

LADY OF THE LAIR

Alter-Human 1

Kiyara Benoiti

MENAGE AMOUR



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With deep gratitude,

Kiyara Benoiti

DEDICATION

For my husband, who supports me always and who encouraged me to write something that *really* pushes erotic romance to the edge. Also, for my friend, Sue, who is dear to my heart.

LADY OF THE LAIR

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Chapter One Consummation

Thunder rolled across the landscape. Breathing in the aroma of rain, Dillon waited for Isis to lock the car. He admired her ass as she bent to insert the key into the door lock of her black 1966 Corvette. He'd been dating Isis Waverly for two weeks. Until then, he never thought it was possible to meet someone special, especially through bar hopping, but fate surprised him with Isis. In just fourteen days, he'd become crazy about her.

"Ready?" Isis asked.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Although thrilled to spend time with Isis, Dillon tried not to sound bored about the focus of their date. Wandering around narrow, dusty passages and admiring rocks just didn't seem all that interesting, but right now he'd do anything to please Isis. "I've never been in a cave, let alone a system of caverns," he added, hoping she didn't detect his lack of enthusiasm.

She fastened a fanny pack around her hips and deposited the keys into it. She caught him watching her and dazzled him with one of her perfect white-toothed smiles. The sparkle in her vibrant blue eyes nearly knocked Dillon off his feet. Maybe he'd get lucky tonight. It was important to him that Isis didn't feel pressured into having sex. He wanted it to happen naturally.

She walked toward him dressed in form-fitting jeans, a pristine white T-shirt, and hiking boots. She'd pulled her dark mahogany hair, composed of tumultuous curls, up into a ponytail.

"If you enjoy the cavern tour," she said as she reached him, "then maybe I'll take you spelunking with my group next weekend."

"Sounds great," Dillon replied, taking her hand. "I never knew this place existed until I heard about those twelve tourists who disappeared six months ago."

"Those people got lost because they didn't stay with the tour guide." She threaded her fingers with his.

Warmth traveled up his arm. Just touching Isis in a simple, innocent way sent tendrils of desire through him. Although they hadn't known one another long, he was ready to take their relationship up to the next level.

"That's why you shouldn't let me out of your sight," she continued, a warning tone in her voice. "I know the paths, plus my group is charting the caverns' unknown regions. I don't want anything to happen to you, Dillon, so stay close to me."

Something about the way she said that last part sounded so suggestive. Dillon gulped and mentally told his libido to quiet down, but it didn't want to listen to him. Was he reading too much into Isis's voice inflections, body language, and the messages in her big blue eyes?

Thunder boomed again, the sound curling across the inky sky. Crickets chirred in the tall grass. A damp breeze whipped across the nearly vacant lot. Only an Aztec, a Honda Civic, and a Dodge Ram remained. About two hundred yards away, the lights of the tourist gift shop and the information center winked in the deepening twilight.

"I'll bet you a vodka tonic it will pour rain all night," Isis mused, looking up at the threatening heavens.

Lady of the Lair

Dillon laughed and squeezed her hand as they walked toward a weathered staircase constructed of heavy lumber. It led down to a large hole in a slab of rugged, gray rock.

"I'll pass," he said. "You'll win that bet hands down."

"Hi, Rory!" she greeted the tour guide standing just inside the cavern entrance. "Are there still people inside?" She indicated the parking lot behind her.

The guide smiled, the expression in his eyes showing more than friendship for Isis. Dillon glanced at her, and dismay swept through him. She favored the guide with a look of adoration.

The guy's smile grew wider, revealing pointed incisors that gave Dillon the chills. He hated it when people had eyeteeth that looked vampiric. The man stood well over six feet tall, his long arms and legs sinewy. He sported a small, black goatee that matched his neatly cropped blue-black hair. His deep brown eyes, overshadowed by heavy, dark eyebrows, reminded Dillon of oil slicks.

Rory brushed a cracker crumb from his tan uniform and tossed an empty wrapper into a nearby trash receptacle. "Nah, they all met for a picnic in the glen over there." He pointed toward a cluster of trees. "They better get going soon or they'll get drenched."

"You two know one another?" Dillon asked. Jealousy nipped at him. The thought of another guy homing in on his territory didn't sit well with him, but he sensed something from Isis, too. Did she have a thing for the guide? Was she using him to make the guy jealous? Whatever the case, the dude seemed too familiar with Isis. He steeled himself for the competition he feared was coming.

"Me and my spelunking group chart the cavern system for the park, so I've gotten to know Rory rather well." Excitement gleamed in her eyes. "Are you ready to go in? I can't wait to show you the sights."

He glowered at Rory. "Isn't he going with us?"

She laughed, the sound echoing in the far regions of the entrance. "He'll check on us later, especially if we're late coming out, but Rory is confident in my abilities as a guide." She patted his arm. "It's okay, Dillon. I know what I'm doing."

Relieved he wouldn't be bothered by the guy, Dillon relaxed. "But we didn't bring any gear."

She favored him with a patient expression. "Stop worrying. We're not going anywhere dangerous or uncharted."

Rory grinned, and Dillon fought the sudden urge to wipe the smile off the guy's face. Slugging the jerk wasn't the best of ideas. He had to play it cool around Isis.

"You're in very capable hands, dude," Rory said. "Isis has been doing this a long, long time. She and her spelunker friends have been very useful to the park."

"Okay." Glad to be rid of him, Dillon took his date's hand, following her down the stone corridor. "I'm game."

They progressed quietly, the only sounds their breathing and the crunch of their boots on the sandy path. Lights anchored to the ceiling and high on the granite walls offered Dillon little comfort. Something tickled the back of his mind, as if a spider had crept into one of his ears and up into his brain. He passed it off as a bit of claustrophobia and the unease of being in a strange environment. The aroma of dampness and dust invaded his nose. He sneezed twice and shook off his discomfort, but he couldn't shake off his unease about Isis and Rory.

"How far are we going?" he asked, trying to keep his gaze off of Isis's round ass. He attempted to concentrate on the minerals twinkling in the smooth passage walls, but his attention kept straying to her butt.

"Just to the first small cavern." Isis's long, curly ponytail swung to and fro in front of him. "Next time we'll plan for some serious spelunking."

They descended farther into the bowels of the earth. The cool, damp air increased, the temperature dropped, and the aroma of moisture and wet minerals grew more prevalent. Stalactites and stalagmites glittered in pointed columns of bizarre beauty and composed a dimension of dreamscape proportions. Dillon thought of the Greek underworld and shivered.

I'll shit a brick if we round a bend and run into Hades himself.

Isis paused and turned to look at Dillon. "Need to rest?"

"Yeah, if you don't mind." He sneezed again. "It's getting sort of difficult to breathe."

"Are you claustrophobic?"

"Never have been before, but, then, I've never been in a place like this before, either."

Is sat on a large stone jutting from the wall. She patted the spot next to her. The lights strung along the center of the passage ceiling glinted on her hair. Dillon liked the way it looked as if someone threaded her locks with glistening strands of red and gold.

"Sit and relax," she suggested and smiled, the expression soft, seductive.

The moment Dillon caught the mischievous gleam in Isis's eyes, thoughts of the encroaching walls and millions of pounds of crushing earth above him fled his brain. He knew he shouldn't have allowed himself to fall for the woman so quickly, but he had. Isis was all he could think about. He dreamed about her at night, pined for her when she was away, and couldn't stand to leave her side when they were together. Not only beautiful, Isis also possessed a keen intellect that intrigued him. Her allure was beyond intoxicating. It was addictive.

Thoughts of her lips caressing his cock filtered across his mind's eye. He grew hard. Oh, how he wanted her, how he'd been patient the last two weeks. For the thousandth time, he imagined what it would be like to fondle her large breasts as his rod sank into her hot, silky center. He wanted her as his woman. The idea of introducing her to all his friends and family as his girlfriend or live-in tantalized him. What would it be like to wake up to her naked body entwined with his, her first smile of the day reserved only for him? She scooted next to him, slipped her arms around his shoulders and nuzzled his neck. "We're alone down here," she said, her tone suggestive.

He fidgeted on the outcropping, his cock hardening more. It pressed against the zipper of his jeans.

Dillon gulped and replied, "But someone might find us."

"The only person left on duty is Rory. He won't say a word should he find us." She caught his earlobe between her teeth. At his sharp intake of breath, she added, "And then later I'll show you my place and we'll start all over again."

He turned his head and sought her mouth. Claiming her lips, he tasted Juicy Fruit gum and her own personal flavor. She sighed and pressed closer to him. Pausing, she drew away long enough to unfasten the hip purse and then straddled his lap.

"Isis?"

She paused, drew back, and looked directly into his eyes. "Yes?"

"I just want you to know that I think you're special. I've wanted you from the moment I first saw you."

A beautiful smile lit up her face. "I'm so glad you feel that way because I think you're special, too."

"Yeah?" Happiness soared through his heart. "You don't mind that I'm just a bartender?"

"Not at all."

"Would you be interested in taking our relationship to the next level—beyond sex, I mean."

"Absolutely." She wiggled on his lap. "Now let me show you how much."

Her words catapulted him into pure euphoria.

He captured both sides of her face in his hands and kissed her slowly, savoring her softness pressed against his body. She wrapped her arms around his neck, and his kiss became more insistent, demanding. She touched the seam of his lips with her tongue. A fire erupted in his loins, and he opened his mouth to her. Their tongues danced and dueled, fueling the flames that swept through Dillon's body. His cock strained against his pants. He moaned, the urge to throw her down and sink it into her satiny folds so overwhelming he could barely control it.

"Te quiero," he mumbled against her mouth.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"I want you in every way," Dillon answered. She nibbled his lower lip, and he gasped, adding, "Damn, I didn't bring any protection."

"We don't need it." She rocked back on his lap and yanked his polo shirt up over his chest. He raised his arms, allowing her to strip him of it. "I trust you," she continued, "and I know you're safe."

"How could—?"

She silenced him with a finger across his lips, and then replied, "Trust me, I just know." Her voice took on a serious tone. "I need to tell you something, though."

"What?"

"When I kiss you, a light toxin will enter your body through my saliva. You'll feel disoriented and your sex drive will explode."

He laughed. "I'm feeling that way already."

"I'm serious, Dillon."

"So am I." He chuckled.

"I'm being honest with you," she said in an even firmer tone.

"All I care about is being with you and loving you. I want you so badly I feel like I'm going to fly into a million pieces."

Isis regarded him for a long moment. Finally, she nodded and said, "All right, Dillon. Just know that I've told you the truth."

She stood and began unfastening her jeans and untying her boots. Quickly, Dillon scrambled out of his clothes, too. He spread his shirt out on the rock and sat on it as Isis bundled her jeans and shirt and placed them on either side of his hips for kneepads. She straddled him again, her bare ass hot across his thighs. "Damn, you feel great, babe," said Dillon, his breath catching. "I can't wait to be inside you."

She snuggled closer, her dark, softly haired pussy planted tightly against the base of his cock. Her breasts, heavy and ripe with large, pert nipples, rubbed against his bare chest.

He struggled to contain himself. Isis was a lovely woman, but his imagination hadn't done her body any justice. Naked, she was spectacular.

"You're so handsome," she breathed as she nipped the skin along his neck, her breath fast and warm against it. "You have such pretty brown hair and eyes that look like chocolate drops. Your dark skin is so smooth, and I love how you're toned, but not overly muscled. I like athletic-looking men." She sighed, the sound half desirous, half relaxed, and moved up along his neck to suck on his earlobe. "Just how athletic are you?"

"I'm about to show you," he said, lust thick in his voice.

She palmed his cock and clenched it rhythmically. He drew air in between his teeth, moving his hands up over her slender thighs, along her hips, the niche of her trim waist, and upward to cup her breasts. She sucked in an excited breath and worked her hand a little faster.

"Isis," Dillon whispered. "If you do that much more..."

She giggled and captured his mouth in a kiss that urged a range of emotions and sensations to spiral straight to the base of his cock. Slowly, she raised her body and positioned her cunt on the head of his penis. Nestled next to her hot, wet opening, his cock throbbed until Dillon groaned in pain for want of her.

"Please," he begged. "You're killing me, Isis. I got to have you. I *need* you."

Her laughter turned throaty. "I'll give you my pussy and *more*." She trailed the tip of her tongue along his jaw line, down his throat, and nibbled at his collarbone. In slow, circular movements, she shifted her hips so that the head of his rod rubbed against her labia. "I'm dying to have your cock inside me, and I'm going to enjoy every moment of our time together."

If his *su manera de beber amigos*, his drinking buddies, could see him now, they would be every shade of green envy. Their words drifted through his mind.

"Man, you have got to be the luckiest son of a bitch on Earth!" And then the bartender at his favorite Cuban bar was prone to saying, "Not many guys around here get to have a blue-eyed beauty like Isis fawning all over him."

The fellows at the pub down the street from Isis's apartment always had similar things to say like, "*I bet she's a hellcat in bed, you lucky dog!*"

Dillon sighed, grateful their words and predictions were coming true. He was the luckiest man on the planet, and he intended to relish every second of their lovemaking. And, if all went well, maybe they could see only one another. Hell, he was ready to ask her to move in with him.

Is is pushed her cunt down over the tip of his dick, but withdrew so fast it left him reeling.

"Mmm." He growled, the sound rumbling low in his chest. "My cock is going to blow."

"No, it won't."

"Isis, I don't think I can hold out—"

The sound of footsteps startled him. He pulled back, head whipping toward one end of the tunnel, then the other, his vision suddenly blurry. His heart hammered twice as hard, the sound thunderous in his ears.

"Someone's coming!" he whispered.

"It's okay," Isis soothed and swirled her pussy around the tip of his cock again.

His eyes rolled back. The pleasure her tiny actions created boggled his mind.

"I think I need some air," he added. "I can't see very well. Everything looks weird."

The footsteps moved closer.

"Isis," Dillon whispered more urgently. "Someone will catch us here."

"Well, precious, I see you've prepared him," a male voice said. "Did you warn him what would happen once you kissed him?"

A surprised sound escaped Dillon, and his heart sped up a few more gears until he thought he might pass out from the force of adrenaline whizzing through his system. He couldn't seem to focus on the person who suddenly appeared behind Isis.

Shifting on his lap, Isis turned slightly. "Yes, I did, but he didn't take me seriously."

"They never do, and judging by the glassiness of his eyes and their dilation," the man said, "I'd say he's ready."

Dillon knew that voice. Rory?

"Yes, he's ready," Isis replied, her voice like a cat's purr. "He's perfect, Rory, absolutely perfect. We're going to enjoy this so much, and I know you're going to like him, too."

"It's about damn time." Rory's voice echoed up and down the passage. "Although the others found theirs a few months ago, there haven't been any who are genetic matches to you."

"We'll be so happy." She sighed, turned, and kissed Rory full on the mouth before facing Dillon again and placing a peck on the tip of his nose.

Dillon blinked rapidly, trying to rid himself of his blurred vision. Had he just seen Isis kiss the guide? Jealousy roared through him. What the hell was going on?

"You're in for an incredible treat," she said to Dillon. "And an even more incredible life with us."

"Us? Wha-what are you talking about?" Dillon slurred.

Fear slapped him. What had he gotten himself into? Was Isis involved with Rory? Were they planning something sinister?

"What did you do to me? And what's he doing here?"

"Babe, I warned you about the toxin in my saliva. I was honest about it, but you didn't listen." Isis sighed. "In a few more minutes, what's happening to you right now will wear off for the most part," she reassured him. She cupped his jaw, rubbing her thumb along his cheek. "You'll understand then, too."

Although Dillon could see Rory, there seemed to be three of him blending and shifting into one person and back into three again over and over. He tried to focus on Isis, and the same effect wavered and rippled over and around her body, too. The scent of minerals and dust intensified. The worry about tons of rock and dirt above him evaporated as well. However, one thing outweighed everything else he still wanted to fuck Isis until she begged for mercy. The urgency to do so surged through him like an unstoppable tsunami and infused every nerve ending in his body.

She stood, took Dillon by the arms, and hefted him to his feet. Once he was steady, she tugged on his hand.

"Grab our clothes and my pack, please, Rory," she said. "We don't want to leave any signs that we were here."

Still naked, she led Dillon down the corridor to a Y. One path remained lit, but darkness bathed the other. She turned to the left where gloom resided, stepping over the rope and a sign that warned the curious not to leave the safe trail.

