the idea before she had to prepare for their baby's arrival.

Once Mariah arrived, there would be no more peace in his household. It was bad enough dealing with Sylus de Gauls' presence in his home. Now more company, but it would do Sera good to have a Lykian

woman around to answer any questions she might have. It didn't hurt that Maria was in the medical profession. They had much in common.

Slowly Justus pushed opened the door and eased inside. Sera slept in the fetal position lying in the middle of the bed. Her hand rested protectively over her stomach. The thin mint-green nightgown did nothing to hide the soft feminine curves from his inspection. He didn't know if it was true or he was dreaming, but her body seemed to have flourished overnight. He noted her fuller breasts and the rounder curved hips, thicker thighs. She was a natural beauty full of quick wit, loving nature, and a passion he revered. She was his and she was *amazing*. That brought a smile to his lips and his body tightened in kind.

The urge to crawl in beside her and hold her was overwhelming, but he didn't want to upset her again. She needed the rest. He quietly turned to walk back out of the room.

"Justus?" Her eyes opened slowly "Stay with me."

He pushed off his shoes and climb into bed with her. Justus circled Sera's waist with his arms, he brushed his lips against her temple, along her jaw-line before seizing her lips in a hot possessive kiss.

Sera responded the way she always did: her body became pliant, leaning into his, and her arms slipped around his neck. "Mmm, before you tempt me beyond reason Justus, we really need to talk."

"I know. I'm sorry I hurt you, Sera." Justus breathe against her mouth. "You think we can talk here without you attacking me?" Justus teased, bringing the back of her hand to his lips and nibbled on her knuckles.

"Oh it will be the hardest thing I've ever done, but I'm sure I can contain myself this once," she laughed.

He loved the sound and swore he would make her laugh more often. Although he intended to say much to Sera, once he saw her nothing he had to say felt as worrisome. In her presence, he felt as if all would be well, no matter what.

"Justus, I want to apologize for my behavior. I think it's because I've been trying so hard to keep things the way I remembered and I'm not that woman any more. I never will have my life back to the way it was and, resting here thinking about it, I don't want it back, but I do want to continue what I love doing. I need to work."

"I understand." He said.

"So, you...you're not upset."

"*Upset* Why would I be upset? I know how important your research has been for my wolf brothers. All I ask is that you do it here; I will bring in whatever you need."

"Do you know how much I have come to love you?"

He leaned her forehead against hers, enjoying the uniqueness of her scent mixed with the soft essences of exotic incense that filtered throughout the room. Justus dropped his hand from her face and sandwiched her hands between his. His heart swelled with emotions.

“Sera, I love you, too, and even though I know that I was destined to be with you, that is not why I love you. I love you because you are a woman with a loving and forgiving heart.”

“I’ve never been accused of that,” she murmured. She leaned against the cushions, offering her profile to him, as she gazed out the window at the sun setting on the horizon. “Justus, if indeed I’m carrying your baby, I want to start researching your bloodline and those of your species, of course. If there is some viral infection taking place and causing dementia, I want to find what it is before our baby is born.”

“Wait, Sera, not so fast.” He could see how excited she was about getting back to work. He just didn’t know if it would be wise now, when her body would need to rest.

“What is it? I thought you would be happy.” The smile evaporated from her animated face. “I thought this is what you wanted, for Lucus’s sake.”

“I’m more than happy and it means the world to me that you would be thinking about my brother and our people. But you are my main concern and in your condition you are going to have to take things easy for a little while longer.”

Sera smiled as she lovingly caressed his face. “I need to do this.” She paused and sighed. “Okay, I know that look. What’s the matter now?”

“The thing is, you aren’t human anymore and your reproductive system doesn’t work like human women.”

Sera grew still. As casually, as she could manage, she asked, “So what are you saying? I’m having a litter, is that what you’re trying to say?” Her voice grew shrill as she continued. “Will I sprout extra breasts or what? Don’t just lay there, talk to me!”

“Honey, if you will let me get a word in,” Justus chuckled. “You know compared to the stuff you called out, I don’t feel as bad about what I have to tell you. Now, those extra breasts sound promising.”

Justus caught Sera’s hand in his as she moved to punch him in the shoulder and brought it to his lips before holding it over his pounding heart.

“Please, don’t tease me. If there is one thing you need to know about me, I...don’t...like...surprises.” She poked at his chest to emphasize her words.

“Sera, you are an expert on the working of wolves and you know canines aren’t like humans, things happened faster...” His deep voice trailed off as realization came across Sera’s face.

Justus was prepared for anger...no, that’s putting it mildly. He was prepared for all the hysterics he had seen take place in other women over the years, but he wasn’t prepared for Sera did next.

Sera gaped at him for a moment, then burst out laughing. She laughed so hard she was rolling about the bed. “I’m going to be a mommy in less than three months.” She was still laughing. “Oh, damn, you’ve finally done it. You found my breaking point. Do you know how much I hate emotional women?” The dam broke and her laughter turned into sobs.

Justus kissed the top of her head and rocked her gently. “Oh, baby, everything will be okay. You’ll see.” He felt like the biggest cad alive. His heart was breaking for her. However, deep in that secret place

where men lock away unspoken hopes and dreams, he was thrilled. *I'm going to be a papa with the woman I love. Can things get any better?*

"Justus!" The voice penetrated Justus's deep sleep, dragging him to alertness before Sera completely roused up.

Sera jumped and sat up the next time the shrilled voice seemed to echo with a howl through the halls. Justus groaned loudly, falling back against his pillow and throwing his arm across his face moaned, "Not now."

"My God, Justus, what the hell is that?" Sera placed her hand on his naked torso. "Was that Lucus?" Fear gripped her heart and a knot fisted in her chest. Unconsciously, she placed her other hand protectively over her stomach.

"No Sera, much worse," Justus commented raking his hand through her bed-rumpled hair.

Sera eyes grew as wide as teacups. "How can you be so calm? Don't you have a gun or something silver?" She scrambled to crawl over him and Justus grasped her waist and started laughing.

Sera looked at him as if he was going mad

"Sweetheart, that silver thing is so full of shit." He kissed her. "You know you are so adorable and I didn't mean to alarm you. It's just *Mariah*," Justus explained as if that said it all.

The voice called Justus's name and once more ended in a frightening howl.

"Justus what the hell is a *Mariah*?" Sera sighed, trying not to freak since he didn't seem to be too concerned; actually, his eyes were twinkling with mirth.

"Not *what* baby, but *who*."

As if on cue, the bedroom door flew wide open, banging against the wall. In sauntered a goddess draped in red satin and white fur. She was one of the most beautiful women Sera had ever laid her eyes on and came in as if she owned the place. Sera's bottom lip dropped.

"There you are, you piss poor excuse for a Lykian male. How could you discover your eternal mate, have already changed her, and have a child on the way and not call me?" She slapped Justus's foot, peeking from beneath the cover with the end of her red-beaded handbag.

Sera felt mesmerized, even the woman's full pouting lips were painted wicked red along with matching long fingernails. Sera couldn't take her eyes off her. She imagined it had to be a sin for one woman to be this beautiful.

Sera had thought Sylus was almost too beautiful to look at, considering he was a man; yet, this woman was too lovely, making it difficult to take your eyes off her. Black hair, golden eyes in an oval-shaped face with lightly-cleft chin and a smile to sink a thousand ships, all the things that made Sera want to hate her.

The energy this woman gave off was something awesome to behold. Funnily enough, she liked her brazenness almost immediately. Almost, but not quite, since this was *her* home, *her* bedroom and *her* man

and no other *bitch* should feel she had the right to barge in here as if she owned the place. Sera eyes grew wide with surprise as a low growl reverberated from the back of her throat.

Justus grinned like an idiot. *Men!*

Once Sera regained her intellect, she grasped the sheet to shield her naked breasts and asked, “Who the hell are you and what gives you the right to sashay your ass into our bedroom without knocking?”

The woman’s mouth formed a perfect moue.

Sera arched her eyebrow in question at the dark-haired woman Justus had called Mariah, waiting none too patiently, for an answer. It didn’t matter to her if the woman was almost six feet tall with a body of a supermodel. She didn’t like the familiarity she had with this bedroom and this man and she was prepared to fight for what was hers.

“Sera—.”

“I’m not speaking to you.” She turned and looked at Justus her lips tightened. Had he lied about the entire virginity thing? She should have known better. He was just too damn good in bed to have been telling the truth. She rolled her eyes and said, “Okay, Mister, you best be explaining something real soon, because I’m getting pissed.”

“Oh, I can speak now!” Justus asked.

He quirked a thick brow at her sternly before his face broke in a wide grin. The scoundrel had the nerve to grin. She didn’t see anything funny about this situation. Sera locked eyes with Justus, crossed her arms across her breasts, and leaned her head to the side. “I’m still waiting.”

“Sera, love of my life, meet my sister, Mariah. Mariah, my mate, Sera.” Justus saw both women smile at each other in that secret woman’s way and shook his head. Justus dropped back on his bed pillows with a soft curse and pulled Sera’s pillow over his face, moaning in a muffled voice, “Two women in my house. I don’t stand a chance.”

“Our house.” Sera corrected, not taking her eyes off Mariah. “I’m delighted to meet you. Justus only spoke of his brother. I hadn’t realized he had a sister too. I’m wondering if there are going to be any more surprises.” She elbowed Justus.

He grunted and fell silent. *What a smart man.*

The excited chatter of two females flooded the bedchamber. Justus felt the bed sag and peeped from beneath the pillow while Mariah removed her fur coat and sat on the foot of the bed.

Sera, now comfortable knowing Mariah was family allowed the sheet to slip in her animated conversation, revealing dark areolas and it didn’t deter her from getting her point across. He felt happy; another woman was just what the doctor ordered. Another Lykian woman, to be specific, could help Sera through her transition and allow her to discuss things she didn’t wish to share with him.

Justus felt a bit jealous at how well the two were bonding. Sera had laid her claim as Alpha Female in her home and Maria respected it. Every thing was peachy.

So why was he feeling left out? He had become used to having Sera all to himself. Darius and Sylus knew their boundaries, even though Sylus made it his mission to push his boundary to the very end, and just short of him killing the Satyr.

Nevertheless, the connection that occurred between women was something no man would ever understand. He had to accept it.

Justus did what men do in a room where women outnumber them, he tuned them out, turned on his side pulling the covers over his head, and prayed that the other fellows would come and save him.

CHAPTER 10

“So you are a doctor. I can’t believe it; you’re beautiful and smart. I would have never guessed it if you hadn’t told me yourself.” Sera gawked in awe and blushed at her bluntness. “I apologize. That was just too rude.”