"Where are you taking me?" Dillon asked as he stumbled along behind her, the path gritty beneath his bare feet. "I thought you said we wouldn't go anywhere dangerous or uncharted."

"Don't worry, dude," Rory said behind him.

A warm hand on his shoulder kept him from falling backward and sent a strange sense of comfort through Dillon as well.

"We're taking you to the consummation chamber," the man added.

The words didn't really compute in Dillon's brain. Consummation chamber? Like sex? But they had planned on screwing in the passage

before Rory showed up. Regardless, his dick strained so hard that he marveled it didn't rocket right off his body. His cock pulsed painfully, and Dillon hoped Rory would get lost soon so he could slide into Isis's hot, slick folds.

They exited the narrow corridor and stepped into a small cavern. The minerals flecking the walls twinkled in larger chunks that reflected the lit torches anchored to the stone and a small fire off to one side. More stalactites and stalagmites columned the room in regal beauty. A mattress covered with black and brown alpaca furs lay in the center of the chamber. An odor he couldn't identify overwhelmed the room with a heady spiciness that was both curious and pleasing. As Dillon glanced around, he realized his vision had nearly returned to normal, but his cock remained just as hard.

"What is this place?" His momentary uncertainty transformed into intense curiosity. "Are you two into pervy stuff?" A tremor settled in his voice, but it was more from arousal than anything else. He'd dreamed of finding someone like Isis and fucking in bizarre settings, so now that it seemed to be coming true, giddiness filled him until he felt almost faint with it. "If you are, then I'm definitely up for that."

Rory burst out laughing and tossed their things on the floor. "This guy's going to be fun to teach, and I think you're right, precious. I'm going to enjoy getting to know him, too."

Throaty laughter joined Rory's chuckles. "He will, indeed," Isis replied. She turned and took Dillon's rock-hard cock into her hand. "Oh my, your dick is so hard a cat couldn't scratch it."

Rory let out another guffaw behind them.

Sucking air between his clenched teeth, Dillon closed his eyes to quell the lust that arrowed through his body.

"Lie down, Dillon," Isis urged and pushed him toward the bed. He followed her instructions and crossed the room, the stone beneath his feet strangely warm. Dillon sat down and scooted backward until his hips connected with a pile of pillows, cock still pointing to the ceiling. "It's time to show you what it's like to be a threesome and yet one." Isis approached the bed and knelt on its edge.

"Threesome?"

"Yes, Dillon." She crawled forward, her ample breasts swaying, ass high in the air, the curve of her waist so stark it seemed chiseled in the firelight. "It's the way we do things down here."

"But I thought you and I liked one another? I wanted you to be *my* woman."

"We do, and I am." She blinked, her dark lashes thick, long. "But I'm Rory's woman, too."

Rory's woman, too? Disappointment stomped through his heart, but he wanted to please her so he'd give Rory a chance. Besides, the more he was around the guy, the more he liked him.

Finally able to focus properly again, Dillon lost himself in the azure depths of Isis's eyes. Regardless of what was happening to him, it became clear he'd fallen *hard* for this woman. Whatever she and Rory prepared to do to him, Dillon was just as prepared to see it through. Isis had to be his no matter what.

"I require two men," she added.

Rory stepped forward. He stripped off his boots and uniform slacks. "Take it easy, dude. You'll enjoy this as much as we will. And then you and I will get to know one another."

"His name is Dillon," Isis said sternly.

"Sorry, Dillon."

A bass sound—or was it the crashing of his heartbeat? penetrated his being. Drums? Music? He recalled what Isis had said to him about a toxin in her saliva. She had been honest and forthright with him, and he'd brushed it off as teasing. The rhythmic booms grew slightly louder. Isis's elixir kiss might still be working on his senses by intensifying normal sounds, but what could be making the noise? "You're wondering what you're hearing, aren't you?" she asked. "You'll have the answers to all your questions soon, my love. Right now, let's just enjoy one another."

"But what about him?" If his heart beat any faster, he feared it would burst through his chest or shoot into his throat, choking him. All he wanted was to make love to Isis.

"If you feel about me the way you say, then you'll accept Rory."

"I've never been with a man, but I'm willing to try."

"Shh." She placed her index finger on his lips, silencing him. "Let us show you." She sat astride his pelvis. "I'm so wet with need for you, Dillon. Do you still want me?"

He couldn't help it. Dillon wanted Isis more than anything. Although weird had zipped right into freaky, he was willing to try anything so he could have her, love her.

He groaned and said, "I want you so badly it hurts."

Isis raked her nails lightly over his cock, and he rewarded her with a hiss of desire. "Yes, I can see that you do," she said, delight in her tone.

She rose to her knees and dangled her breasts in his face. Dillon followed his instinct and latched on to one brown, pert nub. Releasing the alpaca throw he'd been gripping, he grasped her slim hips instead. She murmured her approval and pushed her breast farther into his mouth. He flicked his tongue over the areola, tickling its nub. Her sharp intake of breath only urged him to administer more licks and nibbles. The apex of her legs slid deliciously over his lower abdomen. Her pussy grew wetter, her fluids warm and scented with musk.

Hell, he didn't care how different the situation was or how wild the sex would be. All he knew was that his cock was so hard it was a miracle it didn't shatter. He wanted Isis, had to sink his rod into her pussy, and desired to hear her cries of pleasure as he pummeled her slick core.

She moved slightly, offering him her other tit. He greedily accepted it and sucked hard, drawing as much of her soft, warm mound into his mouth as possible. Isis withdrew from him and peppered his chest with kisses. Every now and then her tongue darted out to moisten his skin. Each time it did, his breath hitched. He'd bedded several women—Caucasian, Latino, African-American, even a gorgeous, young college girl who was half Korean with emeraldlike eyes. However, none of them had ever had the effect on him that Isis did. She was like a drug, and right now, he played the part of the junkie.

Intoxicated with lust, he relaxed into the cushions. He gazed around the room, his attention landing briefly on Rory, who stood naked in the shadows, his enormous cock standing at attention, one of his long-fingered hands slowly stroking it back and forth.

"Be one with Rory and me, Dillon," Isis coaxed as her mouth found the root of his member. "Let us show you what *ménage amour* is really like, let us teach you about a new, special kind of love."

Her words thrilled Dillon. He gasped, threaded his fingers into her hair, and instinctively pushed her head down to take more of him into her mouth. She paused and withdrew from him. Tugging the elastic from her ponytail, she allowed the riot of mahogany curls to fall around her shoulders. Isis leaned forward again, her hair caressing and tickling his belly, his hips. The slight touch of her silky locks served to push him toward the precipice that promised sweet release. He sighed, his eyes closing of their own accord until her mouth slid over his cock again.

The sound that burst from Dillon imitated something wild, primeval. "Damn, woman! I can't last much longer!"

"Oh, but you will," she said once she released him, the tip of his dick popping from her mouth like a lollipop, the sound loud and hollow. "But when you do come, it will be like nothing you have every experienced before." She laughed and latched on to his cock again.

"Gah! Mmm!"

He struggled to contain himself. From the shadows of the chamber, he detected Rory's soft laughter. It didn't sound mocking or arrogant, but more like the man knew what Dillon was feeling and that he enjoyed watching them. At the thought of Rory touching or making love to Isis, a different sense of desire surged through him. Any residual misgivings he had dispersed the moment her tongue flicked the small opening on his penis. He hissed in pleasure, hips arching.

Faintly, Dillon detected the snaps and crackles of the fire nearby and the shuffling of approaching footsteps. As Isis's tongue performed its erotic magic, he forgot about everything around him and just enjoyed her ministrations.

She sucked hard on the tip, and he groaned with sexual hunger. Her tongue slid left, right, then over and around the head. She trailed hot wetness down to the base and back up again, then down once more to nibble and lick his sac, his nuts so damn tight the sensation provided both torture and ecstasy.

"L-let me have you," he gasped, chest heaving. "Let me taste you."

Isis released his cock and helped Dillon maneuver off the pillows to flatten himself on the bed. She turned and displayed her lovely ass to him. He palmed the sides of her hips, her creamy, firm butt cheeks beckoning him to nibble them, the tight, tan star of her anus hinting at other pleasurable activities.

With her pubic hair trimmed and surprisingly soft, he nuzzled his nose against her outer vaginal lips, relishing her musky, clean aroma.

She slid her mouth down over his erection.

He uttered a lusty sound and licked her pussy.

"Oh!" Isis squealed, her lips teasing the top of his cock. "More, please!"

He dipped his tongue into her recesses, her folds slick and velvety, the taste of her sweet, her aroma inebriating his senses. He found the little inner nub, a woman's instant hot button, and nipped at it. "Yes!" she sighed as she ran her tongue down his shaft. "Rory, join us! Hurry!"

At the man's name, Dillon's libido jumped tenfold. Lust didn't just race through his body, it crashed through him.

"Please don't stop, Dillon," she said and delicately raked her teeth over the end of his dick. At his delirious moan, she added, "You will have me in time, my love. Please let us show you the pleasure of being three and yet one. Give Rory a chance to show you that we can be happy as a threesome."

The mattress dipped, and Dillon glanced up to see Rory moving the pillows aside.

"Just pleasure Isis," he said to Dillon, his tone oddly reassuring, "and don't worry about me. Right now she is the one who is important."

Rory straddled Dillon's head, his cock huge, imposing, and damn hard. At first, disappointment nipped Dillon as he realized Rory intended to fuck Isis, but what made it worse was that he got to fuck her *first*. He wanted that privilege.

Placing the tip of his cock against her, Rory plunged into her pussy. Isis rewarded him with a scream of ecstasy.

Dillon thought he'd be repulsed by the sight of another man's cock pumping back and forth inches from his face, but he'd seen many porn movies with such close-ups, and being a part of it as Isis's delighted cries filled the room fuelled his desire even more.

He flicked his tongue over the Isis's nub.

"Yes!" she breathed and shoved backward. "Rory, harder! Dillon, more!"

Dillon caressed her clit with his tongue and glanced up every few seconds to watch Rory's slicked rod pump into her glistening pink hole. He didn't know how much longer he could go without exploding into Isis's mouth. And to his surprise, something about sharing her with another man enticed him further. She continued to perform tongue maneuvers that would have had any other guy spurting down her throat, but for some reason his cock throbbed harder and harder still.

Dillon whimpered loudly. Isis's pleased squeal, followed by more wiggling of her hips, pushed her nub farther into his mouth. He caught on to what he'd inadvertently done and hummed again, buzzing the soft upper flesh of Isis's crotch. He didn't care how he fucked Isis or how hard his dick had become. Dillon had never felt such mind-blowing sensations in all his adult life. If he died this way, he'd die a happy man.

Isis bobbed her head up and down, his cock hitting the soft inner sanctum at the back of her mouth. Then cool air swirled around it as she drew back, followed by the warmth of her mouth.

"Ungh!" Dillon moaned against her cunt.

She murmured her approval.

Rory's pace increased, his cock stabbing back and forth so quickly that for a long minute, all Dillon heard was the wet pat-pat-pat of Rory's pelvis slapping against Isis's ass. The man stiffened abruptly and howled out his release.

"You feel so good, precious," Rory yelled.

Dillon's dick thumped in eager response, but he still couldn't come.

Rory coaxed a few more drops into Isis, and then, once finished, he grasped the base of his cock and withdrew from her.

Groaning, Dillon couldn't fathom how he hadn't exploded by now, but his desire only escalated, his body so wired with lust he could barely stand it.

"Now," Rory said, looking down at Dillon, his eyes black pools of ink. "It's your turn. Finish what we've started."

"But I wanted to come in her mouth," Dillon replied, both excited to get his turn to fuck her and yet disappointed he couldn't finish the oral sex.

Isis moved off of him and sat on her knees, her chest heaving with her excited breaths. The torch light danced across her large breasts and flat belly, the shadows enhancing her lines and sudden curves. In awe of her body, Dillon just stared at her.

She smiled. "There's plenty of time later for that sort of play, my love. Right now we have to finish the consummation, and," she stroked her fingers over his cock, drew them over his thigh, and along one of hers to dip into her moist recesses, "I'm now ready for you to have me."

"I've been ready for you for the last half hour," Dillon said. He wiped her essence from his mouth and sat up. "I don't know what it is about your saliva that makes me feel this way, but I've never been this fucking hard in my entire life. I should've spurted everywhere by now."

Rory laughed softly. "And what's even better is that sex with us will be this way every time."

"Do you accept me and Rory?" she asked, her gaze serious.

"Accept you and Rory?"

He looked at the other man who now sat on the edge of the mattress, then back at Isis, her expression concerned. What was going on? Why was it so important that he was okay with Rory's presence and sexual participation, too?

"I have to be honest," he said. "I don't mind a threesome now and then, but I want you for myself, Isis."

"Rory and I want to be a unified threesome, and you're the one who completes the circle of our love," she replied. "That's how we are, how we live."

"What?" He frowned. His gaze shot to Rory before returning to her.

Rory touched her shoulder, the action conveying his love for her. "Maybe you were wrong about him after all, Isis."

"No, I'm right about Dillon. I feel it in my bones."

Confusion settled over Dillon. "I don't understand what you're talking about."

"Just trust me when I say that you'll come to care for Rory." Isis settled on one hip, her legs drawn to the side, arm out, palm flat on the bed to brace her upper body. "We don't fuck unless we're certain another man is right for us, for our threesome relationship." She shot him a pleading look with her eyes. "Until now I've been wrong about all the men who have tried to join us as a unit. Without the right match to me, I can't have any children, but now that I'm ready to conceive again, and I'm certain about you being a true mate, it's essential that you accept us, Dillon."

Nothing she said made any sense to Dillon. "You're wanting a baby? Is that it?"

"Yes," she said. "A child and an heir. However, you're *the* third partner, the man who can actually impregnate me."

"I'm not sure what you mean about being a unit and a match, but if you wanted a baby, why didn't you just ask me?" Dillon frowned. She wanted a child, but he didn't understand why it was so important for Rory to be a part of it. "I'm crazy about you, Isis," he added. "I'd like to wait before having children, but I want to be with you. I know we haven't known one another long, but I sense we're meant to be together."

"See, Rory?" She threw a pleased look at the other man. "He senses it, too."

Dillon cast a dark look toward Rory. He suddenly realized he'd do whatever it took to be part of Isis's life, even if it meant sharing her with another man. And, although he might not comprehend his strange feelings, there was something about Rory that appealed to him. He shook his head, staring at the dark-eyed fellow. Understanding, sympathy, and reassurance resided in Rory's eyes. For a moment, Dillon could only gape at him. He didn't know how it was possible, but he sensed Rory understood how he felt and what he was going through. This, in turn, heightened the odd affection that he seemed to be developing for the guy.

Lady of the Lair

Against his better judgment, Dillon added, "I'll do whatever necessary to make you happy, Isis, and if Rory's a part of it," he gulped, inherently knowing that the guy was okay, that he had only their best interests in mind, "then I'll accept it. You'll have to teach me, though. This is all very new and different to me."

"See?" Isis replied. She looked up at Rory with utter delight on her features. "I told you he was the one!" She returned her attention to Dillon, her eyes aglow with happiness. "Trust us, and I promise we'll explain everything very soon, that you'll be content and fulfilled living with Rory and me."

Dillon contemplated Isis's words, his gaze drifting back and forth between her and Rory. Both wore sincere expressions. The one thing Dillon did understand was that he wanted Isis, and that if he didn't get relief soon, he'd go insane.

Shrugging, he said, "If what you're saying about Rory is true, then I'm fine with it. And there's no doubt about wanting you, Isis. You are the most desirable woman I've ever seen, ever been with."

She graced him with another one of her white-toothed smiles, her eyes alight with elation and relief. "Good," she said. "Lie back. I want you to fuck me until I scream."

Her words lit a fire within Dillon. Something raced along his nervous system, something heady and hot, yet cool and wild at the same time. Dillon focused on Isis, who now knelt over him on all fours.

"Are you ready for me, my love?" She looked deeply into his eyes.

"Yes." Adrenaline zinged through his body. Every inch of his form itched and tingled to feel her slick pussy glide over his cock.

She lowered her body onto his, and he moaned at the contact. The unrealistic heat her skin exuded forced a surprised breath from him. Kissing him, she drew her nails up along his ribs, then buried her fingers in his hair, assaulting his mouth with her tongue. White-hot need soared through him, his cock twitching in anticipation against her pubic bone.

Finally, Isis drew back, slipped her hand between their bodies and grasped his throbbing hard-on. She placed it at her wet opening and held it there.

"Please, Isis," Dillon rasped, voice thick with lust. "I don't think I can take any more."

Rory nudged Dillon's arm. "Listen to her, Dillon. She's serious. The way we make love will be like nothing you've ever experienced before."

"Prepare yourself for something that will blow your mind," Isis whispered.

He chuckled at that. "You're good, babe, but—"

Her laughter silenced him. "Don't say we didn't warn you, my love." At that, she settled down over his cock in one sudden movement.

"Oh my—" Dillon shouted, his hands flying to her hips to clench her ass, his fingers digging deep. "Holy shit!" He struggled to comprehend the all-consuming sensation that blasted throughout his being.

Rory's deep, rumbling laughter melded with Dillon's cries, and his cock throbbed harder, harder, harder. But no release came. Not that Dillon wanted it at the moment, but the intensity of the feelings coursing through him should've pushed him over the edge so that he filled her pussy with his cum.

"I-I can't! What the hell? Damn, you feel beyond amazing."

Eyes closed, lips parted, Isis braced her hands on the mattress at either side of his torso. As Dillon struggled to cope with the delirium that shot through his nerve endings, his breathing erratic, he looked up into Isis's topaz-like eyes as she opened them to stare down at him.

"Calm yourself," she said, "or you'll end up hyperventilating. Rory and I warned you that this would be like nothing you've ever felt before." "The feelings racing through me are..."

"Indescribable?" she supplied.

He nodded and bit his lower lip.

"Easy, Dillon," said Rory. He moved up onto the mattress again and positioned himself behind Isis. "If you can't handle this part, you'll never be able to cope with your climax or hers. And you must be prepared for the ultimate joining."

"The what?" Dillon gulped and wrestled with the tingles assaulting him inside and out. Pressure built at the base of his spine until he thought the bones would splinter.

"Through our ménage lovemaking," said Isis, her tone patient, loving, "you'll be connected to us."

Nothing made sense, but the messages flooding his nervous system drowned out any rational thought processes. Movement distracted him slightly, and he glanced up at Rory.

"What are you doing?" he asked Rory.

"I've already started the consummation process," the man said. "But while you mate with her, I'm going to give Isis additional pleasure while we all connect."

"Mate with her?" Incredulous, Dillon could only stare up at them. "Connect?" He frowned, shaking his head. "You're not making any sense."

"You said you were willing to be with us, my love." Working her pussy down tighter on his cock, Isis moved up and down.

"Ungh!" He stiffened and fought to pace his breathing.

Isis paused so that Rory could prime her anus. Although he wanted to get down to business, Dillon still watched in fascination and anticipated what it would feel like to have another guy's dick, separated only by the thin muscles and membranes between her vagina and her ass, rubbing against his. He never participated in a ménage fuck before, but if they were all like this, then he had just become an avid fan of it.

"Ready, Dillon?" Rory asked, jarring him out of his thoughts and his regulated breathing.

"Uh, yeah." He started panting again.

How could his skin feel so electrified? Was it due to the toxin that Isis had warned him about? Maybe it heightened the five senses and his libido to science-fiction proportions. Whatever it was doing, he loved it!

Raising her derriere slightly, which forced the head of Dillon's cock into a different position inside her, Isis sighed in bliss. "Put it in me, baby."

Rory pushed into her anus. "I'll never," he gulped, "get used to how great your body feels so tight around me, precious."

The feeling of something hard pressing along the length of Dillon's dick forced a cry of carnal delight from him.

"Oh, that's it." Isis rocked backward. "More, baby."

Rory filled her up, his cock fully against Dillon's, separated from one another by only millimeters.

She took a deep breath and said, "Both of you fuck me now!"

An animalistic force awoke within Dillon. He wanted to pummel her hard, long, and fuck her again and again. He pumped his hips, his dick sliding in and out of her tight hole. As Isis's arousal escalated, her juices coated his pelvis. Working in and out of her ass, Rory's cock massaged Dillon's. Back and forth, they took turns sliding into her. Dillon thrust into her core as Rory pulled out of her asshole, then Rory pushed into her, and Dillon withdrew.

The tingling pressure at the base of Dillon's spine climbed higher and higher. His balls tightened again, the tension both beautiful and painful. Movement briefly distracted him. Both of Rory's hands traveled from Isis's hips to her breasts where he cupped them, squeezing rhythmically. She whimpered, somehow meeting both of their thrusts at the precise moment. Dillon gripped her upper thighs, aiding her motions, needing to plunge his cock deeper.

"Oh! Oh, yes!" she cried. "Fuck me! Both of you fuck me!"

Her shouts echoed against the stone walls and the ceiling. Despite his pleasure, Dillon briefly wondered how he managed to end up in a cavern chamber screwing a dark-haired, blue-eyed beauty while her other boyfriend poked her in the ass. It certainly wasn't how he'd dreamed of making love to Isis, but the rate his cock throbbed and the intensity of the prickles and lightning bolts bombarding his body was nothing like he'd ever imagined possible either.

She worked his cock like a piston, her pussy hot, her inner regions hotter still. She felt so silky, so slick, and her inner walls massaged him. Tiny ripples flowed through her pussy, and his breathing quickened.

Behind Isis, Rory grunted out, "I'm about done, man. I can't hold off much longer."

"I don't know what's wrong, but I can't come." Dillon growled and pumped into her harder, the head of his cock bumping her womb. The friction only moved his new and bizarre pleasure scale up another ten notches. "I want to come. Damn, how I want to!"

Rory adjusted his pace to match Dillon's. "You won't come until she's ready for you. She has to tell you the precise," his eyes rolled back in his head, "time you can come."

"Wh-what?"

"Shut up and fuck me!" Isis yelled, her face flushed, eyes closed. She panted and began a singsong sound. "Uh! Uh! Uh!"

A pulsing began deep within Isis's vagina. It swept over Dillon's cock in shocking waves that sent minute electrical jolts into him. Although odd, it proved beyond fantastic. He moaned loudly, then let out another cry, the sound reminiscent of a wolf's howl. He thrust faster, harder.

"That's it," she whispered. "That's it. Yes!"

At that, Rory grunted and stiffened as he shot cum into her ass. Isis squealed and ground her hips harder.

"Now you may have your release, my love," she shouted. "Fill me with your seed!"

To Dillon's surprise, Rory threaded the fingers of one hand with one of his. He glanced up at the man, the odd action jolting Dillon with a sense of friendship and the caring of two men who shared something special: one woman.

Isis's words unlocked something in Dillon. In return, he squeezed Rory's hand back.

"Now," Isis cried. "Fuck me, Dillon. Release yourself into me!"

The urgency behind his dick detonated. The tingling and prickling at the base of his spine flowed into his cock as if a dam had broken. He issued a scream that stunned him, but he didn't care. He had to ride the wave of hellish ecstasy that crashed along his body and out through his cock.

With his hips ramming hers, Dillon thrust so hard he momentarily saw stars and almost unseated Isis. Cries tumbled out of Rory. At first, Dillon thought he'd hurt the guy, but as he pummeled Isis's cunt, and Rory's shouts grew more pronounced, he realized Rory was somehow gaining pleasure from his movements, too. The man held on tightly to Isis's ass with his free hand, keeping his cock fully inserted in her.

She squealed, the sound a long, low ululation. Her breasts jiggled, and her curls bounced around her head and face as Dillon kept slamming into her body.

"Yes! Yes!" she crowed.

"I can't come!" Dillon voiced between pants and groans. "I can't—"

The pressure at the base of his cock shifted. A force rocketed to the tip of it. Cum surged into Isis's pussy. Dillon continued pumping, unable to control himself or his actions anymore.

"Son of a bitch!" He thrust harder. "Holy hell!" He kept thrusting.

"Ungh!" Rory cried and hung on to Isis, the fingers of his other hand still threaded tightly with Dillon's. Isis shrieked as her orgasm hit. Her inner muscles gripped Dillon's cock snugly, the applied rhythmic pressure his undoing. He screamed with her, bucking and grinding.

"Shit!" Rory yelled as he grasped either side of Isis's ass.

Dillon kept coming. His seed spurted from him so hard he grew faint, but he kept pushing in and out of her wetness.

"Yes!" Isis kept saying. "Oh, yes! That's what I want, my love. Give me all of your essence. I crave it, so fill me with it. Fuck me harder!"

Dillon kept spurting inside her. Each little drop he expelled drained him of strength, but he couldn't stop moving. Her body greedily sucked his cock dry, draining him of all cum, but he kept thrusting as if his entire body was a jackhammer.

Gradually, the intensity of his climax began to recede. With the pressure released and his seed spent, Dillon slowed down. Rory let go of Dillon's hand and withdrew from Isis. He flopped, panting, onto his side next to Dillon. Still pumping, Dillon paced himself, but Isis wasn't finished. Her vagina milked his cock, the muscles contracting and releasing him over and over. The last of his jizz flowed into her. He relaxed, puffing as he tried to catch his breath, his eyes suddenly very heavy.

Isis continued to ride him. Sweat coated her body and dripped onto his belly and chest. Finally, she ground her hips a few more times and stopped. She lay down on Dillon, then rolled to the side, drawing him with her so they lay facing one another. Rory spooned in behind Isis and threw his arm over her, his hand resting on Dillon's shoulder, his thumb stroking his heated skin. Dillon lay still, his mind reeling, and although it scared him to admit it, he realized, too, that Rory's hand on his shoulder comforted and pleased him.

Across the chamber, the fire crackled. Exhausted, Dillon caught sight of a few red sparks drifting to the ceiling to wink out. It took several minutes, but his breathing returned to normal. A warm lethargy sifted into his muscles and bones. Rory yawned, patted Dillon's shoulder, and turned onto his back. The man stretched and yawned a second time.

The spicy aroma of the chamber blended with the thick odor of pheromones. Dillon tried to comprehend what had happened. The sex was phenomenal, astronomical, and totally unexplainable. Whatever the true word for their style of sex, he knew he wanted more. No, he had to have more *and* keep both Isis and Rory. He loved Isis, but there was something about Rory that drew him, too. He'd been dubious of the guy at first, but something had changed between them, and he liked it. The man was easy to get along with, and Rory fucking Isis in the ass as he'd pumped into her pussy had been better than he ever dreamed it could be.

Besides, he truly felt connected to him now. He didn't know how or why, but the feelings were there all the same.

Dillon blinked, trying to rid his brain of the sexual and emotional haze clouding it. His eyelids drooped, but as the sound of bass—possibly drums—reached him, he roused long enough to listen.

"Do I hear drums?" he murmured next to Isis's ear.

"Mmm—hmm." She snuggled closer to him, her arm slipping in between his to lie over the crook of his waist.

"Where's it coming from?"

Behind her, Rory snored.

"The sound drifts through the passages at night during travel times," she replied sleepily. "It's why no evening or night tours are permitted in these caverns."

"But what's making the sound? Where's it coming from?"

"Home," she said.

He frowned and listened to the boom-boom-boom that filtered into the cavern, the bass permeating his body and meshing with his heartbeat.

"Home where?" he asked.

"Down deep at the Community."

"Isis, you're not making any sense," Dillon said and kissed her temple. "What are you talking about?"

"Sleep, my love. I'll tell you later."

He fought the embrace of sleep, battled to keep his eyes open, but failed miserably.

As darkness crashed in upon Dillon, Isis snuggled closer to him and whispered, "With any luck, I've conceived."

"And if you haven't?"

"We still have a few days of conception time."

"And then what?"

"If I still haven't become pregnant, then I'll have to convince the Lady of the Lair not to cast you to the Lava Demon."

Dillon struggled to wrap his mind around her words, but sleep muddled his understanding.

"I don't think I could bear to lose you," Isis murmured as he succumbed to oblivion.

Chapter Two Transformation

Dillon awoke lying facedown, his cheek pressed against a gray fur throw bunched up as a makeshift pillow. He'd never been so drained in his life. Eyes bleary, he raised his head to look around. Cool air kissed his bare body. Where was he? What happened?

A woman knelt next to him, her electric-blue eyes assessing him with concern.

Isis!

Everything rushed back to him in a sensory overload. The ménage fuck, Rory's presence, the weird connection to Rory, the odd things that Isis kept telling him, and most of all—the sexual climax that nearly left him comatose.

But looking in her eyes now, and despite how peculiar everything seemed, Dillon knew one thing. He loved her.

He glanced across the room, seeking Rory's presence, but didn't find him. Bewilderment sifted into his psyche. He cared for the man. There was a strange connection between them, a bond, and that bond was Isis.

"Yes, you do love me, don't you?" she asked, her smile one of obvious pleasure.

"H-how did you hear my thoughts?"

Her smile grew wider. "You're one of us now, so we can speak to one another telepathically. And you and Rory will be the best of friends now, too."

Rory's voice came from somewhere across the cavern by the fire pit. "Get used to it, Dillon. We're bonded, a unit."

Lady of the Lair

Dillon pushed himself up and twisted slightly. There, on a folded piece of black fur, sat Rory, naked save for a suede loincloth.

"We have much to talk about, my love," Isis said and drew Dillon to his feet. He swayed and she steadied him. "I know you're weak, which is normal for the first time with our ménage joinings, but your strength will return once you eat some mushrooms."

He wrinkled his nose. "Yuck."

Isis laughed. "These aren't ordinary mushrooms, and they don't taste like the ones that grow in mines and cellars or even the ones that grow above."

"You talk like these caverns and being above are two totally different worlds," Dillon commented as he accepted a handful of fat, round, brown fungi from her.

"That's because they are," Rory called out. "You're one of *us* now, and we'll protect one another just like any close-knit family, even more so."

"That's something else I keep hearing." Dillon sniffed the biggest of the mushrooms. Spicy. Just like the aroma he'd noticed upon entering this cavern. "The *us* bit seems to be important to you two."

"Once you see the Community, you'll understand." Turning, Isis retrieved their clothes and stuffed them and her pack into a big suede bag.

The spider of unease began tickling his brain again. He paused, the mushroom halfway to his mouth to sample it, and let his gaze wander around the cavern. Everything seemed normal, yet not. Even the sex, although magnificent, hadn't been normal. A range of descriptive words catapulted through his mind. Many came close to labeling the sexual experience but not close enough. Calling their lovemaking normal was like calling a diamond dull.

And he had the distinct impression that his love for this woman and his newfound male friend ended all normalcy as he knew it. "Eat," she said. "You'll need your strength. The trek to the Community isn't an easy one, and Rory and I have much to teach you."

He bit into the shroom. Surprised, he popped the remainder into his mouth and chewed. It tasted only slightly earthy, but the overpowering taste of buttery spiciness exploded in his mouth. He ate the other fungi and accepted a drink of water from a stainless steel water bottle she produced from a hole at the base of the wall.

She withdrew a gauzy wrap skirt from the same place she'd taken the water bottle and fixed it around her hips. The outline of her legs and the dark hair covering the apex of her thighs still showed clearly through the shimmering silver material. Isis left her hair down and remained topless. Wherever they were going, clothes didn't seem a big issue.

Kneeling, she reached into the sunken spot and then stood with something in her hand. She turned and tossed it to Dillon.

He caught it and grimaced. A loincloth? Were they members of some sort of a nudist colony or one that enjoyed partial nudity?

Rory's laughter rang out in the room. "He thinks we're taking him to a nudity colony."

She giggled. "I heard his thoughts, too."

"You guys are freaking me out," said Dillon.

Although everything was strange to him, he wasn't frightened. Hesitant and dubious of the unknown, maybe, but somehow he trusted Isis and Rory implicitly.

Curiosity nudged him to ask, "What's going on?"

"Shh!" Holding out her hand, Isis added, "All is well, my love. I know things seem strange, a bit disorienting and maybe even a tad frightening, but you'll understand everything very, very soon. Don't you trust me?" She blinked, her gorgeous topaz eyes full of worry.

His fear evaporated, and a sense of calm settled over Dillon. "I do trust you, Isis. I trust Rory, too."

She smiled and grasped his hand. "Good."

Lady of the Lair

Rory grinned, obviously pleased at being included. "Are you ready, Isis?" he asked.