Sera wondered if Justus’s sister could be any more dynamic. Not only was she tall, flawless, and gorgeous—she was intelligent. Sera wondered which gene pool had these Lykians and Satyrs jumped in, to be born with such awesome bodies and breathtaking good looks.

“No, I get it all the time.” Mariah touched her hand. “People always assume I’m a fashion model or an actress and I guess dressing like a walking name-brand billboard doesn’t help matter. But I love clothes and I love shopping for them even more.”

“I’ve never cared much for shopping. I mean, why bother?” Sera shrugged. “I was always covered with a lab coat and worked late hours. I got to work before everyone else and was the last to leave, so no one ever saw any more than my collar and the bottom of my pants.”

“Well, that can change now. We can go shopping together.” She beamed. “Sera, you will have plenty of time to do anything you want to do. You can spend a century allowing Justus to pamper you and enjoy your children. And when they’re grown you can embark on an entire new career, in a new place, under a new identity.” Mariah smiled warmly. “The possibilities you have before you have become endless.”

Sera’s thoughts drifted to the past evening, as Mariah continued in her dynamic way, speaking of European versus American fashion. She enjoyed having another woman in the house to help her gain relief from the constant companionship of four very strong-willed men. Mariah also easily quelled her many growing fears about pending motherhood. After medical confirmation was staring her in the face, with it came the reality that she was truly going to become someone’s mother. Wonders never ceased.

A genteel smile of memory played around Sera’s mouth as she remembered thanking Justus properly for bringing Mariah here to help her through all of these changes. Yet, since Mariah’s arrival he appeared more pensive and sad. She wondered why.

Mariah laughed and touched Sera’s hand, causing her to snap out of her reverie and turn her attention back to what she was saying.

“Sera, you aren’t even listening. I see it is going to take a little bit to get you out of your old way of living. You probably still look at the clock and worry about getting things done by a certain hour.”

Sera blushed and looked away with a smile, shaking her head. “You got me there and I just can’t help it. Maybe once the baby is here and my hands are full, I’ll loosen up a bit.”

Sera poured Mariah another cup of freshly brewed herbal tea and they moved their conversation from the kitchen counter to a table in the breakfast nook, surrounded by bay windows, overlooking the

backyard swimming pool area. The soft hues of oak, yellow, green, and ivory made it one of Sera's favorite rooms in the mansion.

"Mariah, can I ask you something personal?"

"Of course."

"Many times, Justus has said Lucus was all the family he had left, but Darius is a cousin, and you appear, and magically he has a sister." Sera paused. "I noticed he seems a bit tense since you've arrived. Are you really his sister?"

"I see Justus is still as closed-mouthed as he's always been. I know he doesn't mean to be, it's just who he is." Mariah's eyes locked with hers in understanding. "Lucus is the only blood relative Justus has left. Darius is a cousin due to a marriage of a distant relative and I'm...well, I think if I tell you how I came to be a part of the family everything will be clearer."

Sera nodded her head.

"Lucus, Justus, and I were raised together in the same village. Justus is the brooding, quiet one, and when he finally had something to say everyone would stop and listen. After all, it had to be important for him to have an opinion on the subject," she chuckled fondly.

"And Lucus?" Sera asked.

"Yes, Lucus." Mariah shook her head and shrugged. "Lucus always had to be the center of attention. He is more like me. Dramatic and larger than life in everything he does, and I was devastated the day I realized he was my mate and I loved him because I thought we would make each other miserable. Because as children, all we did was fight."

"I thought the attraction between those who were mated is a given."

"Oh, it is. However, I was born a Lykian and until Lykians breach puberty, we are like human children. So of course I reached my puberty before he did and because he was so obnoxious I kept it to myself, but once he reached his, he began to see colors and gained his first erection." Mariah laughed aloud. "My secret was out and he chased me like I was carrying his last bone. Yet, I had been around Lucus enough to know you can never make things too easy for him. So I sent him on a merry chase."

Tears came to Mariah's eyes and Sera reached out, placing a comforting hand over hers, and squeezed. "Sera, I thought Lucus and I had forever. If I knew he'd become ill, I wouldn't have wasted so much time playing games."

"You can't feel guilty about that, Mariah. Trust me, I know. I wondered about all the time I wasted avoiding life and its issues after I found out I had cancer."

"I know, but it hurts all the same." She smiled sadly. "So, you see, Justus still sees me as his sister but there it has never been anything between us. He has only one mate, as do I and, in all honesty, Sera, I think Justus hasn't killed Lucus after all these years more for my sake than his own."

Sera sipped her tea and looked down at her hands. "He loves his brother."

"I know, but my Lucas has done some horrible things, starting with their parents' death and Justus was out for blood, as any man would be. Still, centuries ago I forced him to promise to bring my love back alive to me. To give me a chance to cure whatever madness that has seized him."

Sera looked up her eyes wide in surprise.

"I knew I could play on Justus's sense of loyalty and he was a man of his word. I know it was selfish of me, but I still love Lucas." Tears fell earnestly down her cheeks and she spread her hands wide. "Now, he has you and a babe on the way. He has too much to lose. You must help me make him understand that it's okay now to break his word. I release him from his promise."

"You think he will listen to me?" Sera asked.

"I don't know." Mariah shook her head. "I just know that if anything were to happen to him because of me, I would never forgive myself."

A companionable silence stretched between them.

"No, I won't ask it of him. We have already discussed this matter and I believe, for Justus's sake, his brother shouldn't die by his hands. He would have to carry that burden of guilt. Lucas will probably have a lot of guilt once he's cured."

Mariah's head lifted, a brief light of hope shone brightly in her eyes. "You truly think a cure can be found because I have been trying for years and have found no breakthrough?"

"Mariah, I hate to toot my own horn, but I'm very good at what I do." Sera took both of Mariah's hands in hers, hoping in some way she could soothe the look of desolation that swept over her beautiful face. "You bring me all the research information and specimens you have at your disposal. I will not stop until I come to some medical conclusion. One way or the other."

Mariah sighed in relief. "Thank you. Anything you can add to my current research would be greatly appreciated."

Sera leaned forward, bringing her head closer to Mariah; she spoke softly as to not be overheard. "Mariah there is something I've been wanting to ask. Justus doesn't know that I overheard him discussing it with Darius and I prefer him not knowing I know until he is willing to tell me himself."

"We're both in the medical profession. If we don't know anything else, we know how to keep confidences. I wouldn't dare repeat anything you have shared with me."

"Thanks. But I was wondering if Lucas had blackouts before he...he..."

"He went insane. You can say it, because that is, what it is." Mariah shrugged. "I assume you're asking because Justus has blackouts, aren't you?"

Sera nodded her head, frightened by the answer.

"Sera, I know that Justus feels he may be doing something awful during his blackouts. I've spoken with him before about this. Justus has always felt guilty for being the firstborn and not being the one to get sick. They had a bond that normal siblings don't share, but I think Justus began having blackouts to save his own sanity."

Sera frowned in confusion. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that when Lucus kills, Justus can see it as if he were there doing it himself,” Mariah explained. “I believe the blackouts started occurring to keep Justus from having to remember the horror of what he was seeing.”

Sera nodded her head. “That would explain why he hasn’t had one, at least not around me. We share a bed and I’m a light sleeper. I would know it if he’d been disappearing in the middle of the night, but then there hasn’t been another murderer listed in the local paper since we’ve been sharing a room.”

“Sera, I have learned that just because a body hasn’t turned up in the news doesn’t mean Lucus has stopped. Since Justus has lost his link with him, the gods only know what he’s up to and where he’s at,” Mariah surmised.

Sera could see the fear, stark and vivid, glittering in Mariah’s eyes. She wished she had some words that could ease her pain, but she couldn’t begin to know how she would feel if it was Justus who was doing such unspeakable things. She could only hope she would never find out. She hoped Justus would continue to be okay. She placed her hand on her stomach and thought, *please, God, let my baby be okay too.*

“I don’t know what he’s up to, Mariah, but Justus picked up his scent on the property down by the lake. He’s been here. He was also at the hospital, because he managed to place a note in my suitcase telling me to make Justus see reason.”

Sera ran her hands along her arms to stifle a sudden chill as she said, “I still haven’t figured out how Lucus managed to get in my hospital room and no one noticed.”

Mariah set up straighter in her chair. “Sera, sweetie, I thought you knew.”

“Knew what?”

“Lucus and Justus are twins.”

Sera eyes watered at the magnitude of pain Justus must be going through. She squeezed her hands together to keep them from shaking.

“Damn,” Mariah cursed softly, biting nervously on her bottom lip. “I could kill myself for being the one to tell you all of this. I feel like I’m telling you things that, maybe for his own reasons, Justus didn’t think you were ready to know and, by the looks of you, I’m beginning to think he’s right.”

“No...No...I’m fine, I’m just trying to take it all in. Now it makes so much more sense why Justus has to be the one to capture Lucus, also, as a twin, it explains why he keeps so much to himself. The one person he could share his darkest times with is not here for him, so he doesn’t speak about it at all.”

“Yes, as I said, Lucus was the reckless and larger-than-life twin, while Justus who was first born, is always the ever-patient one, taking blame for Lucus’s mishaps. He was his brother’s protector,” Mariah supplied. “He still feels that way, Sera.”

“Maybe Lucus feels the same,” Sera said her voice full of hope. “I mean, think about it Mariah, if he wanted Justus dead, he could have came after him a long time ago. So I guess the question is, what does Lucus want?”

Mariah shook her head sadly. "I don't know. Justus is the only full bloodline he has left, maybe that's why he can't bring himself to harm him, but he definitely wants something. But what? For some reason, he hasn't contacted me and the last time I saw him was the last night we were all together as a family and happy. There is a big yearly function the Darkworld has for all species together. It was a perfect night."

A dreamy smile came to Mariah's face. "Lucus and I discussed starting a family at the next New Moon, but by the time that night rolled around, it was like I was with an entirely different man. The mood swings and anger, along with the nights he wouldn't bother returning at all."

"What could have happened to cause such a turnabout?" Sera asked.

Mariah picked up her cup of tea and sipped before answering, "I have no clue. All I know is after that night it was like a whiplash of madness through the Lykian males. I had more patients than I could handle. Complaining of headaches and fits of rage, but the entire tests I administered were clean. I couldn't find anything wrong except their adrenalin levels seemed to be higher than normal."

"How did Justus react after that night?"

"He was fine, but then again he didn't stay. He made his usual courtesy appearance and left. He hates formal affairs." Maria smiled.

"Did he eat or drink anything during the time he was there?"