"Yes." She brought Dillon's hand to her lips and placed a delicate kiss upon his palm, her eyes full of happiness. "Let's go."

Dillon threaded his fingers through hers and followed her into a black corridor at the rear of the cavern. No torches lined the walls, no electric lights. At first, he didn't realize his vision penetrated the inkiness. The farther they walked, the darker it became, and the more Dillon could see. A pale blue aura bathed the walls, ceiling, floor, and even Isis in startling clarity. Within minutes, he began to feel rejuvenated, too. Energy coursed through his system. Had the mushrooms done that?

His voice sounded small as he asked, "How is this possible?"

Patient laughter answered him. "You've become one of us, my love. You're capable of other things as well, such as telepathy, heightened senses, the ability to leap great distances, strength, and a few other little things."

They continued downward, and a horrible thought struck him. "Are you vampires?"

Deep laughter erupted in the passage behind him. "You're hilarious," said Rory. "I'm going to enjoy getting to know you."

Isis giggled, too. "We're human, my love, but we're more advanced." She released Dillon's hand and bent over at the waist to walk through the narrowing tunnel, the hem of her skirt inching up over her butt cheeks. Once through and she turned to check on him, she added, "We're Alter-Human."

"What is that? Do you mean like alternative? You're alternative human?"

Rory emerged and stood next to him. "We're Alter-Human." He sounded stern, determined. "That's something you need to start telling yourself now, Dillon. It's we."

He stared up at Rory. We? Had he really stepped from the world he knew—the cities, technology, nature, vehicles, and overall humanity as he knew it—and entered a subterranean dimension of people who were what?

"Man, you've got to be the luckiest son of a bitch on Earth!"

The arachnid of unease stomped in Dillon's brain. For the first time, he felt doubt.

"Hey." Roy stepped in front of him and put a hand on one of Dillon's shoulders. "It's like Isis said. This is all extremely new to you. In fact, to a Topsider, it's probably something right out of a science-fiction movie, but trust your instincts. They won't steer you wrong."

"My instincts?" He looked deep into the other man's eyes.

Nodding, Rory wore a sympathetic expression. "Listen to what your gut tells you. You know, that sensation," he tapped the hollow of Dillon's chest, "right there that whispers when something is right or wrong."

Dillon patted Rory's arm. "Okay."

He let his gaze wander along the small fissure sprawling like a serpent before them. He eased to its edge and looked down. Even with his heightened vision, he couldn't see the bottom. The other side beckoned from about fifteen to twenty feet away. He glanced back at Isis and Rory.

"What does being Alter-Human mean?"

Isis faced the gaping crack in the floor and then launched herself at a full run. Startled, Dillon nearly screamed out for her to stop, but she leapt from the edge, her legs positioned like a ballerina soaring through a big jump, and landed with ease on the other side.

Dillon gaped at her, his heart thrashing out his fear for her life.

"It means we're human," she said loudly across the crevasse, "but for some reason, nature saw fit to create a branch off the normal human strain. We're a new race of people. We're evolved. Alter-Humans are physically and mentally advanced. The whys of it all remain a mystery to even us, but we exist nonetheless." She beckoned for Rory to follow her. "As Alter-Humans began to understand our differences and abilities, we also realized we were in danger living among normal humans. We had nowhere to go but to the mountains. When the caverns were discovered, we also realized that our powerful senses aided us in living here, and most of all, that we were well protected here."

Rory leapt across the fissure, landing lightly on his feet. "You're turn," he called, motioning to Dillon.

"You're out of your fucking tree," Dillon retorted, fear stabbing his gut. "You're both *loco*!"

Laughing, Rory waved him over again. "Come on, man! You can do it, too. You've been converted. Isis saw to that when you mated with her."

"Wait. You mean I'm like you now?"

Suddenly what they were saying made sense. He was now an Alter-Human. How was that possible? Didn't one have to be born to it? Didn't it have something to do with genetics?

Isis answered his thoughts. "Mating with me *turned* you." She stood with her arms crossed over her naked breasts. "You mentioned vampires, so think along those lines to understand what I did to you, what *we* did to you. Although Rory helped turn you, most of it comes through the Alter-Female. I didn't bite you or make you drink my blood to turn you, but when you accepted us, accepted me, you granted me the right to make you my mate." She wore a patient expression. "Alter-Females have two mates. One is the primer male, and the other is the donor male. Although to start the process, my kisses were essential. Like I admitted to you before I kissed you that first time, my saliva has a mild toxin in it that made you compliant. It also aids in strengthening your semen. In other words, it helps make your sperm more potent to increase the chances of conception and ensure propagation of our race."

"The toxin is why my vision became blurry and I was disoriented for a few minutes," Dillon said.

She nodded.

"I thought you were just screwing with me."

"No, I was telling you the truth. Are you mad at me now?"

"No," he looked deeply into her eyes, "you were honest with me." Sincerity filled her blue orbs, and he saw his love for her mirrored there. His feelings for her soared through is body. "I should have paid more attention to what you were saying instead of thinking only with my cock."

She chuckled, the sound sweet music to Dillon's ears.

"We don't want you blaming us," Rory stated. "We only take those who are of free will."

"I'm fine with everything," said Dillon. "Some of it is difficult to wrap my mind around, but I'm fine, really."

"In order for you to be my donor male," Isis continued, "we swapped bodily fluids. Saliva. Cum. My juices. We meshed, became one, and thus, you became Alter-Human. But only those we are genetically compatible with can be converted."

"How do you know if someone is compatible?" he asked, stalling.

"We sense it, but that doesn't mean we're always right." She gestured for him to jump. "Now get your ass over here, my love."

Did he believe them and jump across that bottomless pit? He trusted them, but was it really possible for him to leap like they had? He'd just witnessed both his new lovers soaring across the chasm. But what if it was a trick? He gauged the distance of the jump. Fifteen feet, maybe, but twenty? Olympic athletes could launch themselves fourteen feet or more in the broad jump, so it was possible.

"Trust us," said Isis. "You can do it."

Heart thrumming at warp speed, Dillon backed up to make a run for it.

"Don't put too much into it," Rory warned. "You'll end up with your nose smashed on the back wall here." He jerked his thumb over one shoulder. "We don't want you to get hurt."

Before he could change his mind, Dillon took off running. As he reached the edge of the fissure, he closed his eyes and sprang from the precipice so hard it frightened him. The back wall roared toward him, and he slapped into it—hard.

Stone scratched and bit at his skin. Sharp edges cut him. He fell to the ledge, knocking the air from his lungs, and rolled to Isis's feet.

"Are you okay?" she asked, kneeling at his side. Worry etched her features.

Rory knelt, too, his face a mask of concern. "Dillon?"

He gasped for breath. Blood trickled from his nose, and an abrasion on his forehead stung. Amazement blanketed his mind. He'd done it. He'd really leapt across the crevasse as if it had been no more than a sidewalk crack.

"Dillon?" Rory set him up and brushed the hair back from Dillon's face.

"I'm okay," he gasped. "It's just some bumps and scrapes. "I'm more embarrassed than anything."

Isis laughed and kissed his cheek.

"I warned you," Rory said, "but I'm glad you're not seriously hurt."

Isis helped Dillon stand and brushed the minerals and sandstone from his skin.

Gently, Rory smoothed the grit from Dillon's back. His soft ministration touched Dillon's heart, and Dillon smiled at his new mate, heat singing his cheeks. Rory seemed to understand and stepped away as if sensing he needed a moment to compose himself.

Ripping a swath of cloth from her garment, Isis dabbed at Dillon's forehead, then held it tightly against his nose. "Here, hold this there until the bleeding stops."

Rory led the way along the well-worn path that etched the crevasse's rim. Several minutes passed, and a hole opened in the wall. He turned into it. The walls glowed in some sort of phosphorescent mineral that threw an eerie luminescence on the huge chunks and wide veins of gypsum.

The thumping of drums resumed again, louder this time. The bass seemed to almost blend with Dillon's blood. He looked at Isis, his cock hardening. He needed to screw her again. How could he be ready again after the lovemaking session he just participated in?

She glanced back at him. "How's your nose?"

"Fine," he said, voice low.

She paused, her gaze roving over him, her attention shifting to the flap of his loincloth that lay tented over his eager cock.

"Rory," she said. "I think Dillon needs a bit of one-on-one time. Do you mind going ahead without us? We'll catch up."

He paused and looked back at Dillon. "No problem. There's plenty of time for the three of us to get to know one another in that manner, and besides," he smiled, "I think he needs some reassurance from you." He turned, but stopped again abruptly and pointed his finger at her. "Be careful, precious."

She waved him on his way. "You know I'm always careful."

"Isis," Rory interjected sternly. "I mean it. We may live down here, but there are always dangers, and with your attention diverted, you might not notice something or misstep or..."

"Okay! Okay!" She laughed. "I promise I'll be careful." She looked at Dillon fondly. "*We'll* be careful. Now get going, Rory, and stop worrying."

He nodded and left them in the narrow confines of the passage.

"It seems that the drums have begun to speak to you," she murmured to Dillon and sidled up to him. "The three of us belong to one another now, but that doesn't mean that we don't enjoy couple time, too." She offered him a desirous look. "There are many benefits to one-on-one sex as well."

Dillon didn't know what it was that swept over him, but he dropped the rag, moving swiftly, and pushed Isis against the wall. He placed his hands on her hips and knelt in front of her to nose the gauzy skirt away from her cunt. In seconds, he had the nub of her cunt between his teeth.

"Oh!" Her hips jutted toward him.

Presented with easier access to her pussy, he licked her, his tongue laving along her folds to slip upward into her still-damp center.

"W-we shouldn't be too late in reaching the Community." Her breathing grew hoarse. "We're ex-expected. Oh!" She gasped as he sucked her clit into his mouth and pulled on it rhythmically.

She fanned her hands over his shoulders, up the back of his neck, and then threaded her fingers into his hair. Everything she did sparked more and more fires of desire within Dillon. He had to have her, had to sink his cock deep into her vagina and fill her body with his cum.

"Oh, Dillon," she breathed and thrust against his mouth.

He dipped his tongue into her wet, satiny folds and flicked the edges of it. Again and again he nibbled and licked at her pussy. As she murmured and groaned, her arousal wrapped around him, and his dick throbbed harder with the urge to pummel her inner recesses.

She gripped his hair and forced him to travel upward along her body. "I must," she panted hard, "have you. Fuck me, please."

He pushed the loincloth out of the way and sank his dick into her pussy. Her body, hot and lubricated with her juices, readily accepted him.

"Damn, you feel amazing, Isis," he breathed.

With his face in the crook of her neck and his arms bracing her hips, he began pumping in and out of her. Isis snapped her legs around his driving pelvis and locked her ankles at the base of his spine.

He moved in fast, deep strokes. The pressure built behind his balls, tightening them, and crept upward, shooting tingles through his cock.

Isis's muscles tightened around his shaft, and delightful, rhythmic pulses from her vagina penetrated his dick so that he gritted his teeth and sucked air between them. Although Dillon expected the sensation this time, it still took him by surprise. He grunted, but the feeling rocketed into him, setting his testicles, hips, and the base of his spine on fire.

"Isis!" He groaned and stiffened. Cum surged through his cock and into her.

She cried out, the sound loud in the corridor. Her orgasm grew more intense, the contractions inside her milking his cock until tremors beset his legs and he briefly wondered if he'd collapse.

He kept thrusting into her, releasing the last drops of his cum into her body. Panting, she relaxed, and he set her feet on the floor.

They leaned against one another for several minutes. The drumbeats curled throughout the passages and bled into his spent body.

"I admit," said Dillon between pants, "I've slept with a lot of women, but I've never experienced sex like this before." He rubbed his face against hers, drawing in her intoxicating aroma. "Until today, I'd never shared a woman with another guy either."

"Sex between mated Alter-Humans is beyond intense," she replied.

"So making love has evolved, too?"

She giggled. "Yes, I guess that's true."

"But Rory, well, I never expected I'd have to share you with another guy."

"Are you disappointed?" Worry tinged her voice.

He paused, then said, "At first I was jealous as hell. Then, something changed when Rory grasped my hand during sex with you. I don't know how to explain it. I just knew he was all right, that he's a good guy, and I felt this..."

"Connection?"

"Yes. A weird, comforting bond with him," Dillon supplied. "And then I didn't mind sharing you after that."

A soft, pleased chuckle slipped from her. "That's as it should be between Alter-Human trios. It's natural."

He frowned. "One thing bothers me, though."

"Oh? What might that be?"

"Will I ever see my family again?"

"Certainly. But for a few weeks, you must remain down here at the Community with me so you can assimilate." She stepped away from him, straightened the wrap around her hips, and grabbed his hand. Tugging him into a sedate walk with her, she said, "We have much to teach and show you. Now that you've converted to an Alter-Human, you'll learn how to use and hide your abilities before you can return Topside." She shot him a pleased smile over one round, smooth shoulder. "It sounds like you're coming to terms with the unexpected turn in your life."

"I guess you could say that. Other than my family, I don't have anything to lose, and you've assured me I'll be reunited with my family a few weeks from now."

"Yes."

"Then I'm going to enjoy my new life."

She laughed lightly. "Wonderful!"

"So when do I get to meet this aunt you were telling me about the other night?" he asked. "You spoke highly of her."

"Very soon," she replied. "Then you'll get to meet the rest of my family, too." She looked askance at him. "Does your mother—what's her name? Mama Rosa?—know about me yet?"

Her question startled Dillon, but it also pleased him that she was interested in meeting his family.

"Not yet, but I wanted to be sure you were interested in meeting everyone before I mentioned you to my mother."

"What about your father?"

"He died when I was ten. Mom loved him more than anything and even named me after Dad, but her side of the family frowned on the fact that Dad was Caucasian instead of Cuban."

"I think such prejudices are silly," she said.

He grinned at her. "I do, too." He hopped over a large stone in the path. "But you know how hard it is for people of color to make it in

today's world, let alone someone who has the blood of two races running through their veins like I have."

"I understand." Isis stopped at a wall that reared high into the darkness above them. "The Community is working on banishing all racial issues. We want to be part of Topside society, but we have to be sure that normal humans are ready for us, and what better way than to show Topsiders that it doesn't matter what race, religion, or culture one belongs to? We manage okay down here, but we don't want to live out generation after generation in caverns when we have much to offer science, the teaching professions, medicine, and so on." She shrugged. "And although some Topsiders participate in *ménage à trois* sex, the vast majority of the population frowns upon it. Here *ménage amour* is a way of life. We can't procreate without two males."

Her words both touched and confused him. Was it possible for equality to happen for everyone no matter what their race, culture, religion, or, in this case, the world of origin?

And what did she mean by needing two men to have children?

His mother's side of the family was Cuban, so all he'd heard for the past three years was that it was time for him to settle down and start a family. His mother, Mama Rosa, wanted grandchildren. "Find a nice *mujer sola joven*, Dillon," she'd say. "Settle down and make me lots of *nietos*."

His father's side of the family, the Garvers, told him to take his time in choosing a spouse. "Get married soon" warred with "Take your time and choose wisely." Dillon often felt like he was the rope used in tug of war.

Now it appeared that he'd found a woman he adored and who wanted children right away. What perfect time to tell her his true feelings.

"I have to tell you something," he said.

"Yes?"

Lady of the Lair

"I love you, Isis. I've loved you from the moment I first saw you. I just want to make you happy."

"I love you, too. And the way you suddenly knew you loved me is the same way I knew you were my other mate."

"I'm not sure I understand why you need two men to help you conceive, though."

"Don't worry. I know you have many questions." She kissed him softly. He brushed his tongue over her lips, and she murmured her approval. "You'll learn our way of life," she continued. "Although requiring two males to have offspring may be strange to you, the same goes for Alter-Males interested in a mate and children. They must help their Alter-Female find the second suitable male whose genetic makeup is compatible. Alter-Females require an Alter-Male to prime them, which is what Rory is. He awakens my hormones and my body's chemicals, readies me to conceive. You are the donor, Dillon, the one who actually impregnates me.

"Me?"

She nodded. "I thought I had the right primer male with my childhood friend, Fanes, but our DNA was only partially compatible. That's when I discovered Rory."

"But would a child be part me and part Rory?" He loved her, but he worried about his mother's reaction.

"Yes," she replied. "Rory gives me hormones and chemicals that prime me, and once my body is ready and you impregnate me, Rory's elements are transmitted to the embryo, so it will inherit some of his physical characteristics, too."

He blinked, and his eyes widened. *Mama Rosa will flip! She'll never understand me sharing Isis with another man.*

She caressed his cheek in a reassuring and loving manner. "You'll learn more as you get to know everyone in the Community and understand our society. At first it will all be difficult to wrap your mind around, but you'll know the feelings and sensations are okay. Use them to guide you." "You mentioned an heir," he said curiously. "Tell me more."

A long moment passed as Isis stared into his eyes. Satisfied by something she saw in them, she said, "I'm the next in line to lead the Community." Pride laced her tone. "Cuban blood is strong, so you, Rory, and I will have beautiful baby girls and handsome, strapping little boys—and our firstborn will be my heir."

Surprise crept into his brain. "Are you serious?"

"Does that bother you?" Worry tinged her voice.

"Well," he raked the fingers of one hand through his tousled hair, "this is all moving so fast, and the idea of children and ruling a community with you is wild and wonderful to say the least." Dillon met her concerned gaze. "I've always wanted kids, and God knows my mother has hounded me for the last three years to find a nice, young single woman and give her *nietos*, but she won't understand Rory."

"We'll deal with that issue when we come to it. Besides, I may not be pregnant," she said. "Sometimes it takes several times of ménage coupling to impregnate an Alter-Female."

"At least we'll have fun." Dillon grinned.

"Dillon? Tell Isis to get moving. The Lady of the Lair is waiting."

Startled, Dillon looked around, but soon realized he'd heard Rory's voice. A chill swept over his skin.

Isis laughed. "I heard him, and he's right." She sat down. "We better get going before my aunt and the others start to worry. Rory is probably getting tired of waiting for us. He's a little on the overprotective side, but I love him."

"Love him?" Dillon echoed. Within his heart, jealousy and uncertainty reared their heads. He liked Rory, felt an odd connection and affection for him, but the alpha male in him warred with his feelings.

"Don't worry," she replied. "I love you, too. Trust me. This is all a big learning process, but in the end, you'll be very happy." "What are you doing?" he asked, trying not to let his ego and insecurities override everything else.

"This is where the journey gets a little tricky for those who aren't prepared or used to it." She lay on her belly and scooted beneath the edge of the rock so only her hips and legs stuck out. "Now," she called from the narrow crack, "grab one of my ankles and keep hold of it as you scrabble through on your belly."

"Oh, shit. No way."

"You aren't claustrophobic after all, are you?"

"No, but that doesn't mean I want to get stuck with a hundredmillion pounds poised above me or have an earthquake happen only to be squashed like a bug."

"Not all paths to the Community are like this one, my love." Her muffled voice reached him.

"Isn't there an easier route?"

"No, not in this section of the caverns. You can see in the dark, and your strength has returned, so just hang on to one of my ankles and use it as a guide."

Although her tone switched to a soothing one, it did nothing to calm the terror that raged in his heart and innards.

"Trust her, Dillon." Rory's voice filled Dillon's mind. "She knows what she's doing."

"When everything looks the same above and under you," she added, "and you're squeezed tightly, things can get turned around and you might wriggle in the wrong direction. I don't want you to get pinned where I can't get you free."

"That doesn't make me feel any better," he retorted. He eyed the massive wall that seemed to hover about fourteen inches above the cavern floor. All that weight suspended by what? He shivered.

Louder now, the drum beats filtered through the narrow crack. Dillon closed his eyes and allowed the bass to become a part of his every nerve ending. Slowly, a weird sort of calm settled over him. With a deep breath, Dillon dropped to his knees. His heart pounded out a wild, stuttering tempo, but he had to trust the woman he loved. After all, everything she promised had come to pass.

Dillon drew in another deep breath, let it out, then lay down and grasped Isis's bare, dusty foot. "Okay, babe. I'm ready as I'll ever be."

"Don't let go," she warned.

"Trust me, I won't."

Rory's laughter permeated his mind, and Dillon sensed that Isis heard him, too.

Isis laughed and began inching forward.

Holding tightly to her ankle, Dillon slid along on his belly behind her. One thing helped take his mind off of his current situation. Each time he looked forward, he saw a tantalizing glimpse of Isis's bare ass moving from side to side and the pink lips of her pussy whenever she used her knees for leverage. Despite the monolith looming over his vulnerable body, he grinned. Night vision definitely had its advantages.

Cold from the floor seeped into his body, and pebbles and grit bit into his flesh. Flat floor gave way to pitted areas and rough sections. The odor of ancient dust coated his sinuses. He sneezed.

"Bless you." Her muffled voice sounded amused.

It seemed like it took eons to get to the next cavern, but Isis finally called out that she'd reached it and told him to let go. She turned, grasped his hands, and helped him slide out into the open.

"Remind me to go the long way around whenever I can return Topside," he said, trying to calm his breathing and his nerves.

"You'll get used to it." She patted his arm. "Everyone does."

He looked sharply at her. "Like those missing tourists?"

She nodded, appreciation in her eyes. "You catch on quickly. Yes, they've been assimilated and all live happily in the Community. Some are even with child or have conceived with an Alter-Female." Dillon caught movement on one side of the chamber. There, at the back where an underground stream burst through the rock and disappeared into a hole in the floor, stood Rory.

"I was starting to get worried," he hollered across the room.

Walking toward him, Isis detoured around several stalactites and replied, "Dillon had a slight attack when it came to squeezing through that fissure."

The man held his hand up as if to say he understood. "I sensed his attack. Most people feel the same way, Dillon. Don't worry about it. The longer you're down here assimilating, the easier it will be to navigate such areas." He turned with the bag he stowed their things in and motioned for them to follow. "We need to get going, precious, or the Lady will send searchers out to look for us."

"Yes, you're right, baby." She waited for Dillon to catch up. "Let's go, my love. I want to see the expression on your face when you see the Community for the very first time."

Rory led the way with Isis trailing him. Dillon kept close to her, watching her ass sashay to and fro beneath her sexy, see-through wrap. Even after having her twice in the past few hours he still wanted her. He stopped. How long had he been down here? He thought hard. He'd fallen asleep, but how long he'd slept remained a mystery. For all he knew, it could have been three hours or an entire night.

Being able to tell time was yet another thing he'd have to learn to adjust to down here.

He hurried to catch up with Isis and Rory.

What about his mother and his brothers? His sister? How many days or weeks would pass before he was able to see them again?

Dillon jumped over another cold, albeit much smaller, underground stream. The sound of rushing water melded with the boom-boom of the drums.

Another thought occurred to him. Once he didn't show up for work for a couple nights, he'd lose his job. And after two or three days, Mama Rosa would file a missing persons report and begin telephoning the police station every hour on the hour.

He couldn't just disappear and then reappear later. What sort of explanation would he give his family?

"We'll take care of all of that for you, Dillon." Rory threw a comforting look over his shoulder. "We'll think of something to placate Mama Rosa."

"How is that you can both hear my thoughts, but I can only hear yours now and then?"

"You're still turning," Isis answered. "It'll be a few days yet before you can hear our thoughts all the time. Then we'll have to teach you how to bar your mind. Being able to read thoughts isn't as great as it's cracked up to be. Sometimes those who are standing close to you will hear things you don't want them to hear."

"That's good," he quipped. "They'll probably think I'm *loco* anyway, so why let my thoughts convince them they're right."

Rory and Isis burst out laughing.

"Isis, how long have I been down here?"

"Rory?" she asked.

The man stopped and quickly rummaged in the bag he had slung over his torso. He withdrew a pocket watch. "It's ten after four in the morning."

"On what day?" asked Dillon.

"The following morning since you entered the caverns," he answered. Dropping the watch back in the bag, he continued on his way and slipped into another black fissure that ran from the floor to somewhere high above them. His forearm appeared, and he flexed his fingers as he waited for Isis to take his hand.

"We'll have someone contact your family and give them a story that should smooth things over," Isis offered. She turned sideways into the slender tunnel, laced her fingers with Rory's, and sidestepped out of Dillon's sight. "Come on, my love," she said to him. "This passage only goes for a few feet." Dillon banished thoughts of his family and slid into the tight corridor. He shuffled his feet a little at a time, his back pressed to one wall, his chest to the other, the points, nubs, and serrated edges of the rock scraping at his skin. Within seconds, he emerged into—he blinked and his mouth fell open—into another dimension.

Chapter Three Community

No, not another dimension, although it might as well have been.

Huge, glowing bugs the size of footballs flew throughout the underground valley.

The insects glided through the air. Everything except for their bright blue heads and clear wings emitted a phosphorescent light. Large areas of wall rock and big, protruding boulders shone with yellow and red. The stones provided more illumination, giving the subterranean valley a twilight atmosphere.

Homes lined the walls and ledges. Rope or root ladders and stone staircases led from one place, terrace, or house to another. They reminded Dillon of the Anasazi dwellings he visited with his grandparents when he vacationed with them one summer, but these residences looked smoother, classier.

An underground river twisted through the center of the valley. Every now and then, during lulls in the drums, Dillon caught the sound of rushing water. Traffic dotted the waterway, and small boats ferried from one side to the other or up and down the river.

"Well," said Isis. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"I would never have dreamed such a fantastical place could exist," Dillon whispered.

Rory clapped him on the back. "Welcome to your new home." He handed Isis the bag he'd been carrying. "I'll go ahead and tell the Lady that we're back and that we'll see her once we've bathed, rested, and gotten to know Dillon a little more." "Thanks, baby," Isis replied. "Once he's looked around a little, we'll catch up with you at our home." She looked askance at Dillon and grinned. "Maybe we can enjoy one another more before we rest."

A tendril of desire wound through him.

Rory smiled and kissed her soundly. He waved to Dillon. Turning, he started down a series of stairs that led into the valley. The ethereal light bounced off Rory's ass muscles and along the sinewy planes of his shoulders. Watching him for a moment, Dillon frowned and looked at Rory again.

Something wasn't right. He didn't look like Rory anymore.

"Isis!" Someone called. "It's so good to have you back. You were gone for several weeks this time."

Dillon turned toward the male voice and stumbled back in shock. "Holy shit! Fucking hell!" He pressed his back against the edge of the corridor they just exited from. "What the hell is this, Isis?"

"Take it easy, Dillon."

"He's not human! What the hell is he?"

The male who approached Isis gaped at Dillon with wide, elongated eyes that glowed electric blue. His ears appeared flattened. Only a slight outer curve at the top and a small nub as an earlobe hinted that the being had any ears at all. His pale, moonshine skin and odd white hair gave him a ghostly countenance. Although tall, broad, and muscled, the man didn't look like a normal man but more otherworldly, alien.

"Easy, my love." Isis stepped between the two men. "This is Fanes, the other male I told you about."

If his heart pounded any faster, Dillon feared he might be sick. "Isis, I don't know about this. You never said anything about—about being *this* different!"

"Hell, Isis, I thought you would have prepared your mate better than this," said Fanes. His brilliant, Christmas-bulb eyes blinked slowly. He studied Dillon for a moment, and Dillon stared back at him as a four-alarm bell of terror clanged in his head. "I'll let you two talk," the other primer male stated. "It looks like you've got a lot more explaining to do." He patted her ass.

"Hands off, Fanes," she snarled.

"Ah, come on, Isis. I'm just playing around," said Fanes. He followed a cobbled path that led to the upper regions of the buildings built into the valley's walls.

"Dillon," Isis took a step toward him, both hands out in a pleading gesture, "listen to me. Rory and I have explained that we're Alter-Human, that things are different here and we can do superhuman things. Your senses are heightened, we make love and breed differently, and we're even capable of telepathy. Each of us has our own special talents, too."

"You said nothing about looking different! I'm going to be a freak!"

"You can wear your Topsider form any time you like, my love. Once you learn how to shift from Alter-Human to human, you will be able to do it at will."

"It's too late for me now, isn't it?" His voice squeaked. He grimaced at the sound, feeling as if he were a five-year-old whose mommy had come into the bedroom to chase away the Bogey Man.

She nodded. "I'm afraid so."

"You didn't give me a choice."

"Oh, but I did! We've already had this discussion, Dillon. You even admitted you weren't listening."

"That may be, but you said nothing about the changes in my appearance and neither did Rory."

She sighed in exasperation and worry. "You have to understand how difficult it is for an Alter-Human to find someone who is genetically compatible. The only way we can continue to propagate is to bring in new blood and convert him or her."

"Propagate? Isis, this isn't science class or sex education, this is my life!"

"It's my life, too, my love. And Rory's. It will hurt him if you reject us now." A note of anxiety lurked in her voice. "One day I'll take my aunt's place as Lady of the Lair. I need mates who will rule by my side and who can give me an heir."

Body shaking, hands trembling so hard he had to clench them, he stared at her in horror. How could she do this to him? Rory had been part of it, too! The premise of being higher on the evolutionary ladder took on an entirely new meaning. Alter-Humans were alien. He was now alien.

He focused on the tip of a huge pointed rock bursting from the valley floor and sought to calm his mind.

No, he'd fallen for Isis, had believed in her, made love to her, and connected with Rory, developing an odd and unexpected affection for the man. He'd taken their word that they would live incredible lives together in some sort of new, evolved community where people treated one another as equals. He was as much to blame as Isis and Rory were.

His newfound hopes and dreams shattered to blow away on winds of regret. However, part of him screamed otherwise. It said that he'd found his home, found the place where he was meant to be and that life had a higher purpose for him now.

Shaking his head, he struggled to comprehend the emotions, uncertainties, and possibilities that assaulted him.

She moved closer to Dillon. "You're a part of something special, my love. Trust me, you'll come to understand our life and ways here, and then you'll feel the need to mesh with all of humanity and teach Topsiders that we all can be whatever we want to be and help one another."

"You're a blue-eyed devil," he whispered, the tremble of his body bleeding into his voice. "You're a liar, a trickster, a succubus, and Rory is no better."

"No, you're wrong." Her voice took on a note of determination. "I'm none of those. And Rory is a good person who cares about you, too. We're both human, just more evolved. A step or two up on the chain of evolution."

"You changed me into a monster!" He tried to convey his hostility and pain through his eyes.

She regarded him quietly for a moment, but when large round tears brimmed at the edges of her eyes and rolled over her lashes to trickle down her face, pain stabbed him. Dillon couldn't bear it and glanced away.

He stared out over the subterranean world. What was that one classic novel called? *Journey to the Center of the Earth*? Although this Alter-Human world was nothing like the book or the movie, it was the only thing he could bring to mind to describe the image that sprawled below them.

He spotted Rory traveling along one of the lower trails. Even from this distance, the unmistakable glow of the man's eyes couldn't be missed.

The citizens of the Community who were closest to him all had the similar features. They had hardly any outer ears, their big almondshaped eyes glowed in an array of colors, and their pale skin looked washed with moonlight. Dillon couldn't put his finger on it, but something else seemed to emanate from these people. However, he wasn't so sure he wanted to know what it was.

He felt as though he stepped from everyday life into a costume party from Hell.

"It's not that bad," Isis said. "We're not monsters, and you're not either. I love you, Dillon."

"Show yourself," he snapped. "Show me what you really look like."

He turned and looked at her, steeling himself for the shock. She morphed in front of him. It happened within seconds. Her body remained the same, only her skin paled to snow white. Her wild mane of mahogany curls stayed the same, too, but her eyes grew bigger, wider, and dominated her face. They transformed from the lovely blue eyes he drowned in to orbs that looked like someone had installed two electric lights in her skull. She pulled her hair back from her face and exposed her flattened, nearly non-existent ears.

"Is that all?"

"What do you mean?" Puzzled, she tipped her head to one side.

A heavy sigh escaped Dillon. "What else have you not told me?"

"Many things," she said. "But if you keep an open mind-"

"What choice do I have?" His voice rose again. "I'm stuck here. I can never return Topside without knowing how to camouflage myself. And I'll always have to lie to my family."

Isis sniffed and then wiped the tears from her cheeks. The wetness streaked her face with the color of her eyes. How odd, but how alien, too.

"Come," she said. "Let me take you to our home."

He remembered her words as they'd walked across the parking lot. *"Then you'll get to meet the rest of my family, too."*

The rest of her family? Hell, the entire Community was her family!

He remained where he stood.

"My love?"

"Don't call me that!" He shot her a look of pain. "Love can't be built upon lies."