Mariah shrugged. "I don't think so. It was so long ago so I can't be sure." She tilted her head in question. "Wait, you think someone deliberately did something that night that affected the Lykian men only?"

Sera sighed. "I don't know what I'm thinking. I just find it strange that you have this big event and then the men of your species started having these psychotic breakdowns. You tell me, you were there."

"Who...I mean how?" Mariah's face twisted in disbelief. "It would explain a lot. However, there had been a peace treaty amongst us for years before this happened. Why would someone tempt the wrath of the Ancients?"

"Maybe because they knew they could get away it. Haven't they?" Sera pointed out and asked, "How is the population of your species these days?"

"Not good, but neither are the Satyrs and I didn't hear of this happening to their species."

"Maybe not this, but something must have happened. Have you spoken with Darius about it?"

"Why would I? It never dawned on me." Mariah came to her feet and started pacing. "Oh, Sera, we need to get on this right away. I will have all my research shipped to me and maybe Justus can prepare us a place to work."

"He already told me he can have the basement set up for me when I told him I wanted to go back to work." Sera smiled, feeling hopeful.

Mariah slapped her hands together. "Okay...okay, that is a start. Now, when it comes to the chemical testing, leave that up to me. I don't want you handling anything that may affect you and the baby. Justus will have my butt."

“Deal. Now, going back to my theory, is there a species that has thrived over the years more than the others?”

Mariah pondered over the question. Sera could see her mind was remembering and calculating several possibilities. “Sera, with the exception of two species, all others were slaves up until the late 1200’s.”

“Which were?”

“The Ancients and the Vampires.” Mariah answered.

Sera eyes grew as wide as saucers. “You are telling me Vampires are real.”

“About as real as shifting wolves and Satyrs.” Mariah quirked a brow and grinned at her.

“What are the Ancients?”

“Gods and Goddesses, they are our beginning, middle, and end.”

“Would they allow this to happen to creatures they created?”

“Does your God allow murder and wars to thrive?”

Chagrin spoiled Sera’s features. “Good point.”

“When do we get started?”

“As soon as possible.” Sera lifted her cup to her lips and blanched; her tea had become cold. She couldn’t believe how easy it was to talk to Mariah. Sera had never been the type to have women friends, not even when she was in college during the most outgoing time of her life.

“If you want, I can fill you in on some of the research I’ve already done until our lab items come in.” Mariah offered.

“You know, Mariah, I’m glad you came here. I didn’t realize how much I needed someone to talk to,” Sera said as she placed the cup back down on the table. “I’ve never really had a real friend...”

“You do now.” Mariah reached out and took her hand. “You can talk to me about anything. We are more than friends. We’re sister-in-laws...family.”

Sera couldn’t stop the wide smile that parted her lips or the unshed tears shimmering in her eyes. “Family. I can’t believe it. One day I went to sleep with no one and the next I wake up to find myself with husband who, just by loving me, has changed my entire world. I’m feeling very lucky.”

“Believe it. Now that you are a member of the Darkworld, you have a huge *family* waiting to meet you. You’re married to the Alpha Lykian and Justus is on the Council, so you might as well get use to lots of friends dropping in and going to several functions.”

Sera laughed. “I thought you said Justus didn’t do functions.”

“No, he doesn’t do functions well.” Mariah corrected. “He still does the same thing he did when we were younger and his father was the Lykians’ Councilman, he makes appearance and leaves.”

“Well, functions I’m good at.” Sera confided. “I was always working one crowd or another for research funds for the university and several of the foundations I assisted. I even took ballroom dancing, because most of the deals I gained were agreed upon during a waltz.”

“Uh-oh, sounds like my brother is in trouble.”

Sera nodded in agreement and both women broke out in laughter. The conversation moved to shopping again, this time for baby items to decorate one of the guest rooms into a nursery.

Sera placed a hand on the growing swell of her stomach. Without the benefit of a nine-month developing period, she had to adapt quickly because her body was changing rapidly. She didn't even need the confirmation of a pregnancy test but it was good to have to put in the baby book she was going to start. "I can't believe I'm thinking of doing a baby book. I'm so happy."

"It's okay to be happy." Mariah smiled at her.

Sera was surprised; she hadn't realized she said that aloud, but yeah, it was okay because it was true. The last time she was this happy, the Tibbs family was finalizing her adoption and the next thing she knew she received the fatal phone call of their death.

Happiness terrified her; it left her in a state of wondering when something horrible would happen.

Justus stood naked as he shifted from wolf to man. Darius and Sylus, who remained in their natural Satyr state of naked human upper bodies, hooved feet, and pelts of hair-laden legs, stood behind him.

"Damn, the track ends here and then nothing. How could Lucus's scent just disappear here at the edge of the woods, then nothing?"

Justus's frustrations mounted. He now had Sera in his life and a child on the way and he no longer had the patience to deal with his twin's elusive and mad behavior.

"Justus, I know how you and Darius feel about Lucus, but I've seen some of the carnage left behind in his wake. Have either of you considered what we may have to do once we find him?"

Justus straightened from his crouched position and looked at Sylus, the abrupt voice of reason. The question was a stab in his heart, but worth asking. "Sy, I wish I could say that I believe my brother can still be saved. With each passing year, I'd thought our bond was enough to have him come to me and ask for my help. He hasn't."

"And now?" Sylus asked. "Now, I don't even have the connection we shared. Yet, his behavior's changing. Why now?"

"It could be because you've changed." Darius spoke up. "When Sera came into your life, she opened up the world in ways you've never seen. You have emotions you never felt. Lucus has always had these things since he came into puberty because of Mariah being his mate. Maybe, your feelings are reminding him of what he used to have."

"That could be a possibility. All I know after tracking my brother for all these years is that this is unusual for Lucus. I am usually tracking him; he has never come to me." Justus shook his head. "Now he has been on my property, obviously watching and waiting. Why and for what, I have no idea, but it scares the hell out of me that he has changed his pattern and after I found my mate."

"Justus, do you think he would harm Sera?" Darius asked, shuffling restlessly on his hooved feet.

“Hell, I don’t know. He’s left a trail of mutilated women in his wake. If it were Lucas the man, my brother,” he sighed heavily, “I would say he couldn’t hurt Sera because she’s mine.” Justus stomach clenched tight. “We all know if he was in the right frame of mind, he would’ve never chosen this coward’s way. He would have allowed himself to be contained until a cure could be found.”

“I knew after what happened to your parents, we lost Lucas.” Darius gritted his teeth together. “His instincts have returned to the old ways and I, for one feel guilty about the lives he’s taken since that faithful day. We could’ve prevented all this bloodshed, if we had taken care of Lucas when we had the chance.”

Justus clenched his fist. Darius spoke the truth, and he couldn’t argue the point any longer. He hadn’t been there to save his parents, but he would die before he allowed Lucas to do the same thing to his wife and baby.

“I agree with you, Darius. I can’t take the same chances with Sera’s life as I did with my parents. From now on we...we hunt Lucas, to kill.” He heaved a heart-wrenching sigh. “Come, let us return home before the women start to worry.” With ease, he shifted into his wolf form, leading the way back to the house and back to Sera.

“Sitting in here is better.” Mariah announced. “You can put your feet up, your ankles are a bit swollen.

Sera and Mariah set in quiet comfort in the video room lounging on chaises with a serving table between them. Kahn had made sure they had plenty of chilled bottled water, fresh fruit, popcorn, and Sera’s favorite craving food of steak tartar, sliced raw steak, and *capicollo*, thinly sliced cured ham on day-old French bread.

In pensive silence, Sera waited for Kahn to depart and her new sister-in-law to settle comfortably on the matching burgundy chaise. “Okay, Mariah, give over. Tell me more of what Justus was like before he became his brother’s keeper.”

Mariah snorted out a laugh. “I wish I could say there was a Justus before he became Lucas’s keeper; however, I believe they came out of their mother’s womb with Justus waiting to catch Lucas, from hitting the ground running.”

Sera chuckled. She could imagine Justus being a little boy running behind his brother, making sure he didn’t touch anything hot, climb too high, or put anything in his mouth that wasn’t supposed to be there. One of the things she never had was a sibling around to watch over her. She envied their family bond.

“Well, tell me anything, he speaks so rarely of his past, and when he does I feel like he is giving me a treat.” Sera took a sip of bottled water. Her heartbeat sped up in anticipation and fear that Mariah wouldn’t want to continue because the memories might be too painful for her. “I guess when you’ve lived as long as you guys have, there are a lot of bad memories.”

“Yes,” Mariah agreed and said, “But there are a lot of good ones, too.” A soft smile came to her mouth. “Justus is a decree unto himself. He’s loyal to a fault, especially to his twin brother. Not just because

they are twins, but because Justus is just that damn good to everyone.” She shrugged, shaking her dark ponytail. “My parents had hopes that Justus was my mate. At first, I did too, because loving Justus would have been so damn easier.”

They shared a laugh.

“Still, you can’t cheat the fates. Justus knew I wasn’t his mate and when he hit puberty and couldn’t see colors and everything that comes with finding one’s mate by being around me, it was confirmed.”

“This entire *destined mate* thing is hard to believe. Justus said he’s never been aroused and a man as sexy and fine as he is still being a virgin is even harder to believe.” Sera shrugged. “I still don’t think I believe it.”

“We are a complicated people, Sera. First, if Justus says it, believe it. He doesn’t lie and when he does, he doesn’t do it well, and give him a few days of holding it in, he’s going to blather the truth. If Lucus and I wanted to get away with anything, we’d have to ditch *Sir Righteous Justus*, that’s what we used to call him.”

Mariah picked up a hand full of popcorn and said between chewing, “Justus has always know that his female wasn’t Lykian and if he was to remain pure in male form for his mate, he was determined to stay that way in wolf form also.”

Sera gazed locked with Mariah. “So what you’re saying is you *can* have sex in wolf form without it being with your eternal mate.”

“Of course. You think any species could last centuries without any form of sexual contact?” Maria lifted a thinly arched brow. “I couldn’t. Neither did Lucus, but Justus, as far as I know, did. If he did anything with another Lykian female, I have never heard and things like that usually get around. I found out Lucus had mounted many in wolf form before we married.”

“Didn’t it bother you?” Sera questioned.

“No, I was there.”

Mariah winked at her and Sera’s mouth dropped wide. “Oh.”

Mariah leaned forward. “Did you know that because you were a born mate of a Lykian, that it is why you developed cancer in the first place?”

Sera became alert. “How can this be?”

“Human females must carry a certain gene, which is usually passed on from their mothers and so forth for generation after generation. If this human’s mate does not find her by her twenty-fifth birthday to fertilize the gene, it poisons her system and cancer develops.” Mariah explained. “If she dies before he finds her then, he has to wait for her next life cycle and pray he finds her in time.”