Her expression crumbled. Sorrow filled her eyes, sorrow so intense that Dillon felt it.

"Don't do that shit, either," he said.

"We're mates now, so I can't stop you from feeling my pain and neither can Rory." Isis hung her head. A curtain of curls hid her face. "We automatically feel one another's emotions."

He pointed to the paths that joined a few feet away from them. "Let's go. Take me to where I'll be living."

She picked up the travel bags and took the path that Rory had traversed. Dillon followed, but kept several feet between them. Her ass beckoned to him beneath the filmy skirt. Except for her skin, eyes, and ears, Isis looked the same. They passed a pool where a small waterfall spilled. Dillon stopped, turned, and strode to the small pond. He looked into it, and upon seeing his reflection, issued a scream that startled everyone nearby.

Weeping, Isis fell at his side. "Please, my love! Calm yourself. It's not bad at all, once you learn our ways—"

"Get. Away. From. Me."

"What the hell is going on?" Rory's voice soughed into Dillon's mind.

"He has seen how Alter-Humans look in our true forms," Isis relayed.

"You told me nothing about this," Dillon shot back. "Nothing!"

"Do what you can to calm him, precious. I'll talk to him later. The Lady is eager to meet him."

Dillon gasped for breath, but no matter how much air he drew into his lungs, it was never enough. His huge, elongated eyes gleamed like two onyx stones. His ears, or what was left of them, were gone. And the deep natural tan that boasted his Cuban heritage faded to the color of bleached suede.

He couldn't look at Isis. He wanted to flee and find his way back Topside, but he was a prisoner in this valley beneath the earth and an outcast from the world he'd known.

Mama Rosa's voice suddenly filled his mind. "Find a nice, mujer sola joven, Dillon. Settle down and make me lots of nietos."

Oh, Mama. I don't think you'd want to call yourself grandmother of these nietos. An anguished sound fled his lips, and he leaned against the fountain wall, its stones cool against his skin.

"I'll give you time to cope with the situation," Isis said and straightened. "But know this, Dillon. I warned you about my kiss, and you were asked to accept us *before* we consummated our union. Even those who understand their appearance will change are still surprised by it and must cope with it, too. I love you and I know you love me and care for Rory. No matter how much you might fight it, we're mates now."

"Just leave me alone," said the thing staring back at Dillon in the water's surface.

He didn't have to look at her to know she wept profusely. As she stumbled away, her heart cried out to his, and waves of remorse and agony washed over him.

What had happened to the woman he'd fallen in love with?

"Man, you've got to be the luckiest son of a bitch on Earth!" He snorted. Yeah, right. If only the guys could see me now.

Maybe Alter-Humans were just more advanced in things like strength and telepathy, but despite his claims he'd been given no choice, he realized he'd made his decision when Isis asked if he accepted her and Rory. He allowed his damn pecker to override his rationale, and now he had to pay the price.

He slid down the rock and sat with his back to it. The sound of water spewing into the pool soothed his frayed nerves. Dillon studied the valley below as well as the homes lining the walls and precipices.

How had these Alter-Humans turned something like this underground region into a home? What made the rock faces and boulders glow? They weren't hot. He reached out and placed his hand on a small boulder. How did they provide illumination, and where did it stem from?

No, he couldn't get wrapped up in the wonder of this new world. If possible, he had to find out if there was a way to reverse what Isis and Rory had done to him. Then, if he could return to normal, he'd go home and forget he ever met Isis or that this valley even existed.

Regardless, the thought of leaving Isis and Rory behind bothered him. No matter how he might feel at the moment, he couldn't deny he loved Isis and cared for Rory. He leaned his head back on the stone and groaned.

A spicy aroma assailed his nose. Mushrooms? His gaze traveled from one garden terrace to another, but he found the fungi within a few feet of him. There, in a small garden to the right of the waterfall, kneeled a female Alter-Human. She looked askance at him, her vibrant green eyes like flaming emeralds.

Dillon whirled around and faced the valley again. A big bug aglow with phosphorescence lumbered by. Its wings beat only enough to keep it airborne. The insects gave a whole new meaning to the word firefly. The bug landed on the boulder he'd just touched. It flattened its wings out in the style of an airplane, and two appendages emerged to rub together. Dillon blinked. Antennae on its back? The sounds the insect produced reminded him of church bells pealing in the distance.

What's next? Jiminy Cricket appearing to sing When You Wish Upon a Glowing Boulder?

Wait. He heard insects!

The silence of the subterranean valley weighed heavily upon Dillon. What had happened to the steady beat of the drums?

He glanced around. "What the hell's the purpose of the drums?" he mused. "Why did they stop?"

"All Alter-Humans are back in the Community now," said a voice.

He paused, and remembering the Alter-Female tending the garden, he turned and looked at her.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"When members of the Community are Topside and due to return home," the woman kept her gaze on the soil beneath her hands, "the drums are used as a directional guide. Should something happen to prevent someone from following the normal paths, they can follow the drumbeat."

"But it filters through every hole and passage, reverberating off of everything," he said. "How can you know which direction it's really coming from?"

"Our hearing is more sensitive than a normal human's is." She finally stared down at him, her eyes frighteningly bright. "The more you assimilate, the more you'll be able to detect the differences in sounds."

He returned his attention to the valley. Several levels down, Dillon noticed the male, Fanes, Isis's previous and mistaken primer male. He approached Isis, who just stepped out of one of the fancier cliff-face buildings. Fanes said something to her, and she replied, turning away. He grabbed her arm, jerking her back to face him. Dillon's new, exceptional vision revealed their scuffle in stunning clarity.

Whatever Fanes said to her certainly struck a chord. She transformed, her body melting into a more lethal version. Her eyes brightened, and she bared small fangs.

Her fangs forced him to think of Rory's vampiric-like smile when he'd first met him.

Should've listened to your little voice, then, dumbass!

Dropping into a crouch, she poised herself as if ready to spring.

Isis's emotions rolled over him. Anger, hurt, desperation, bewilderment.

Fanes reached for her again.

"What's wrong with Isis?" Rory's voice entered Dillon's mind. "Why is she so upset?"

On his feet, Dillon didn't bother to answer Rory. He stood at the edge of the mushroom garden and leapt. Air whistled in his ears, the sound shrill to his heightened hearing. He landed two levels down and stumbled only slightly. Jumping from the next terrace, Dillon tried to choose his landing spot, but one of the lumbering insects crossed paths with his. He smashed into it. Guts, exoskeleton, and luminescent juices coated his chest and upper arms. Dillon hit the terrace on all fours a bit harder than he would've liked. Cussing, he righted himself.

Isis met his gaze, and a strange, silent communication passed between them. Dillon lunged from the terrace and collided with Fanes's backside. Fanes tumbled face first into another mushroom garden. The spicy aroma of the fungi permeated the air. Stunned, Fanes lay quietly for a moment, then raised his head, shook it, and pushed himself up on his knees.

"You didn't have to do that," said Isis, her anger at Fanes momentarily forgotten as she smiled at Dillon. "I can handle myself just fine, but I'm glad you felt compelled to come to my rescue."

"You looked really upset." The awkwardness of the situation fell over him. Ripples of embarrassment heated his body. "I thought something was wrong." He glanced at Fanes, who stood brushing dirt and mashed mushrooms from his skin. "I felt your emotions."

The Alter-Man's expression turned from shocked to one of irritation. "I don't know, Isis," Fanes grumbled. "I think it's going to be difficult for him to assimilate. Your senses may have lied to you this time, too. It's not the first time one has been converted only to die later." He stalked over to the far end of the terrace and leapt two levels up to disappear into another elaborately carved dwelling.

Isis still smiled at Dillon. Her brilliant gaze slid down his body and back up again. "It looks like you had a run-in with a lantern bug, my love."

"Lantern bug?"

She pointed above them at a swarm of big, glowing insects.

"Oh." The heat in his cheeks grew more intense. He swiped at some of the glowing goo still clinging to him. "You could say that."

"We'll teach you how to avoid smashing into them when you leap from terrace to terrace."

He stared at the designs carved into the rock beneath his feet.

"Are you still angry with me?" she asked.

"Answer me! Isis? Are you okay, precious?"

"I'm fine, Rory. I'll explain later."

Dillon couldn't look at her. Hell, yeah, he was still pissed at Isis, but he couldn't seem to stay away from her, either. He leapt from the upper levels without really thinking about it. He saw Fanes upset her, felt the emotions emanating from her, and reacted in a way he never expected.

It didn't matter that he didn't want to be here in the Community living beneath the surface. He could leave, hide out somewhere, and learn as much as he could about his new form, and maybe he could blend with society, but that tenuous comfort meant nothing to him. The realization he had to have Isis and be close to her while being a part of Rory's life, too, nearly choked him.

Even if I run, I love Isis. She'll taunt my dreams and tantalize me even more than she did before. And I have to find out what this feeling is that I have for Rory and why. This is just too bizarre!

He sighed heavily, the sound startling him. His gaze flew up to meet his mate's.

"I know you're confused," she said. Sympathy settled over her features as well as regret. "However, if we had told you the truth about what we look like and where we actually live, you would never have believed us."

He shook his head. "No, you could've told me, Isis."

"Face it. You would've laughed about it. Your first thought would have been that Rory and I were crazy or a little delusional." She fixed him with a don't-argue-with-me look.

He wilted. "Yeah, I guess you're right."

"Can't we start over?"

He studied his lover as he tried to form the right words to get his point across. "Regardless of the fact that I wasn't really taking your warnings and explanations seriously, you could've shown me this valley first, let me see it with my own eyes so I knew it was real, and then shown yourselves to me."

Choking back tears, Isis replied, "I couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"It's forbidden to bring Topsiders here until they've been converted. Normal humans are not permitted beyond the marked tunnels and caverns reserved for the park." She sniffed and stared out over the valley. "That's part of Rory's job. He's one of the Alter-Humans who maintains and protects the outskirts of our cavern system."

The last few pieces of the enigma fell into place. It all made sense now. The missing tourists, the roped-off tunnels warning the curious away, the *tour*, and the promise to go spelunking another weekend. Even monies generated through the gift shop and all the other revenue such as camping fees, parking permits, and the like were funneled into the Alter-Human world. It was all a façade for those who lived above, and a means to fund and provide for the well-being of the Community.

"It's all bullshit, isn't it?" he snapped. "The entire park, the money it generates—everything is both a spider's web to catch the unsuspecting and a means to keep it funded."

She nodded. Tears dripped down her cheeks, each one leaving a faint trail of sapphire upon her skin that slowly faded as it dried.

"What about the catering business you told me about on one of our dates?" he pressed. "What is its purpose?"

Isis hung her head. "More funds generated for the Community, plus it gives us access to foodstuff and items we can't make or grow down here. Even my Corvette is paid for through the revenue our businesses produce."

"Isis!"

A stern woman's voice temporarily shook Dillon out of his angry frame of mind. He whipped toward the sound, his mouth falling open.

"Aunt Sareenah." Isis turned and bowed. "I was preparing my new mate to meet you. My love, this is my aunt and our leader. Please meet, Sareenah, the Lady of the Lair."

The Alter-Female at the fancy dwelling's entrance stood in her human form arrayed in silks ranging from cream to burnt umber. Hair as dark as sin and styled in a multitude of tiny beaded braids wrapped around her head. The toes of her bare feet peeped from the dusty hemline of her draped garment. Wearing a stern, yet intrigued expression, the woman approached them.

"Fanes tells me that you and Rory didn't prepare your mate as well and as long as the two of you should have." She blinked big, dark-well eyes rimmed in thick black lashes. She shooed away a lantern bug that buzzed too close to her. "Have you lost your senses, niece? Many of our converts die for numerous reasons, but the shock of conversion for one who hasn't been properly prepared is reckless and unfeeling."

Hanging her head, Isis stared at her feet. Sobs wracked her body. "Fanes should never have told you. It was Rory's right to speak to you first."

"He tried, but Fanes burst in very upset about this one embarrassing him."

"Hey," Dillon said, "that was a total accident."

The Lady of the Lair held up one had to silence him. "I know that. Fanes is easily offended, but he'll get over it."

Isis's quiet sobs stirred remorse in Dillon's heart. Although still angry with her, he desired to comfort her.

"Well, niece, it seems this one loves you, indeed." The Alter-Female crossed one arm over her midriff and propped the elbow of her other arm on it, hand on chin, the talon of her index finger tapping her lips. "However, this one is also very angry with you. His fury emanates from him in waves."

"I did warn him," Isis said, her voice subdued. "I knew he was my mate, a perfect match genetically, but he dismissed my warning."

"Don't they all." The Lady smirked.

"I don't have many child-bearing cycles left, and I feared he'd reject us, but I did explain as best as I could." She threw a frantic look toward her aunt. "Please don't blame Rory. The law states no Topsider should see the Community without first being converted."

"You're right about your time running out, Isis, I'll give you that. But you and Rory could have prepared this one better, took more time to explain things to him. What would one more full day have mattered? A few more hours could have made all the difference."

"True." She sighed. "I admit we were overeager, but I resent the fact that Fanes interfered." Hostility lurked in Isis's voice, but she still didn't raise her eyes to look at the commanding woman. "You are my aunt, so I planned on discussing this with you and Rory in private. Fanes interfered because he only wants me as his fuck woman. He doesn't want me to be happy, and he's determined to have me back even though he isn't genetically compatible with me."

Dillon stared at the other female. Her authoritative presence set his teeth on edge. So this was the all-wonderful-and-wise aunt whom Isis mentioned over the last two weeks.

"Return to the form of a normal human, Isis," she said. "It might make it easier on him." She approached Dillon.

He held his ground, eyeing her with distaste.

"Give me your hands." She held hers out to him.

She appeared human, but she had wicked claws on the ends of her fingers. The woman smiled patiently, and Dillon caught a glimpse of her little fangs just like he had Rory's that first time. Whatever her intentions, he didn't trust her.

"Nor will you trust any of us until you fully assimilate." She stepped closer. "Please. Give me your hands. I only want to help."

He hated the way his fingers trembled as he allowed her to grasp them. Warmth flooded his palms and oozed upward into his forearms and his shoulders. Something slid over his skin or at least he thought something did. He looked at his arms. His skin switched from the bleached buckskin hue to his rich, dark tone.

"There," Isis's aunt said. "Looking like your original self will help you feel better."

"Nothing is going to make me feel better."

"My love," Isis said. "Let me show you our dwelling. Maybe when you see how nice our homes are—"

"Isis, please." Her aunt shot her a look of annoyance. "Come..." Her expression changed to curiosity.

"Dillon," he supplied.

"Come, Dillon. It looks like a lantern bug sideswiped you," she chuckled as her gaze swept his body, "and I'm sure you'll want to bathe and have a meal. I'll have the staff prepare lunch while you bathe." She motioned for Isis to follow. "Then my niece and Rory can show you the new home you will share together."

Dillon studied the woman with skepticism, but shuffled across the stones and up to the dwelling behind her. He paused at the door, permitting Isis to enter first.

She offered him a sad, apologetic smile and touched his shoulder. "I am so sorry you feel this way."

He followed her into her aunt's home.

Although carved from stone, the walls, ceiling, and floor looked like marble. All was polished, and symbols covered nearly every available surface. Silks hung from the ceiling as decorations and in thresholds in place of doors. Glass and pottery seemed to be the medium for utensils or vessels. Without electricity, lamps of various sizes and shapes provided a cheerful atmosphere. The strange glowing rocks aided in illumination. Some were even used for tables.

An Alter-Female appeared through a curtain of variegated blue. "Lady," she said.

"Take our new friend to the bathing chamber," said the Lady. "Then notify the cook that we'll be having dinner a little early today." She turned to her niece. "Isis, come with me. We shall speak with Rory and settle all of this upset." She strode after the young Alter-Female who had disappeared through the blue curtain.

Isis threw Dillon a helpless look. "Rory and I will try to get away to talk with you later," she said and hurried after her aunt.

Left alone with the household staff, Dillon reluctantly trailed behind two Alter-Females. They motioned for him to keep up as they ducked through a doorway curtained in an array of bright yellow and red silks. They traversed a long, narrow hall inscribed with more symbols and designs, some even filled with color. The women turned left into a small cave where a pool of thermally heated water steamed. Jars and bottles lined one part of it, and a stack of towels perched on a shelf carved into the back wall. More lamps lit the room, but a huge glowing rock jutting from the ceiling provided most of the lighting.