“Reincarnation?” Sera shook her head in disbelief. “Mariah, do you know how crazy this sounds? You are a medical doctor! We deal in the real. You know there is no such thing!”

Mariah’s head leaned to the side. “So, you aren’t married to a species that can change from a human into a scary beast, or into a common mountain wolf?”

“Still, Mariah—.”

“Oh, is it crazier than Darius and Sylus becoming half-man, half-animal and galloping about the estate?” Mariah leaned back, dropping her hand against her knee with a deep sigh. “Sera, is it crazier than you having the ability to give birth so soon after conception?”

Sera felt she was being impolite for suggesting Mariah was spouting lies just because it was beyond her analytical mind. She accepted all the changes. *So she thought.*

Mariah was right, if everything else had been proven true beyond her beliefs, why not this? How else would a Lykian predetermine to a human female with this gene, unless they had more than one chance?

“Sera, you’re part of Justus’s fate, never doubt that.” She touched her hand and squeezed fondly. “I believe that if anyone can make Justus give up on Lucus and start living his own life, it’s you.”

“Do you want him to give up on Lucus? I’m not blind, Mariah, I can see your pain and the love you have in your heart for Lucus.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Sera, I miss my husband so much, it hurts to inhale each day without him. I nearly died from grief when I lost him to the demon inside him. I can no longer hold Justus to his promise, now that he has found you. Finding you is a sign that the time has come, that maybe we *both* should just let him go.”

Sera felt warmed by Mariah’s word, however it made her want to help her find the same happiness, or at least get some closure. The only way to do that was to get to the full truth of what caused a handful of Lykian males to change.

“Thank you for the thought, Mariah, but now that I know we are speaking of Justus’s twin, I can’t give up on finding out what caused this.” Sera tucked away strands of frizzy new-growth hair behind her ear before plucking a couple of grapes off the vine and popping them in her mouth.

“Sera, look, trust me from experience. You can get caught up in all of this and spend nearly an eternity trying to solve it.” Mariah warned. “You have a child on the way; don’t even let this bother you.”

“Mariah, what if what Lucus carries is something hereditary? Couldn’t it stand to reason that once certain Lykian males become sexually active it alters their biological makeup in some way, triggering off some sort of imbalance that causes madness? If I have a son, he could be born with this defect, if it’s indeed something new in the male Lykian species gene makeup.”

Mariah nodded her head in understanding and shrugged. “I don’t know, Sera, sounds like a long shot to me. I would think if it was something that simple someone would have discovered it by now.” She washed a hand over her face with a deep sigh of frustration. “Sera, I don’t think I can handle having false hopes all over again.”

“Mariah, *you* can’t give up now, and I can’t allow Justus to do so either. We need Lucus, and we need him *alive*”

CHAPTER 11

Sera walked into the bedroom she shared with Justus. She'd been on her feet; working non-stop in the makeshift lab Justus had set up for her Mariah. Even though Justus felt secure keeping her chained to the security of the property, Sera wasn't feeling very secure. Even though the men spoke in hushed tones, with her acute hearing she knew Lucas was still making his presence known about the estate.

With each passing day, Justus was becoming more frustrated that he couldn't sense his brother's movements anymore. Every time he found Lucas's trail he would lose it in the middle of nowhere.

Sera undressed in front of the elongated bedroom mirror and stared at her reflection. Lovingly, she placed a hand over the growing swell of her stomach, smiling as she received a sound kick to the palm of her hand.

She wished Justus could be here to enjoy the pleasures of these precious movements; she so enjoyed the look of amazement and obvious male satisfaction on his handsome face. It seemed like they barely had any time together since the day of the picnic. Justus was out on his nightly surveillance of the pit traps and, once again, she was going to have to retire alone. She wasn't looking forward to it.

A freshly-showered and shaved Justus released the towel he wore low around his hips and allowed it to pool around his feet. Sera rested in their bed; feminine curves, velvety flesh, warmth, and the fragrance of her favorite mango lotion made for a heady combination. He continued staring at her sleeping form while pulling his damp hair back off his face and securing it into a ponytail at the nape.

He loved her and the secret world they shared. Subtle whispers, gentle laughter, sighs and passionate moans lingered in his memories. Justus knew from across a room, what she was thinking, just by the way she looked at him. After making love, they'd lie there in the quiet when no words were necessary, still he would think to himself how fortunate he was to have her. *I'll keep you safe, Sera, I promise.*

Naked and semi-erect, he slid beneath the warmth of the covers and spooned against Sera's cozy, yielding body. His penis lengthened and swelled as he pressed against the crevice of her butt cheeks.

Coming up on his elbow, he reached out, tracing the feminine outline of Sera's hip and thigh with the tips of his fingers. His penis twitched. Ever so slowly, he traveled upward across her arm and shoulder, smoothing her hair off her face while loving her with his eyes.

His body tightened as Sera snuggled her buttocks against his cock. Justus's penis extended to a full, heavy erection. He thought his heart would jolt from his chest, while he fought the overwhelming need to be inside her.

Every day, his love deepened and intensified. The smoldering flame he'd spy in her eyes, when he caught her staring at him, only made him more anxious to bring this business with Lucus to some form of conclusion.

He never thought it was possible to feel such deep emotions, it threatened to unman him by its sheer intensity and it made him soft. It was time for him to consider a change. Justus no longer had the stomach for the hunt; he was about to be a man with a family, and it was time to leave the hunting to the younger Lykians.

Justus rested his hand over the growing heaviness of her breast, tweaking and rolling her nipple, until it hardened between his fingers. He smiled as Sera frowned, moaned, and licked her full lips in her sleep. He dipped his head and grazed his lips against Sera's neck, continuing to caress her body intently.

Sera awoken to the most joyful sensations. Sera was aware of his naked chest pressed against her back, of his hands sliding up and over the roundness of her stomach in a loving touch. Most of all, she was aware of his erection's hot satin against her bottom. She tilted her head to look up at him. He had a scar beneath his square chin that she hadn't noticed before, because of the shadow of the beard he usually wore. She wondered if he received it during a battle centuries ago, as he had the many others that marred his otherwise-perfect body. She still found it surreal to love a man that had lived through historical events she read about as a young girl.

His muscles felt like iron rippling beneath human skin, a guise over what really lay dormant underneath. She couldn't wait to experience more of her own abilities, but due to her wayward hormonal imbalances, she was finding shifting difficult. As usual, he was understanding and patient. *God, I love him.*

"Hi" A wide, sensuous grin parted his lips.

Sera was familiar with the husky ache in his voice, and she felt the same. "Hi, back to yah." She nuzzled her nose against his chin.

He grasped her chin between his fingers, holding her face in place as his lips shifted and teased, settling perfectly in a breath-stealing kiss.

"No more talking," he whispered against her lips before raising his head to look into her eyes.

"No more talking," she agreed dreamily. Sera turned away, burying her face against the arm he rested across her pillow, allowing him access to continue cherishing her sensitized flesh.

Justus's large hand stroked and massaged her bottom cheeks, allowing a finger to smooth through the crease over her tightly-puckered anus. Sera whimpered and squirmed against him. A soft startled gasp escaped her as he lifted her leg and placed it over his muscular hairy thigh, giving him more access to her feminine core.

This opened up Sera's vulva, leaving her exposed to the gentle but firm stimulation against her clitoris, until it hardened and stood erect from its feminine hood, throbbing and pulsing with each heightened heartbeat.

She pumped wantonly against his probing fingers, loving the familiar way he eased her with his hand. Sera moaned her complaint, as his fingers eased out of her opening. She felt empty without a part of him inside her. However, his neglect was brief. Sera moved anxiously against the in and out motion of his fingers, while her hands held her aching breast, tweaking the nipples between her forefingers and thumbs.

“Oh...yesss...ahh...” She pushed towards her peak. Her voice was raw with need. She heard it and she knew he heard it, too.

Her arm reached over and cradled his head as his mouth moved against her throat licking, suckling and nipping, until a passion mark appeared in the wake of his tongue.

Sera’s body shivered, exploded, and convulsed, as she clutched and twisted the bed sheets, to help her ride through the intensity. Before she could regain her breath, Justus was easing his engorged cock inside her wet opening. His hand rested protectively on her belly as he glided them into a rocking motion.

Sera found it decadent making love on her side. She hardly had to do any of the work and enjoyed a whole lot of pleasure, including the ability to close and tighten her thighs, adding intensity and allowing her to control the pace of Justus’s thrust.

A single sound tore from her throat as she came once more. His pace quickened; puffs of breath blew hot from his mouth, ruffling the hair at the nape of her neck. Their sweaty bodies slapped loudly in the soft light of the room.

Sera’s entire body felt like it was on fire; muscles rippled and strained under skin. She heard ripping of the bed sheet as her nails extended and curved into claws. Sera came up on her hands and knees with Justus guidance, his cock remained buried deep inside her locking them together as he thrust from behind.

Hair rippled over her body before she stiffened and orgasm brought her into the form of a wolf, Justus shifting with her...humping...humping...filling her as no one else ever could. He rode her hard and she gave as good as she got.

The whelp that escaped her elongated snout was all animal as she felt Justus bite into her shoulder with his final thrust. He released a deafening howl, rolling back on his side, bringing her back with him; they shimmered and shifted back into their human form.

Wrapped up in his arms, bodies still attached, Sera cried.

“Hello sexy, it’s about time you woke up.” Justus pulled Sera to him, resting her head on his shoulder. “I hardly slept at all, I’ve been so worried.”

“I’m sorry, baby. I’m okay.”

Sera reassured him but it wasn’t enough for him; he wanted to know why she cried herself to sleep after they had the best mind-blowing sex he’s every known. Well, more mind blowing than their last mind-blowing session. *Oh hell, all of it is good.* He couldn’t imagine sex being any better with any other woman but Sera. He had the best.

“Why were you crying? Did I hurt you?” His brow darkened in worry.

“Oh no. You’d never hurt me,” she said with an assurance that made him feel good. Very good because it meant she trusted him completely, be it in human form or his natural form.

Justus tightened his hold. “Talk to me.”

“I finally shifted and every fiber of my body was alive, the feeling is so unbelievable and more intense than anything I’d experienced in my entire life. I wept out of joy and a bit of fear, I suppose.”

His shoulders fell. “So, you are afraid of me.”

She lifted her head from his shoulders, shoving her hand through her hair to stare at him. “Of course not. She shook her head. “Never, could I be afraid of you. Don’t ever think that. I love you and I trust you with my life and our baby’s life.”

“Then tell me about what you fear so that I may take it from you.” He cocked his head in question; strands of dark blond hair drooped over his shoulder, where her wandering fingers had tugged it from the band. He tucked it behind his ear.

“Baby, I don’t know if anyone can take away these fears. It’s something I have to deal with on my own. I think only time, with your love, and giving me countless hours of more happiness than I can stand.” Her finger traced his nose, causing him to grin.

She returned his smile and finished what she was saying, “Loving me will help me get over my fears of losing you and everything you have brought into my life.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” he crooned, kissing her face, and lips while silently praying that soon he could truly put all her fears to rest. He wouldn’t be satisfied until Lucas was no longer a threat. “Soon, all this craziness with Lucas will be over with, and I swear you’ll feel safer. I going to give up hunting and find something else to do. You are going to see so much of me you’ll grow tired of me.”

“Never,” Sera said passionately, bringing his palm to her lips in a kiss. He could tell there was something on her mind and he waited.

“Because we both have been busy, this is the first chance I’ve had to discuss the issue of Lucas you...”

Justus snorted in disgust. “I can’t remember a day that I haven’t brought Lucas up. I apologize, sweetheart.” He kissed the top of her head, his hands soothing the length of her back.

“Sera, I spoke with Darius and Sylus. We all agreed it’s time to start hunting my brother down earnestly and end all these years of suffering. I have too much to lose by keeping Lucas alive.” Sera locked her gaze with his and he gave pause.

“Since Mariah has been here, I’ve come to know so much more about you and Lucas.”

Justus rolled his eyes heavenward. “I can only imagine the stories Mariah has filled your head with.”

“Only the good things, so don’t you say a word to her about it,” Sera defended Mariah. “Anyway, it has given me a chance to understand why you have fought for the right to capture Lucas alive.”

“Well, that has changed.” Justus said, but he couldn’t refrain from the sadness that crept in his tone.

Sera turned in his arm and sat up in the bed, giving him her full attention. Her hair disheveled from his eager fingers and her full breasts stood out, once more, inviting his touch. Everything about her showed signs of a woman thoroughly made love to, which made him harden and crave to make love to her all over again. However, he'd been in her company enough to know when she had something serious on her mind; she wouldn't welcome the distraction until she had her say.

He shifted and pulled the pillows higher behind his back for a more comfortable position. With loose fists resting on his abdomen, he encouraged her to tell him what was on her mind.

"I want you to bring Lucas in alive."

That was the last thing he had expected to hear from her.

"Sera, I don't understand. Weren't you the one that convinced me Lucas was too far gone to help him? What would be the reason for bringing him in alive if he can't be helped?"

"I was wrong." She gave him a lop-sided grin. "Well, maybe not wrong. It's just that now, things are different."

"What's different? Did Mariah use guilt to bind you into a promise as she did me centuries ago?" Justus asked, his voice rose in agitation.

"No," Sera placed a calming hand on his arm. "Of course not. But she did make me see Lucas as he was before this happened to him, not to mention she told me something you failed to tell me."

"Which is?"

"Lucas is your twin. Why wouldn't you share that with me?"

Justus shrugged, "Because it makes no difference."

"It makes a big difference and you know it. Everyone knows there is a bond between twins that none can fathom." Sera stated. "To kill Lucas would be like killing a part of you. Also, Mariah and I may be onto something."

Justus kept his eager hope tempered. There have been too many disappointments in the past to allow hope to prevail. "Can you tell me how, after all this time with hundreds of Lykians doctors on the job in our homeland, have you and Mariah found a possible cure down there in that mini-lab?"

"Hey, that's a mini-lab with all the best equipment available, I might add." Sera teased. She reached out and caressed the frown from his face. "Baby, I'm not saying it's a cure yet, but in one of the tissue cultures I found some similarities to a strain that I worked on years ago. It was killing off the population of Ethiopian wolves and infecting the people of the village around them."

"Wolves?"

Sera sighed. "Yes. That is where your Lykians' testing failed them. They are trying to treat your kind, looking for diseases that affect humans alone. Well, from the way I, as a human, see you, no offense but I see you as a wolf that can change into a human."

“No offense taken.” Justus stated with a half-grin. “We’ve been pretending to be humans for so many centuries in this forced hiding of who we really are, not man or beast, that we have forgotten the days we used to run in our true form.”

“I’m just sorry you had to hide at all. It’s understandable, due to the ignorance of people, that you will feel the need to do so. We, as a people, still haven’t accepted the fact that the world must be shared equally with people of color and that issue is centuries old, too.” Sera shook her head in disgust. “I can’t imagine trying to get the same people to accept different species. Fear alone would cause people to want to kill what they don’t understand.”

“That is why we remain hidden. If humans call other humans ‘aliens,’” Justus snorted on a laugh. “What the hell would they call us?”

“Monsters.” Sera answered seriously. “Tenants of the Darkworld exist, but only as fictional characters in our books and movies. You are the stories we tell our children at Halloween, to scare them.”

Justus couldn’t mask the sadness that touched his heart at Sera’s words. It was true. Every day, in one form of medium or another, people of the Darkworld are taunted and mocked by the commercial stupidity of those who didn’t know of their existence, especially during the Halloween season

“Come here, baby.” Sera laid back against stacked pillows, opening her arms to him.

Without hesitation, he went into her arms, resting his head against the swell of her stomach. With his acute hearing, he could hear the strong heartbeat of his child. It soothed all of his senses.

Justus closed his eyes wearily as he felt Sera’s fingers remove the band from his hair, freeing it to the soothing combing of her fingers against his scalp. “Tell me more about this strain you have found that is similar to what was found in these *African* wolves.”

“These particular wolves are *Canis simensis*, a rare breed and the only wolf breed to be found in Africa. They are nearly extinct due to rabies and distemper transferred through breeding from the more domestic dogs.”

“What is this *distemper* you mentioned?”

“It’s a contagious, incurable, often fatal, multi-systemic viral disease.”

“I speak eleven languages, twenty, if you include those that no longer exists.” Justus stated, but not in a smug way, just as a statement of fact. “But I don’t speak doctor, so what are you saying exactly? In addition, I heard *incurable*. That, I understood.”

Sera chuckled and tugged his hair playfully. “I’m saying it’s a disease that can attack many organs of the body.”

Justus refrained from asking the many questions that swirled in his mind and allowed her to continue uninterrupted. He adored the excitement that came to her face whenever she talked about her work. It was very arousing. *Truthfully, watching Sera breathe arouses me.* His penis agreed.

“The good thing is you aren’t all canine. You’re a different species altogether; therefore, we’re dealing with two sets of organs in your general makeup. I’m sure after more testing to confirm my theory on this matter, there’s a possibility this viral infection could be treated and cured like rabies in humans.”

“Sera, I hear the words ‘possible’ and ‘could be.’ It gives me pause to think this is the answer we have been seeking.” Justus sighed, the tiredness of the hunt weighing heavily on him.

“I can’t be definite about such things, Justus. Even rabies can be fatal if treatment is not administered in a timely manner and by all accounts if it was rabies and your brother was human he would be dead by now.” Sera leaned over and whispered in his ear, “With that said, I’m the doctor and as long as I have hope of finding a cure all you have to do is lie there looking handsome and not worry your gorgeous head about it.”

Justus felt his body tighten as Sera’s hot breath blew and caressed his ear while she spoke. Maybe he wasn’t that tired after all. He sat up long enough to gather her in his arms and pull her form on top of him.

“Doctor Woman of mine,” he whispered against her laughing, parted mouth. “Do you have any idea that all this medical talk turns me on?”

“Well, did I tell you that it’s possible for humans to contract an asymptomatic CDV infection—?”

He lifted his head cocking a brow lifted in question, “CDV?”

“*Canine Distemper Virus*,” she reminded.

“Oh yeah.” His mouth made its way lower as he spread her thighs wider. “Keep talking.”

He smiled in between licking as Sera spouted off medical terms that he would’ve sworn she was making up. In the end, his *oral* skills outweighed hers, and eventually she couldn’t speak at all, not for the rest of the night.

CHAPTER 12

“Thank the gods, Sera, come look!” Mariah shouted, backing away from the microscope.

Sera leaned over as far as her growing belly allowed and peered down into the microscope at the active virus cells they were testing. “Oh, God, Mariah, it’s working! It’s working!”

Mariah rushed forward and wrapped her arms around Sera’s neck in a hug. “We did it. The vaccine is devouring the viral cells.”

“Now, all we have to do is overnight some of the vials to San Francisco, so the doctors at Darkworld Corporation can try it on the Lykians they have sequestered.” Sera clapped her hand with happiness. She couldn’t wait to tell Justus the news.

“I will get on it.” Mariah said, looking at her oddly. “That is the fifth time you looked at the clock. What’s going on?”

“I don’t know, Justus should have come in for dinner by now.” Sera rubbed the ache at the small of her back. “Darius and Sylus came in over an hour ago. They said Justus went for a swim in the lake and he would be along.”

Mariah shrugged her slender shoulders. “I’m sure everything is okay, but I know Justus will have my hide if he knew I kept you in this lab this long.”

Sera sucked her teeth and rolled her eyes. “That man has become so protective since I became pregnant, that he is driving me crazy. Don’t worry, my feet are killing me, so I’m through for the night.” Sera removed her lab coat and hung it on a hook. “Are you good to finish up here?”

“Of course, hon, go ahead and go to bed. I got everything from here.” Mariah’s mouth spread into a wide grin. “How about we convince the fellows to take us out tomorrow night to celebrate?”

Sera gave her a doubtful look. “Yeah, right. If you can get Justus to agree to take a break, I’ll be forever in your debt.”

“Deal!” Mariah giggled. “Night, sweetie. Since we’re finished here until we hear from the corporate office, why don’t you sleep in and I’ll get up early. I will get these samples sent out.”

“Sounds like a plan to me.” Sera stifled a yawn and chuckled. “See you in the morning.”

“Night!”

Sera eased her way up the stairs from the basement laboratory into the kitchen, closing the door behind her. With a groan, she arched backward and forward to work the kinks out of her aching back.

“You are killin’ me, kid.” She spoke aloud, rubbing her belly, and snorted on a laugh, as she received a good kick. “I see you’re just like your father, you always have to have the last word, don’t you?”

Sera reached to shut off the kitchen light and paused, looking out the kitchen window; she spotted Justus standing outside staring at the house. “Mmm, looks like daddy’s got a lot on his mind tonight. How

about we go get him and tell him the good news?"

She made her way to the door. "We might even convince him to allow us to shift and go for a run. Wouldn't you like that, *babykins*? I don't know about you but I need some fresh air and exercise after being cooped up in that lab for weeks on end."