"Please remove your loincloth and get into the pool," said one female with vivid amber eyes. "We will help you bathe."

"No, thanks," he replied. "I can take care of myself."

"But the Lady of the Lair will be upset with us," the other female stated, her tone concerned.

"Please," he said. "Just leave me alone."

They regarded him for a moment, their eyes like sparkling jewels. Finally, they nodded and left the bathing chamber.

He took off his garment and descended a set of stone steps into the steaming pool. Although hotter than he preferred, the water still felt wonderful and aided in calming his nerves and inner turmoil. He picked up a thick piece of cloth and examined the contents of the jars and bottles until he found one that smelled good and looked like soap.

Dillon submerged his body, then lathered and rinsed. Leaning back on a ledge, he stretched his arms out on the polished stone, put the cloth behind his neck, and closed his eyes.

"Sir," a voice said.

His eyes flew open. Two women stood waiting patiently.

"The Lady of the Lair said that if we took on our common human form you might be more relaxed and let us help with your bath," said the one with amber eyes.

Black. She was a black woman. Dillon thought the other one might be Samoan or possibly Hawaiian. They were as normal as any women of color, only they had the ability to look like regular human beings or shift into their preferred shape of an Alter-Human.

Movement behind them caught his attention.

"Dillon," said a tall blond man who leaned through the threshold. "The Lady sent me to see if you needed anything."

He raised a questioning brow.

"Oh," the man stepped inside, "I'm sorry. I'm Fanes. The lady insists that we all wear our Topsider forms until you get used to being here." Although bare-chested, he wore a pair of pale suede pants. He motioned toward the women. "They are here to serve you in *other* ways, if you desire, and if you'd like wine or liquor to sip on, I can have it brought here."

"I'm fine, thanks." He sat staring at Fanes, marveling over the difference between his earlier form and now. "I'm sorry for crashing into you when I leapt to the terrace," he added.

"I was once a new convert, too." Fanes offered him a halfhearted smile and left.

"Are you sure there is nothing we can do for you?" the Samoan woman asked.

He shook his head. "Thanks, but I just need time to relax and think."

"As you wish," the women said simultaneously and hurried out of the chamber.

I'm such a dipshit. He sighed and leaned his head back again. Although this isn't how I envisioned being with Isis, she's still a beautiful woman—just one who has the ability to change from one form to another. Rory's still the same person with the same ability, and now I'm like they are. What's done is done, but although bizarre, it's sort of cool, too.

"Dillon?"

He looked toward the doorway to find Isis standing there with Rory behind her.

"We managed to slip away while the Lady was busy," she said.

She walked slowly across the room, her hand threaded through one of Rory's as he followed her. Her gauzy skirt barely hid her hips, the dark apex of her body enticing Dillon. "I don't want there to be any ill feelings between us. I can't apologize enough that we didn't make sure you completely understood what was going on, but it's necessary that we tell you our reasons in hopes you'll understand."

He held up one hand, silencing her. Water drops trickled from his fingers. His gaze wandered over her body and settled on her ripe breasts begging to be fondled and kissed. His cock twitched at the sight of her.

"I'm starting to understand, Isis," he said. "An Alter-Human may be more advanced, but other than that, you're no different than anyone else. While sitting here, I've seen a black woman and a Samoan woman. Even Fanes is just an average white guy. Here I am a converted half Cuban, half Caucasian man. I have no right to judge any of you. I've suffered the ridicule and cruelty of those who are prejudiced against people of color, and being Alter-Human isn't any different than being white, Chinese, German, or any other nationality."

"Are you sure?" asked Rory, surprised.

Dillon focused on both of them and conveyed his reassurance. "Yes. We're all equal."

Smiling, Isis glanced from him to Rory. "He is sure."

She untied her wrap and let it fall around her feet. Seconds later, she sat in the water next to him.

Wearing only his loincloth, Rory stepped down into the bath too.

"I admit," Dillon added, "that I'm still not comfortable with this new form, but I guess I'll get used to it"

"We've had a whirlwind courtship," Isis said, "and then you find yourself within a trinity relationship. That's enough to absorb, but now you're faced with a new life, a new physical form, and new abilities." She touched his face, leaving dampness upon it. "You're strong and will adapt." "Dillon, I'll do whatever it takes to help you assimilate," Rory commented and settled in the water up to his chest. "I want you to be happy, and so does Isis."

"I get that. I really do, but the speed in which everything happened has left me reeling."

Isis sat quietly.

"But isn't that the way life is when things do decide to change?" asked Rory. "If it didn't, life would be boring."

A sardonic chuckle escaped Dillon. "True, very true." He pulled Isis into his arms and kissed her on the mouth. "I forgive you both for not taking more time to prepare me, but I do need time to adjust. That doesn't mean I'm going to conform to laws and practices I don't believe in, though."

She gaped at him, her blue eyes round.

"But her aunt is the Lady of the Lair," Rory said, scooting closer. "You *must* obey our laws. They are what protect us and the Community."

"I cannot practice or believe what isn't in my heart, Rory." He looked from him to stare into their lover's blue eyes. There, he saw Isis's soul and knew that regardless of everything else, he loved her deeply, unconditionally. "Isis, you're special to me. I'm okay with a trinity relationship. The connection is there, and it has been sealed, but you both need to let me adjust to things in my own way and time." He sighed and shut his eyes for a moment as he gathered his thoughts. He opened his eyes again and said, "I can be a very difficult man to live with if I'm not happy where I am. It's why my mother and I argued so much whenever I decided to move to an apartment outside of our Cuban neighborhood. I felt that I shouldn't be cut off from the world."

"And you are here?" asked Isis.

"In many ways, yes."

A sob wrenched free of her, and Dillon hugged her tightly.

"It tears me up that I've found my other true mate," Isis cried, "and yet you will probably hate your new home."

Rory drifted through the water and positioned himself behind her, his hands on her shoulders. "Give Dillon time, precious. You know how difficult it is for a convert to cope with the changes, their new home, and their talents."

"I can only do the best I can," Dillon said. "If all else fails, maybe we can compromise. Maybe I can live down here part time and then Topside the rest of the time."

He lifted her chin and kissed her again. She sighed, snuggling closer to him, and Rory's arms slipped around both Isis and Dillon. Dillon's cock hardened as Isis pushed toward his body, her curves molding to his beneath the hot water.

"Come here," he murmured against her lips. "Change for me so I can feel what it's like to make love to you in Alter-Human form."

"Are you sure?" She locked gazes with him.

He nodded.

"Do it," Rory urged.

The transformation from the normal human appearance into her Alter-Female state happened in seconds. It amazed Dillon how her skin seemed to ripple from the crown of her head down, down over her body like a placid pool of water disturbed by a pebble. Flaming sapphire eyes looked back at him.

"If it makes you feel any better, I think your onyx eyes and dark hair look very sexy in the Alter-Male form," she said. "And part of what attracts us is scent."

"Like animals?"

"Yes," Rory answered. "Exactly."

Grabbing one of her hands, Dillon moved it to his cock. She palmed it and moved her hand up and down. He groaned and shut his eyes as she pumped his length. He helped her sit on his lap facing him. Settled, she resumed stroking his penis. Gently, Dillon caressed her pussy, his fingers trailing through her folds.

His lips met the curve of her breasts. Behind her, Rory moved her hair aside and nibbled on her nape, his tongue swirling over the skin. Dillon dipped beneath the water to her nipple. He sucked it into his mouth and delivered several flicks of his tongue to it.

"Oh!" Isis wiggled on his lap.

Dillon released her and came up for air. "When or how will you know you're pregnant?"

"The same way any woman does, but I'll know within a few hours to a couple of days instead of missing one or two cycles like most women do before they realize they're pregnant." She braced her knees on either side of Dillon's hips and rose up slightly. "But what will you do if I am pregnant? Rory wants to be a father so much."

"Yes," said Rory. "I've always wanted children."

"We'll face that if it happens," said Dillon. He looked over her shoulder at Rory and smiled. "And we'll face it together.

Rory's eyes glowed with relief.

She lowered herself over Dillon's cock and sucked in a lusty breath. "Rory, baby," she gasped, "fill me up, too."

The sudden feeling of her body sliding tightly over his prick prevented Dillon from using words. He moaned loudly and gripped her hips. As Rory's cock pushed into her anus, the length of him slid against Dillon's cock through the thin membrane. The feeling forced Dillon to yell out in pleasure. Rory growled in response, and he placed both hands on Dillon's shoulders.

Isis raised her ass and slid it down on Dillon's dick. Rory simultaneously withdrew and then penetrated her ass again, his hardon raking over Dillon's cock through her sheer muscle wall. She began riding Dillon. Immediately, the electrical sensation Dillon experienced with her before heated the base of his spine and settled in his balls.

"Why," he gasped, "is sex so intense with an Alter-Human?"

"I don't know," a low keening sound escaped her as she settled over his cock once more, "but it has always been this way for us."

"Damn," Rory hissed, "I could fuck like this all day and night." He began pumping into her.

Dillon gasped for breath, sensations rolling over him in waves. Rory let go of Dillon's shoulders and jerked Isis's hips suddenly, burying his cock deep within her, sandwiching her inner most places between him and Dillon.

She moved her hips back and forth, and they all settled into a hard, rigorous rhythm that aided Dillon in probing her pussy, the head of his dick bumping her womb. He enjoyed the friction applied through her muscles by Rory's cock, back and forth, up and down. Each rub shot currents of sensation along Dillon's cock and into his spine. The pressure there continued to build.

"Isis!" he hissed. "You feel so damn fantastic."

She replied with a sharp intake of breath and rode him faster as Rory wrapped his arms around both of them and met their motions as his strokes demanded.

Isis straightened and bent backward slightly, forcing Rory to bend with her. Dillon suckled her breasts, his tongue laving one, then the other. With each of Isis's pleasured whimpers, he thought he'd explode into her, but somehow the pressure kept increasing.

He thrust into her so hard he raised her out of the water and pushed Rory back, but Rory's following thrust impaled her so deeply that Dillon felt every inch of him inside her. He grunted, looked Rory in the eyes, and knew the other man sensed his intentions. With Rory's aid, Dillon stood with Isis in his arms as Rory braced her hips and back. Dillon kept pumping into her body. She wrapped her legs around his hips as Rory planted his feet against the pool's bottom, his dick pummeling her ass.

Dillon thrust into Isis's pussy, his hips pistoning in his quest for release. He sensed that with both of them slamming in and out of her entrances, Isis wouldn't be able to last much longer. She began a singsong cry that echoed throughout the bathing chamber. Her nails dug into Dillon's back. She slid them down along his skin and sank them into his ass muscles. The rake of her nails, followed by the piercing sensation urged him to spear her pussy harder. She turned lax and allowed Dillon to hold her as Rory supported her backside.

Dillon issued a growl so primal it startled him, but he couldn't stop. He had to have her, had to coax his seed into her and hear her screams of pleasure as he did so, but he wanted to come the same time Rory did.

"Are you ready for that?"

"Yes! Please, both of you at the same time!"

"I want it more than anything right now," said Dillon as he groaned in desire, his cock ready to blow.

Something inside Isis clenched Dillon's dick so hard he grunted. She stiffened, then began arching her hips so quickly he almost couldn't keep up with her movements and was vaguely aware that Rory struggled to match her pace too. The inner walls of her cunt began pulsing and throbbing around his cock, milking him until the pressure shifted behind his balls and his cum surged into her body the same moment that Rory stiffened. The throbbing of Rory's cock through the muscles separating Dillon's dick from his shot more sensation into Dillon's cock and into the base of his spine.

And their minds joined.

Dillon shouted against Isis's neck, and she screamed out her ecstasy, her nails digging ever deeper as she guided his strokes. Rory yelled out, his cock thrusting faster, faster.

Dillon leapt over the precipice of pleasure and nearly blacked out. Spent, he shifted into the bathing pool's seat, pulling Rory so that he pushed forward, pinning Isis between their bodies. Withdrawing from her body, Dillon breathed hard and tilted his head to keep it above the water.

With Rory still penetrating her body, Isis cuddled against Dillon.

"I don't know if I'll ever get used to Alter-Human sex, but I'll gladly die trying." Dillon wheezed, trying to catch his breath.

Rory chuckled.

Isis said, "Sex with a mate is ten times more pleasurable."

"Indeed," said a familiar voice

Dillon looked up to find the Lady of the Lair and Fanes staring back at them, their expressions stern as if they both disapproved.

"It's just too bad," Isis's aunt mused, "that after all this you'll never feel Dillon's cock in your body again."

"Aunt Sareenah?" Isis straightened. "You're not making any sense."

"You found my primer mate," the lady replied.

Dillon frowned. "What the hell are you talking about?" The spider of unease in his brain let out a shriek of terror. "I'm Isis's mate."

"We're a unit, Sareenah," said Rory, an edge to his words.

"That may be," Sareenah replied, her voice almost a purr. "But Dillon is mine as well. I have maybe two or three more child-bearing cycles left, and I intend on passing my command over to a full heir instead of my niece."

Isis gaped at her. "You can't be serious?"

"Oh, but I am. Fanes, she is yours."

"No!" Rory shouted. He withdrew from Isis, turned, and put his back to her.

"Take her from here, Fanes" the Lady commanded, "and keep her chained until she realizes she is yours and yours only."

"Aunt Sareenah, please!" Isis started to scramble from the pool.

The fear pouring from Isis felt like someone had slapped Dillon across the face. He reached for her, but Fanes became a blur of white skin. A whoosh of air passed him, and Fanes appeared at the pool's edge, his hands around Isis's wrists as he hauled her out of the water.

Reaching for her, Dillon found himself jerked backward next to Rory, their heads pinned to the brim of the hot spring. Sareenah peered down at them. In one hand, she clenched his throat, her talons in his neck without actually breaking the skin. With her other, she did the same to Rory, who grunted.

Dillon could only see him out of the corner of his eye, but he sensed the outrage and animosity rolling off his new bonded companion.

"I don't think either of you want me ripping your throats out, do you?" The older woman smiled, but no warmth resided in her deepwell eyes. "I have no use for a mate save to give me an heir."

"Lady of the Lair is my rightful inheritance," Isis yelled.

Dillon caught only glimpses of their mate. Why wasn't she fighting Fanes as she had earlier on the terrace?

"She cannot when he uses his powers," Rory answered his thoughts.

"We all have powers, or what humans call talents," Sareenah added. "Where a Topsider can sing beautifully, here one might be born with the power of extreme strength or maybe the ability to turn stones into mushrooms. One of Fanes's is strength."

"I have no desire for you," Dillon said, his voice tight and whispery from the pressure she applied to his throat.

Sareenah chuckled. "I don't care if you do or not. Besides, now that you're an Alter-Male, you can't say no to instinct."

He frowned. "What?"

"You love Isis, but you'll still feel compelled to mate with me. The mating instinct is now part of your body."

"She's right," Rory managed to say.

She leaned close to Dillon's face. Only her eyes changed. They sparkled obsidian with deep red overtones. Although bright and dazzling, Sareenah's eyes reminded Dillon of congealing oil mixed with blood, and they repulsed him.

"You will service me when and how I tell you to," the Lady added, "or you'll join the others who have been tossed to Ore."

"Ore?" Dillon tried to swallow.

"The Lava Demon," Fanes answered with a heinous laugh.

The comment Isis had made after making love suddenly came to mind. She'd said something about a Lava Demon.

"Take Isis to your dwelling, Fanes." In one motion, Sareenah pulled Dillon from the hot spring. She released Rory, who slipped into the pool and came up sputtering and coughing. "I can handle my mate without your help."

"As you wish, my Lady." Fanes picked up Isis's skirt, ripped a piece of it free, and used the scrap to gag her. He threw her over his shoulder, his arms pinning her legs to his torso. Struggling, she beat on his back, but Fanes exited the bathing chamber as if he carried a sack of dirty laundry.

"No!" Rory lunged for Fanes, but an unseen force pressed him against the edge of the pool. His face grew white, and he clutched at his throat.

"Stop it!" Dillon threw a pleading look at the Lady.

She seemed to consider his request, then eased the pressure at Rory's windpipe. He gasped, sucking in air. "Veethie!" she yelled.

The black woman appeared in the doorway.