Sera opened the kitchen door, a smile of welcome on her lips. As he stepped forward the clouds broke, allowing the full moonlight to blanket the surroundings as if someone had turned on an outside nightlight. It was a perfect night for a run.

"Hey, baby, how was the temperature in the lake? Maybe we can go back." Sera halted, a startled look of horror came to her face. "Oh, my god...no!" She turned to run; the scream on her lips died, as a rough hand cuffed her mouth and dragged her backward.

She thrashed and struggled, her hands protectively holding her stomach, as a silent prayer for help went through her thoughts.

His breath blew hot and heavy against her ear as he spoke. "Hello, pretty...pretty Sera, welcome to the family. You don't know how long I've waited to get you alone. First, I caught my dear brother alone and off his guard down by the lake and now this. A real family reunion."

Sera felt as if she could no longer breathe. He tightened his hold around her neck. All she knew was she was going to die. Her eyes fluttered closed, seeing only darkness.

In what appeared to be an old mineshaft within the estate grounds, Justus paced the small, makeshift niche that held him imprisoned. It was a crude opening sealed with bars, chains, and a padlock, crude but effective and obviously especially prepared for him.

From all the equipment, test tubes, and hospital bed, it was obvious Lucas has been planning this for some time. How could he manage to get all of this onto his property without him knowing? It was as confusing as everything else he had been able to do lately, such as trespassing on the property without setting off any of the alarms or falling into the many traps set about the estate. It wasn't possible unless he had someone helping him.

Still, who would betray him? Most of his staff had been with him for years and had proven to be most faithful. He would deal with finding the traitor later. Right now, he needed to know that she was okay.

"Sera...if you can hear me, open your beautiful eyes for me." Justus called out to her unconscious form from his small, makeshift prison. Fear stuck in his heart like a thorn; she looked so frail and still. He leaned his head against the bars. "Please, baby, give me a sign that you are all right before I go mad."

Still there was no movement. Justus cursed, hitting the bars with his fist to seize his mounting rage. Seeing his wife so helpless made him feel impotent and being completely powerless was something Justus wasn't used to. Kin or not, Lucas would pay with his life if he hurt Sera.

Justus stood from his crouched position in shame. He'd let Sera down. He knew better than anyone the risk he was putting her in by bringing her into his life, while his brother was still running amuck. Still, he

had been so afraid of losing her, he put his needs first and if anything happened to her or his child, he would never forgive himself for being the one to place her in danger.

Justus caught his brother's scent. Reflectively baring his teeth, a deep growl emanated from his throat, as he watched his mirror image stride into the cave. "Lucus, damn you!" Justus snarled. "You have me now, so let Sera go."

Lucus's lashes fluttered in confusion, as if he'd just become aware that he wasn't alone in the cave. "Well, dear brother, I have both of you right where I want you. So why would I want to give up one of you now?"

"Because she's an innocent and she's carrying my child, your first nephew or niece." Justus searched his mind for the any words that would make Lucus understand reason. "Lucus, you, better than anyone, know how much we need Lykian children to save our dying species. Please ...you don't want to hurt a Lykian child, do you?" Justus continued to watch Lucus's every movement as he walked over to silently check the fetal monitor printout.

"My *nephew* is fine." Lucus said aloud.

Justus eyes watered with unshed tears. "My...son?"

Lucus brow lifted in surprise. "So, you didn't know that you were going to have a male child? These modern contraptions are a wonder. Lets you see the baby before it's born. I can't believe you haven't utilized one to find out the sex of your child."

"Sera wanted it to be a surprise," Justus said quietly, still taking in the news.

Lucus moved to sit at a lab table of test tubes. He took a vial with reddish-black liquid it in and placed it in a machine of sorts. It started to spin.

"Do you even know what you're doing with all this stuff, Lucus?" His voice was cold and exact as he began to pace the small space.

"Don't worry, Justus. While you were wasting your life trying to entrap me, I have been educating myself. Remember my most productive stay in London, when they rudely called me *Jack the Ripper*? I was living a decent life as a surgeon on the upper west side of town."

"Those were grievous times, Lucus. I can't believe you would even have the audacity to bring it up and not express some form of shame." Justus swallowed back the bile of disgust that arose in his throat as the memories of the crime scenes replayed in his mind.

"You were as foolish in your search as those detectives. I don't understand why everyone made such a fuss over dockside whores anyway. Given time, they all would have succumbed to the pox or syphilis. I did them all a favor. They became the most famous whores in all of England because of me!" Lucus bellowed.

"You're mad!"

"Oh, please, dear brother. Do you honestly think the history books would have recorded these women if their deaths had not made them live forever? People actually seek out their graves to pay homage.

What better gift of immortality could one give a human? Besides, I needed to study the female human reproductive system in order to continue my work.”

“Fuck me a break, Lucas, don’t even try to ride that horse of sanctimony with me.” Justus shook his head in disgust. “I was there. I saw those women. It may have been a surgical procedure in your mind, but then you unleashed the beast and tore them to shreds. There was no medical reasoning to unleashing what we are on those less fortunate. So tell me brother, are you completely out of control, or has all this madness been intentional? Are you in the least bit aware of what you’ve done and what you’re doing now?”

Lucas appeared stunned. “I...I didn’t do what you accusing me of. I’m a doctor intent on saving our people. I didn’t—.”

“You did.” Justus interrupted. “Deny it if you will Lucas, but you murdered those women and that nurse a few weeks back for nothing! What medical reason did you have for killing her?”

Lucas started shaking his head and pacing back and forth. “No...no...not me...not me...that was you...you killed those women. Yes, it was you.”

“Me? What reason would I have to want to kill those women, Lucas?” Justus taunted. “It...was...you.”

Lucas ignored his question. “You’ve always had high opinion of your status as Alpha male, dear brother. However, I don’t take orders from you and I’ve as much right to lead our people as you do. You have been a spineless leader and you must be willing to make sacrifices for the cause of the greater good.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying there are others who think like I do. Who believe we should take our rightful place on this earth.” Lucas stopped pacing and smiled at him. “Kahn is a believer and he has been helping me for some time.”

“My manservant Khan is the one who’s been aiding you?” He ground the words out between his teeth, feeling a complete sense of betrayal. “So that explains how you managed to elude me for all these years. I foolishly believed our bond as twins allowed you a privy to my thoughts,” Justus cursed.

“Kahn has been most loyal indeed. He knows which twin deserves to lead our people into the future.” Lucas exclaimed. “We are gods, born to lord over the mortals.”

“That was in the ancient days, Lucas.” Justus closed and reopened his eyes in frustration deciding to try a different tactic. “What about your wife Mariah? How could you have abandoned your mate for all these years?”

Lucas turned his perplexed, deep stare on Justus. “I love Mariah very much. When she sits by my side, as queen, she will understand and she will know I do what I do to save our people.”

“All our people need saving from is the plague that seized your senses,” Justus growled.

“Plague? There is nothing wrong with me. With my expertise, I will create an entire new genetic group of Lykians. Human females shall be the breeders,” Lucas announced gleefully with the clap of his hands. “Ingenious, don’t you think?”

"Is that what you did to all those women?" Justus pressed his face against the bars as he gripped them in his fists. "Damn you, that is why their bodies have been found in such a state." Justus shook his head woefully. "Lucus, you've been attempting to breed human females with Lykians while in beast form. You sicken me."

"Don't fret so, brother. I believe with your help I have exactly what I need to have a successful Lykian hybrid."

"What are you saying, Lucas?"

"Well, with your mate Sera already pregnant with a Lykian child, all I need to do is add my blood to the equation."

"NO! Don't even think about it, Lucas." Justus pleaded. "You have to listen to me. Your blood is infected. Sera and Mariah have been working on the specimen of other Lykians who have had the same symptoms you have. They are possibly days away from finding a cure."

Lucus snorted in disgust. "I told you I don't need a cure. I don't know what happened to me all those years ago, but I feel wonderful! Alive and soon you will join me, all of you will."

"Please, Lucas, don't do this. You could harm Sera and my son."

"Brother, you should be thanking me for making your son the first," Lucas reasoned.

Justus squeezed the bridge of his nose as all that Lucas was saying sunk in. He felt horrified. How could he save Sera locked in this cell? He had to think of something before it was too late. He paused. Why hadn't Sera made a sound? She'd been unconscious far too long. Something was wrong. He could feel it.

"Lucus, shouldn't Sera be awake by now? What did you give her?"

Lucus continued mumbling in quiet tones as he scribbled out information in an opened tablet. He sauntered over to a table, picking up the vile with dark liquid. "No greater time than the present to administer more of my blood," he said aloud, ignoring Justus's question. He inserted the hypodermic into the glass vial and pulled the contents into the needle.

Oh, please don't tell me I'm too late. Lucas must have given Sera a transfusion of his blood while he was unconscious. There was no telling what it was doing to Sera and the baby. "Lucus, stop!" Justus called out as his brother moved with the needle towards Sera. He held his breath until Lucas turned to look at him, a deep scowl on his face at the intrusion. "Brother, Sera is my wife, shouldn't I aid in giving her the blood? After all, how can I be a part of this new beginning for our people, if you don't allow me to help?"

"Well—."

A mournful wail of a Satyr's blow horn sounding close to the cave halted Lucas from continuing. The sound gave Justus hope. It looked as if Darius was aware that they were missing and had most likely probed the thoughts of all the staff to see if they had seen something, without realizing it. Once Darius and Sylus turned their mental capabilities on Khan, they'd know he betrayed them. He just prayed his cousin would reach them sooner than later.

“Well, it looks as if I don’t have as much time as I thought I did. It sounds as if our interfering cousin may be on his way to join in the celebration of the transformation of your son.”

“Look, Lucas, we should wait until Darius gets here, don’t you think? Darius will be disappointed if you give Sera more of your blood without him. He might even have Mariah with him and you can change her too.”

“Mariah, my mate. She’ll be so proud that she’ll forgive me for being away from her all this time.” Wistfully, Lucas smiled.

Justus’s heart tightened as he stared at his brother, for a moment his face so lovingly familiar, hearkening back to the time they were happier with their parents. He had to keep Lucas distracted. “Lucas, Mariah has always loved you and only you.” Justus forced a lighthearted laugh. “Do you remember when we were young *wildlings*, we use to sit on the hill and watch over Mariah as she frivoleed the entire day away amongst the field of flowers? It was such a silly, girly thing to do.”

Lucas laughed quietly, his eyes twinkled with mirth. “Of course I do. It was the first time I realized I’d lay down my life to protect her. When I hit puberty and saw colors with Mariah, I was deliriously happy. She was my mate. That was a joyous occasion indeed.”

“Yes, it was. Still, Mariah being Mariah, she gave you a hard run.” Justus’s thoughts returned to the joyous days of their youth and a genuine smile touched his lips.

“I have been away from her for far too long.” Lucas shook his head. “I bet Mother and Father will be happy once we reconcile and I return home with her by my side. I think it’s time for us to start a family like you and Sera.” Lucas smiled wistfully.

Justus’s smile wavered. Lucas obviously didn’t remember he killed their parents centuries ago. Justus had spent a lifetime regretting he’d been on a hunt all day and had not been there to save them. By the time he returned, their remains were properly cremated and waiting for him. All he had was an urn of their ashes in his private vault. Lucas was on the run and he didn’t have time to grieve their loss, before he took off after him. Standing here with his twin made the memories seem like yesterday.

“Yes, the day you married Mariah was a blessed day for our family and our parents were proud of you and your choice. Mother was extremely happy that at least one of her sons was not destined for a human union.”

Lucas dark brow frowned in a scowl. “I don’t know what happened, we were all so happy and had so much to look forward to.” He rubbed his temple. “I try to remember what happened to make me leave and I can’t. Why is that, Justus?”

“I don’t know I was away on a hunting trip and when I returned...every thing had changed and you were gone.” Justus continued to take advantage of this seemingly sane moment Lucas appeared to be having. “Shouldn’t knowing that you can’t remember what happened, Lucas, make you wonder if you are making rational decisions now?”

Lucas remained silent, his face twisted in confusion and Justus continued.

“Why would you leave your mate alone all these years? *Lykians* never abandon their mates, only in death can we be parted. The grief makes it almost impossible to move on.”

He held his breath, waiting for some sign that he was getting through to the man Lucus use to be.

“I haven’t been gone that long.” Lucus’s features again became vague. “Did I tell you that Mariah and I are going to start a family, too?”

Justus felt his growing hope fade and he held back his tears of disappointment. For a moment, it was like being with his twin again and after so long. Well, none of that mattered, it was important to keep his thoughts on anything else but what he was about to do to Sera.

“I can’t wait to be an uncle. You will make a great father, Lucus, and—.”

Before Justus said another word, the medical machines began to sound off throughout the cave. Both the men looked towards the hospital bed, their mouths open in shock as Sera convulsed, her pregnant body shimmying against the restraints erratically. Justus felt as if his heart had stopped.

“Nooo!” Justus wailed.

CHAPTER 13

“Let me out of here, Lucas, Sera needs me.” Justus voice was gruff with emotion.

Lucus ignored his request, rushing over to Sera.

Justus felt as if he could feel Sera’s pain as the rabid blood of his brother’s fought a battle inside her body. She would need his blood to help dominate the tainted blood. He must get out of here, now!

As her body fell limp, their baby’s heart showed a flat-line on the monitor. Justus let out a woeful howl as he shifted into the monster that wasn’t man or wolf, but something terrifying and hideously in between.

Justus’s nails clawed and his fingers elongated, gripping the metal bars. Veins rippled and popped, straining under his skin. Fur welled up along his arms, muscles contorted and rippled quickly. His cried out in pain as his feet arched high, adding another two inches to his 6’4” frame. The final transformation came as a muzzled snout grew where there had once been a nose and his teeth elongated, snapping ferociously against the bars.

Justus pushed against the iron bars; rocks crumbled loose, falling about his head. He raged and shook the foundation of the bars until they fell flat from the force of his weight and strength onto the dirt floor of the cave. Now, he was free to bring about destruction. It was hard to think as a man when he allowed the *Lykian Berserker* to rule his body; he must remain focused for Sera and his son’s sake.

Justus reached his brother, backhanding him away from Sera with one clawed swipe, knocking him about four feet off the ground into the rock cave wall. Lucas slid unconscious to the floor. There was no stopping the rage that propelled through his blood. Lucas had taken so much from him and put him through hell. It was time he paid for what he did to their parents and for what he’d done to Sera.

Stealthy, he towered over Lucas and lifted him from the ground; with one hand wrapped around his neck, he squeezed. Justus raged, snapped, and snarled, shaking his brother with unrestrained wildness and bloodlust.

A lone wolf charged into the cave and threw itself against Justus, catching him by surprise; he lost his hold on Lucas and stumbled backward. Immediately, Justus was on his face, ready to do battle for dominance over whether Lucas lived or died.

The deafening sounds of violence seemed to bounce off the granite walls as the two, *Lykian Berserker* and the wolf, snapped and growl. Smells of animal musk and sweat permeated the arid air until it was almost unbearable. Justus had no desire to harm Mariah, but he was the alpha *Lykian*; it was his right to end Lucas’s rampage once and for all.

Softly like a passing breeze, the soft willowy flutters of a flute began to sound throughout the cave, causing Justus and Mariah to halt and silence slowly followed. The melody was so hauntingly beautiful and spellbinding they couldn't help but listen.

Justus felt his rage subsiding. With tears burning in his eyes, he gave himself over to Sylus's Satyr magic, soothing the savage beast back into his human form. Mariah's naked womanly form crawled across the floor towards Lucus's bloodied, unconscious body.

He grunted as he pushed himself off the floor and stood. Darius was standing over Sera's pale, lifeless form, releasing the bed straps from her limp wrist. There was a mournful sadness about his face as he looked down at her.

Tears glided silently down his cousin's face as he looked up at him. "I'm sorry, Justus."

"No!" Justus swiftly closed the distance between him and Sera.

His hand stroked her hair, her face, incredibly tender as he tried to merge and pick up any lingering signs of life but he couldn't make the connection. His heart felt as if it had found its way to his throat and threatened to choke him. A raw and primitive grief overwhelmed him and he leaned his sweaty forehead against her cool skin.

"Sera...no...no...please don't leave me." Tears blinded his eyes and choked his voice. He pressed his hands over the sides of her face convulsively. "Come back to me, baby, let me feel you."

"Justus, move away and let me take a look at her." Mariah touched his shoulder.

Justus released a deep growl. His surreal golden stare was like staring into a full moon on a starless night. He turned his tortured gaze on Mariah. "No...no! Don't touch her," He gulped hard, hot tears fell slowly over his cheeks. "Look at what we've done to her. I should have sent her far away from all this madness."

"Justus, you're too emotionally unstable to feel Sera, it may not be too late. Allow me to merge with her and see what I can do." Mariah's voice trembled with growing fear for her new little sister.

Darius grasped Justus by his upper arms and tugged him away from Sera. "Justus let her try, damn it," he urged.

Justus allowed Maria near, but they'd have to cut his hand off before he would let go of Sera's cold, dry fingers. He leaned down to brush kisses to her forehead and whispered words of promises in the shell of her ear, all while watching guardedly over Mariah. She closed her eyes and regulated her breathing, releasing her healing Lykian spirit to bond with Sera.

Once again, the cave flooded with magic in the form of a melodious therapeutic tune from Sylus's flute. The sound was so forlorn, serene, and sweet that it only mimicked Justus's anguish and forced him to yield to the compulsive sobs that threatened to unman him.

After what felt like a lifetime, the flute playing subsided. Justus could see the pulse of Sera's heart beating at her throat. He merged his mind, heart, and soul with hers, to regulate her heartbeat and breathing until it matched his own.

Mariah drew back and swayed into Darius's arms. "I...I did all that I can for the moment. We need to get back to the house so I can administer the elixir Sera and I designed to combat the infection in her blood."

"You found a cure." Justus's eyes widened in surprise.

"Just this evening. We were going to send it to corporate headquarters for a trial, but there is no time for that. We must give Sera a shot and now that we have Lucas, I can begin to administer it to him." Mariah looked with deep longing at her husband, still unconscious on the ground, his blood seeping from his deep wounds. "Justus, you are going to have to hunt a live animal and feed before returning to the house. I will need lots of your blood for Sera and Lucas."

"Lucas deserves to die for what he has done to me and my wife, Mariah." Justus's voice sounded rough with bitterness. "So you'll save Sera first. Do you heed me?"

"Damn you, Justus, don't do this to me now. You made me a vow and I expect you to keep it." Mariah trembled against Darius, who remained like her wall of strength behind her in his impressive Satyr form. "Besides, I don't need your threats to save Sera. I love her, too."

Justus sighed with exasperation, running his hand through his hair, pushing it back off his brow. A muscle ticked rapidly in his jaw as he stared at Sera. "What about our baby, Mariah?"

The dead silence stretched thickly in the cave.

"Mariah?" He asked again.

"I'm sorry, Justus," her voice faded to a hushed whisper.

Justus swayed and dropped to his knees as if someone planted a double punch to his gut. His head tilted back in a silent curse to all the gods before he released a deafening heart-wrenching howl over his loss.

He stood and stumbled back to Sera to press his lips to her swollen stomach. He whispered words that were strictly between him and his son. He hugged Sera to him as he buried his face into her belly and grieved in silence for a tiny life he had yet to meet but already loved dearly.

"Get out! I'll bring Sera." Justus bellowed.

Easily, Darius picked up Lucas's inert form and tossed him over his shoulder; Mariah and Sylus took one last look at Justus as they mournfully exited the shaft leaving Justus, deeply sleeping Sera, and their babe alone.

Justus stared with agony etching lines into his face as searing pain made Sera moan and cry out. It had been three days, several antiviral shots, and two transfusions later before Sera awakened from her healing slumber so that Mariah could induce labor.

To his surprise and cowardly relief, he didn't have to tell Sera that they had lost the baby. She seemed to already know he was gone. All he could do was hold her, allowing her to grieve, but still it didn't seem like it was enough. The guilt ripped at his heart as he watched her strain and push against her pain giving birth to their stillborn son.

Sera's face twisted again in agony. He turned his pained expression on Mariah and said, "Surely there has to be a better way to do this." He bellowed from the chair beside Sera, holding her hand with one hand and massaged the center of her lower back with the other as another contraction seized her already-weakened state.

"I'm sorry, Justus, I can't risk Sera losing any more blood than necessary. Giving her a C-section is major surgery in spite of its popularity these days and I won't risk it. She has to give birth naturally," Mariah empathized. "Also, in her weakened state, giving her something to ease her pain won't allow her the strength she needs to push."

Justus scowled shaking his head. "It just seems so fucking unfair that she has to suffer and give birth to a baby she won't be able to nurture."

"Justus." Sera gripped Justus hand tightly and whimpered until another bout of pain abated. "Please, don't take this out on her...ow...ow...shit!"

"I 'm sorry, sweetheart, I feel so damned hopeless on how to help you." Fear and anger knotted inside him. "Breathe...breathe...that's it, baby."

"Oh...oh...ahh...hee...hee...hee." Sera blew pulsing breaths through her pain looking up at Justus she cried, "Oh God, I don't know if I can keep going! I'm so tired." She squeezed his hand, tears streaming down the sides of her face.

Justus bit down on his back teeth to keep back a fresh batch of tears; he had cried more in the past few days then he had in a lifetime of centuries. Here she was in the throes of pain and all he could do is feel angry at the world. *Just let Sera get through this and I swear I won't ask for anything else.*

"I love you." He leaned down and brushed his lips across hers, feeling that they were dry and cracked; he took the soothing balm Mariah had made for her from his pocket and coated her lips. He turned his attention to what was happening between Sera's spread thighs as Mariah called out to her.

"Okay, Sera, the head is almost out. On the next contraction I need you to push as hard as you can until the contraction eases," Mariah instructed, pressing on her stomach to help shift and ease the child from her body. "Push...push...okay...good, now, take deep breaths...I got the head. One more time, sweetie, give it all you got...push...push..."

Justus brushed his free hand against Sera's cheek as she held on tightly to his other hand. He only flinched and tightened his hold. Sera stifled her final screams by biting into the side of his hand. It brought tears to his eyes as bittersweet memories of the last time she had done so in the limousine flooded back. It seemed so long ago and he never would have thought he would be standing here watching her suffering once more because of him. How much more could her gentle soul take?

There was a lingering stillness in the room. It was the crowning moment where you wait for your baby's wails to confirm all is hopeful but they only heard the sounds of their own heartbeats. It wasn't a lingering nightmare; their baby was not going to ever cry. This moment was supposed to be about feeling sheer joy and finally place a voice and face to the object of their growing love. However, for them it was not to be.

Mariah swaddled in a receiving blanket the motionless perfectly-formed infant. She wouldn't dare take the child away until Sera and Justus were ready to let go.

"You have a beautiful son." Mariah spoke quietly, almost reverently, her eyes filled with tears as she handed Sera her baby. "I will leave you two alone for a moment before I finish up here." She eased her way quietly from the bedroom chamber.

Sera looked up from her son as Justus set on the bed beside her.

"He looks as if he's just sleeping." Justus voice had deepened with unchecked emotions.

"He is so beautiful, Justus. I want him to open his eyes and look at me." Sera smiled through her tears. "I keep thinking if I stare at his little fingers long enough, they will move and his tiny lips will open into a yawn or cry. I wonder if he has a strong high-pitched scream or a throaty squall. I can almost swear I can see him breathing."

"I know, sweetheart." He brushed his hand over the back of Sera's head, cupping her skull in the palm of his hand. He placed a kiss to her temple and gazed back down at his son. It took everything in him not to bend under the strain of their loss.

Sera looked him over, as any new mother would do her child. "Look, he has your big hands and long, skinny feet." She managed a laugh that ended on a sob. "He even has your damn nose and dimpled chin."

Justus beamed with pride. "There is no doubt he is his father's son, but he does have your wide full mouth and..." his voice died away. A hot tear slipped down his ridged face. "Oh, I can't..."

"Please." Sera looked at him. "And what?"

"Never mind." He swallowed deeply, the Adam's apple in his throat bobbed.

"Tell me."

"I was just wondering if he had the color of my eyes or yours, then it finally hit me that I'll never know." There was no stopping the emotional torrent that burst forth. He pulled Sera and his son against him. They held each other and cried until they had no choice, but to give him up to Mariah. Together, Sera and Justus dealt with the feelings of unmerited harshness and deep, irreplaceable loss.

Marius Justus Octavos Apollon forever slumbered in the field of wild flowers where Sera and Justus enjoyed their picnics.

After returning to the main house, Sera went straight to their bedchamber. She just wanted to curl up and die, but she knew it wasn't an option. Justus needed her as much as she needed him. She couldn't leave him behind, thinking he had somehow failed her and the baby.

Sera changed into a cotton peach-colored caftan with gold embroidery and pulled her hair up with a twisty. She sat on the pillows in the window seat and gazed out the window, not really looking at anything in particular. Her hand swept across her slightly swollen belly. There were no words to express the emptiness she felt in her body and soul; she could have sworn at times she felt Marius still moving in her stomach. She wasn't aware of how much she truly wanted him until he was gone.

She turned to look intently at Justus's tall form as he strolled into the bedchamber with his hands tucked in his trouser pockets. He had on navy blue slacks with deep creases; matching opened jacket and a baby-blue silk shirt unbuttoned at the throat. Sera's heart raced because, as usual, he was the most handsome male she'd ever known. There was just something so damn fulfilling about looking at him, knowing he was hers. It made her feel proud and anxious at the same time.

He looked up and their eyes locked.

"By the gods, Sera, I don't think I'll every get used to how much I love you." He touched and rubbed his chest. "Every time I look at you it feels as if it's the first time and my heart overwhelms me."

Sera smiled for the first time in a long while. "Funny, but I was thinking the same thing."

She continued to watch him as he closed the space between them and sat at her feet. He rested his face on her knees, snuggling closer to her, and she enjoyed the consistent connection between them.

She brushed her fingers through his hair and massaged his scalp. "Did you go and check on Lucas before coming up?"

"Yes." He answered and rancor sharpened his voice. "His wounds are healing and the serum seems to be working but it makes him sleep a lot, which is a good thing. Mariah believes he will return to his old self."

Sera knew Justus was battling his inner demons about his relationship with his twin. It would take some time, but he'd deal with it in his own time and his own way. She could only feel a bitter sweetness because she was in the medical profession and she knew that a person with a chemical imbalance created by a viral disease wasn't accountable for his actions. It left her feeling as if there was no one to be angry at, but she knew her anger should pass in time.

"Did Kahn get off safely?" Sera twirled a lock of hair around her finger.

Justus shook his head disbelievingly. "Sera, only you can care about people undeserving to eat at your feet while in the midst of grief."

Sera tugged his hair. "And you can't remain angry forever. It was the circumstances that caused us to lose our son, not Lucas or Kahn."

"Okay, I will give you leeway because my brother was ill but there is no excuse for Kahn's behavior. I don't care what my brother promised him or led him to believe; he should have been willing to lay his life down to keep you safe. Lykian mothers are a precious commodity. Kahn has shamed his father's name and he has you to thank for not being shipped back to Greece in pieces."

"It just shows you are a fair leader over your people. Compassion isn't a bad thing and I'm sure Lucas was quite convincing." Sera leaned over and began to massage the tension from his broad shoulders.

"I just don't want to deal with any more family issues." Justus mumbled. "My brother used me up for a lifetime. As usual for the winter, our doors will be open to the pack. However, for the rest of the summer and fall I just want it to be you and me." He sighed, leaning into the comfort of her soothing fingers.

“I promised Darius we’d be at his and Selby’s wedding, whenever that will be. He and Sy will be flying out tomorrow. Mariah and Lucus have quarters clear on the other side of the house. So, it’ll almost be just us.” She paused before forging ahead. “I want you to make peace with Lucus.”

“Sera.” He moaned her name closing his eyes with a deep sigh.

“Seriously, Justus.” She tugged at his hair until he looked at her. “I’ve never been fortunate enough to have a family of my own. My adopted parents died in an accident only two years after they adopted me. Your family is still alive. We can’t allow discord to deny us being a real family.”

Sera spoke deeply from her heart. “This is a time of great loss and family need to pull together.” She was determined to be a part of a real family and she didn’t want stubborn pride to ruin their future happiness.

She watched the play of emotions on Justus’s face before he smiled at her warmly and caressed her chin with the back of his hand. “This truly means a lot to you, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” she admitted.

He sat up, reached for her, and pulled her onto his lap, tucking her securely against his chest. He tilted her chin up to gaze into the deep brown pools of her trusting eyes. “I can’t deny you. If you demand peace in your home, it’s my duty to make sure you have it.”

“Justus, I love you so much and I know I’m asking for a lot. Still, there is one more thing...”

“Tell me.” He urged.

“Do you think after I’ve completely healed you might consider—” Sera’s voice drifted away, afraid that if she said what she was thinking, it would somehow erase their little Marius.

“Sera, I think I know what you are asking of me, for I love Marius with all that I am, but I feel what is missing.” He paused, taking a deep breath before forging ahead.

“I miss him, too.” Her voice faded away into a hushed stillness.

“Sweetheart, I know we can never...ever replace our first born, but I want nothing more at this moment than to see you swelling once more with my babe nestled beneath your heart. You’re born to be a mother and have a big family of your own. I want to give it to you.”

She smiled, feeling a semblance of hope arising deep inside her. “Then we mustn’t neglect what is to be our destiny. Fortunately, Lykian women heal quickly and Mariah said that I should be well enough by the next new moon.”

“So you truly want to try for another child right away?” he asked. “You aren’t saying this just because of me, are you?”

She loved the way his fingers trailed over her features as if he was blind and memorizing every detail. “I won’t deny that I feel guilty for even thinking about it on the day we buried our son, especially since I didn’t want him at first.”

“Baby—.”

“No, it’s true.” She put her fingers over his lips to stop him from continuing. She knew the truth; if she hadn’t become pregnant accidentally, she would still be telling herself she never wanted children. When, in truth, she wanted children...lots of them.

“Justus, my soul aches for another baby. Now that the danger no longer haunts our lives, I want another chance and I want to appreciate the miracle of motherhood this time.”

He brushed the frizzed hair that had escaped the twisty behind her ear and said, “I think we should take one day at a time healing and see how we feel come the next new moon.”

Sera nodded her head in agreement. “Do Lykians have fairytales that are passed on from generation to generation?”

“But of course, but we don’t call them fairytales for all of our stories are as real as we are,” he whispered against her full lips, before seizing them in a loving, passionate kiss.

“Let me tell you the one my mother use to tell me about two lovers who were preordained to find one another before they were even born. She called it, *Forever Moonlight*”

Sera held on to the healing balm of Justus’s love and knew they would share their good and bad times together one sweet day at a time, as a family.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I hope you enjoyed *Forever Moonlight*. If you would like more information or to donate to the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Program headed up by Oxford University Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, check out their website for more information.

<http://ethiopianwolf.blogspot.com>

Thank you for your continued support.



SHIREE MCCARVER

Interracial relationships with action, romance, humor and emotions rolled into one memorable tale has become a trademark of Alabama native, Shiree McCarver's novels. She learned a long time ago that laughter and dreams is necessary for daily survival. Ms. McCarver loves hearing from her readers. She can be reached at:

E-mail: shireemccarver@yahoo.com

Or shreeree@gmail.com

Information and sample chapters of my books is on the Internet at:

<http://www.shireemccarver.com>