"I will hold Rory here for a moment, but once I'm gone, have one of those with mind powers come for him. I want him put in a cell until I'm sure he will no longer interfere."

The woman bowed and hurried out into the corridor.

"What if Isis is pregnant?" asked Dillon.

"Then Fanes will raise the brat as his own," the Lady quipped.

Fear and anguish overwhelmed Dillon. A wall of grief crashed through him, and he realized it came from Rory. Dillon gasped and squeezed his eyes shut, sending out calming thoughts to not only their mate but to Rory, too.

"Aww, how sweet," Sareenah cooed. "But it will do you no good. Fanes will not return Isis to either of you. He's loved her since they were young, but she would never give him the time of day except when she mistook him for a primer male."

"You're a monster," spat Dillon. "A real succubus."

"Why, thank you," she said and fluttered her eyelashes. Laughing, she motioned for him to walk to the door. "After we dine, we shall mate."

"How can I be your mate as well as Isis's?"

"Sometimes it happens," she replied in a bored manner. "Who can figure out genetics? Now, move it, unless you like pain." She flicked her gaze toward Rory still pinned in the hot spring. "Or, if you prefer, I can cause him pain instead."

Although naked, Dillon straightened his spine and faced the Lady as if he wore a suit of armor. "Fuck you."

"Very well." She flicked her fingers. An invisible force flattened his arms to his sides, clamped his lips together, and whirled him around so that he faced the doorway. "Now walk," Sareenah growled. "If you thwart me or give me any grief at all, I'll inflict pain on you unlike anything you've felt before, and if that doesn't work, I'll take my frustrations out on Isis."

Feeling helpless, Dillon cast a last desperate look at Rory, and shuffled through the threshold into the narrow hall where the black woman and the Samoan woman now waited. The ebony beauty tossed him a sympathetic look before focusing her gaze on the floor.

"Take my mate to my chambers and aid him in dressing for dinner." She placed her hand on a glowing stone in the wall and closed her eyes. She sighed. "It's just as I thought. We've wasted so much time it is now the supper hour." She opened her dark orbs and glanced at the women. "Find him something masculine, yet sexy. He is half Cuban, so the sexier, the better." She waggled her fingers at them. "Go on, hurry. And *don't* disappoint me, ladies."

"Will the Lady want something different to wear set out for dinner, too?" the Samoan asked.

"Yes, now that you mention it, leave out my favorites. After all, this is a special occasion." Sareenah spun on her heel and sashayed along the corridor in the opposite direction. The Samoan curtsied. "The deep red dress and the golden sandals. As you wish, my Lady." Turning, she glanced at Dillon and shot him a look of warning.

Sensing her unspoken words, Dillon trod behind the black woman. They followed the curve of the corridor where he saw several openings leading to other rooms. For the moment, he was just grateful to be away from the Lady of the Lair.

In the tunnel, a small silver-haired man passed them.

"Is he the one with mind powers?" asked Dillon.

"Yes," the Samoan whispered. "He's going to tend to Rory."

"Isis? Are you okay?"

"Dillon! I'm here in—"

The sudden way her telepathy ended shot a cold arrow of fear into Dillon's heart.

"You must learn to silence your thoughts if you wish to communicate with your mate." The black woman cast an apologetic look over one brown shoulder. "The Lady can hear you, and you'd be a fool not to think she isn't listening."

"What can I do?" His words came out choked.

"Keep the Lady happy," the Samoan answered behind him. "Once you have impregnated her, she will be done with you, and then Rory will be released from his cell, and the two of you can begin your lives in the Community, but I fear that Isis is lost to you both now."

The black Alter-Female nodded gravely. "The Lady has given her to Fanes, and he'll never release her. He has wanted her since they were very young. When Isis mistook him as a primer male and ended her relationship with him, he didn't take it very well and vowed to get her back one way or another."

The severity of the situation descended on Dillon, and he nearly crumpled to the passage floor. He collapsed against the wall, his legs trembling beneath him.

"Dillon, you must be strong for Isis, for the three of us!"

Lady of the Lair

"But I have no life without Isis and Rory," he replied to not only the Alter-Females, but conveyed the same to Rory as well.

The dark woman stopped and made her way back to him. "We are here to help you. I am Veethie, and she is Taran." She pulled a mushroom from a small suede purse at her hip and offered it to him. "Here, eat this. It will give you strength and calm your nerves."

The fungus she placed in his hand looked deadly. Although a bright orange, it exuded the aroma of a sweet apple. He popped it into his mouth and chewed. It tasted more like cardboard but infused his body with a sense of tranquility. The shaking left his body.

"A narcotic?" he asked.

Veethie nodded, smiling, her white teeth stark against her chocolate-hued skin. "A very mild one that lasts only a few minutes."

"Come," Taran urged. "Let us get you ready for dinner. Otherwise, the Lady will be very angry and crueler than usual."

Although he began to feel better, Dillon mourned the loss of Isis and already missed Rory's friendship, too. He had to get Isis back, had to create their trinity again. All his horrible words and his anger from earlier flooded his head. What if she now carried their child? He didn't know yet how such things worked with the Alter-Humans, but the thought of Fanes raising Rory's and his son or daughter sent a knife of fury into his gut.

He might have to service Sareenah, but he'd be damned if he'd let the Lady of the Lair or Fanes keep him and Rory apart from their mate.

"De un solo sentido u otro, volvere a la mujer que adormas." He straightened and glared down the corridor where the lady had disappeared. "Incluso si tenga que matar alguien hacerlo."

Taran frowned, looking worried. "What did you just say?"

"Loosely translated, I said that one way or another, I'll get back the woman we love, even if I have to kill someone to do it."

"Choose your battles wisely," said Veethie. A weary sigh escaped her as she slipped her arm through Dillon's and guided him into the Lady's chambers. "What you plan to do will not be easy, nor is murder taken lightly here. It seldom occurs. It will most likely get you both killed."

"Or fed to Ore, the Lava Demon," Taran finished.

"Nothing will keep me from Isis and Rory," Dillon insisted, his mind made up. "Nothing! They are my mates!"

"Shush and calm down." Veethie soothed him. "The more compliant you are, the easier and quicker it will all be with the Lady and then it will be over."

Dillon followed them into a small room awash with red-rock light and symbols painted in black and red. A huge circular bed covered in black velvet sat in the center of the room. More veils dyed black, red, and fire yellow hung over indentions serving as closets and storage areas.

"Don't any of you start to feel claustrophobic or cut off from the world down here?" asked Dillon.

"What do you mean?" Taran replied.

"Except for the front of the dwellings, there aren't any windows."

"Oh," she smiled, "you'll get used to it."

"Not to mention we all have our time away Topside," Veethie reminded him.

The Samoan rummaged in a drawer beneath the bed and withdrew black leather pants and a pristine white suede vest. She placed the garments on one corner of the blanket and nodded to them.

"You want me to put those on?" Dillon asked. "I'm half Cuban, not half *Pirates of the Caribbean.*"

Veethie burst out laughing. "Just humor the Lady, okay?"

He sighed. "All right." Quickly, he yanked on the slacks, fastened them, and slipped into the vest. "Shoes?" he asked.

"Only when we travel," Taran returned. "Here in the Community most of the surfaces are smooth and free of debris."

The Alter-Females left him alone for a few moments only to return with strange-looking fruit and a bottle of wine so deep red it looked like ink. Veethie set out sparkling colored plates as Taran poured wine into fluted glasses that shimmered with rainbow hues.

Time passed. Veethie handed Dillon a wedge of fruit to hold him until the Lady of the Lair arrived. He bit into it, and a peculiar flavor that reminded him of fresh butter and crisp lettuce tantalized his palate.

Minutes later, he looked over at the women fussing over Sareenah's clothes laid out on the other side of the bed.

"What's taking Sareenah so long? I want to get this over with."

"I don't know," Veethie said. Nervousness shone in her eyes. "I'll go see what's keeping the Lady."

She left the chamber.

"Where will Fane keep Isis?" asked Dillon.

"Fane lives near the big mushroom beds." Taran moved to the table and put a hand-blown stopper into the wine decanter. "He oversees the mushroom crops. His dwelling is the large one with the blue swirls carved around the main door."

Quiet reigned in the room. Dillon paced the floor, his thoughts on Isis and Rory.

Soft footsteps drew his attention, and Veethie appeared in the doorway, her face ashen and etched with concern.

"What's going on?" Dillon questioned.

"Remember the man who was fetched to detain Rory?"

He nodded.

"He was found dead, his neck snapped."

Somehow he sensed what Veethie was about to say.

"What happened?" Taran rushed to Veethie's side. "Who killed him?"

"Rory must have done it," said Veethie. "He's gone, and Sareenah is furious."

Taran's shocked gaze met Dillon's. "Killing an Alter-Human doesn't happen unless it's Topside. Murders and mysterious accidents just don't occur down here, Dillon." Veethie grabbed his hand and pulled him out into the corridor. "The Lady will be busy for quite some time as she looks into this, so take this chance to find out where your mate is. Maybe you'll find Rory, too."

She prodded him to the left, around a bend, and down a narrower, darker tunnel. They emerged in an offshoot of the underground valley.

Pointing, Veethie added, "Go that way. Drop down two levels, walk past ten dwellings, and when you smell the mushrooms, look for the abode with the blue design around the door."

"Why are you doing this for me?" he asked. His heart thundered out an erratic beat, and his legs wobbled under him.

Sighing, Veethie squeezed his hand. "Most of us who know the Lady well also know what a self-serving and malicious bitch she is, too. If she has an heir, the Community's goal of one day blending with Topsiders will never see completion. Sareenah has her own agenda—one that suits only her desires."

"Thank you, Veethie," he said.

"Make sure you return as quickly as possible. If you don't, the Lady will punish both Taran and me."

"I promise," he said and kissed her on one plump, mocha cheek.

She grinned from ear to ear. "Go. Hurry!"

Dillon padded along the narrow walkway and leapt from the terrace, following Veethie's instructions. Instinct told him to keep a low profile. He paused in the shadow of a boulder and concentrated on shifting into his Alter-Human form. A strange sensation like millions of minute needles swept over his body. His skin turned paler, and he raised his hands to his ears to feel them flatten.

Stepping out from the gloom, Dillon made his way along the terraces and stone walkways until the overwhelming odor of spice assailed him. There, a few yards away, a grand entrance framed in twists and whorls of blue beckoned to him.

Now how the hell do I get inside without being seen?

Maybe, like Sareenah's dwelling, there was a back entrance? Could he get that lucky?

Fanes exited the dwelling and leapt from terrace to terrace, dodging lantern bugs and other Alter-Humans. Without another thought, Dillon raced across the stones and through the doorway.

Inside, the chambers done in various blues and silver, the quiet seemed almost palpable. Hunched over, he crept along a wall and down a short corridor. A tiny, fine-boned Alter-Female stepped out in front of him. The tray she carried slipped from her grasp, but Dillon caught it. She emitted a brief squeak of fear, her eyes a flaming goldgreen.

"Please," he whispered, "don't scream."

She met his gaze with terror.

Dillon frowned. Beneath her left eye, a vivid blue-and-purple bruise spread across her face like spilled paint.

"Did Fanes do that to you?" he asked.

She looked away.

"Do you know where Sareenah's niece, Isis, is being held?"

The Alter-Female inclined her head toward the opposite end of the hall.

"Can you show me?"

"No," she whispered so low he almost didn't hear her.

"Can you tell me where she is, then?"

The young woman nodded. "At the end of this corridor there is a big, colored tile. It lifts like a lid and props against the wall. You'll find your mate in the cell below it."

"Is there anyone here who might sound an alarm?"

"No," she answered, her voice a little louder. "They are all in the shroom gardens for another hour or so." Her frightened gaze flew up to meet his again. "But Master Fanes may come back at any time, so hurry. If I am asked about you, I will not lie." She touched her cheek, her eyes glassy.

"Thank you, sweetheart."

She offered him a tentative smile, took the tray from him, and continued to the front room.

He hurried down the corridor as if he wore wings on his heels. The tunnel came to an abrupt end, and there on the floor, its seal tight, rested a large, sapphire-blue floor tile trimmed in black and silver.

Dillon hooked his index finger into a carved indention and hauled the stone up. The hinges turned quietly, and he leaned the upper end of it against the wall. Darkness prevailed, the mouth of it yawning at his feet.

"Here."

Startled, Dillon turned to find the young Alter-Female behind him. She handed him a glowing stone.

"Thanks."

She nodded and hurried away.

His heart pounded out a frenzied beat as he descended the narrow, notched steps into the darkness.

"Who's there?" Isis's frightened voice rang out in the inkiness.

"It's me, babe."

"Dillon?"

Using the red stone to guide him, Dillon picked his way around pottery and gardening implements until he found his mate in a stone cell with a barred door. He hurried the last few feet to her and fell to his knees, dropping the light stone between them. He gripped Isis's hands through the bars.

"Fanes has the keys to the cell and to my shackles," she said and gestured at her feet. Iron bands encircled her ankles, each one connecting to a chain that lead to the back wall.

"That bastard!" he snarled.

"How did you find me?" she asked.

Quickly, Dillon told her all that had transpired.

"Rory doesn't have it in him to kill someone," Isis mused, worry in her eyes.

Frowning, Dillon asked, "Not even for you?"

90

"I-I don't think so."

"Look, someone killed that man, and if it wasn't Rory, then he's being blamed for the murder."

"What are we going to do, my love?" Tears filled her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. Even in the semi-darkness, the trail of saltiness glowed blue. "You must return, or Sareenah will be cruel to you and the others, and Fanes will do the same things here."

Rage flamed through Dillon's body. "I love you, Isis. Rory loves you, too. I'm sure if he did kill that man, it was to save you. But if he didn't, then I get the distinct impression the three of us are in grave danger."

She nodded, her eyes wide, worried.

"Who left this door open?" Fanes roared above them. "Makishta! Did you do this?"

The young girl's frightened voice wafted through the square hole. "I thought I heard something, Master. Wh–when I realized I hadn't, I decided to fetch food and water for your new guest. I was just on my way to get those things when you called me."

"Never leave this door open again! Do you understand?" Fanes roared.

Footsteps descended into the gloom.

"Hurry!" whispered Isis. "Douse the light and hide!"

Like a crab, she scurried backward into a far corner of the cell, her chain jingling in the blackness.

A yellow-gold illumination and sure footsteps moved toward Dillon. He stuffed the red glow stone into his slacks and backed deeper into the storage section. Kneeling, he hugged a wooden crate that smelled of dirt and something pungent.

"Well, Isis, I see you've settled into your new home," said Fanes. In one hand he held a golden glow stone. Its brilliance washed his pale torso and face with a sickly yellow hue. "Lucky for Makishta, you're still down here." "Where the hell would I go?" Isis countered, hostility in her voice. "You have me chained like a common dog, like some wild animal in a Topside zoo."

Fanes laughed. "Payback for kicking me to the curb."

"But our DNA isn't compatible!" she shrieked.

"It doesn't matter." He leaned one bare shoulder against the door's iron frame. "Men have fragile egos. You not only shattered mine, but took the time to stomp it into a million pieces."

"Seems like your ego is just fine to me," she shot back.

"Now, Isis, is that any way to talk to the man you're going to spend the rest of your life with? Especially when we Alter-Humans live so long?"

"Fuck off."

"I will," he said, "but I'll fuck off *in* you when I'm ready and you're begging me to do it to you like I used to."

His snide chuckle urged Dillon to lunge from his hiding place and pummel the man into putty, but he gritted his teeth and forced himself to remain still.

"But if anything should happen to me, sweet Isis, you will probably starve to death before anyone realizes you're down here. No one will come to release you—and I'll make sure Makishta doesn't check on you, either." Fanes shrugged. "Besides, the keys are hidden until I need them. Your food and water can be pushed through that slot," he gestured toward the bottom of the door, "and you have a chamber pot to relieve yourself, so it can serve its purpose for several days before it needs to be emptied." He glanced around at the inky shadows. The tone of his voice changed from arrogance to suspicion. "Just some friendly info in case you get any stupid ideas about *someone* coming to rescue you."

He turned and crossed the chamber, ascending into the upper dwelling. The tile door thunked down and darkness ate what little light had been penetrating the room. Removing the glow stone from his pants, Dillon whispered, "Did he know I was here?"

"Possibly," she whispered back. "You haven't learned to camouflage your thoughts and feelings yet, but if he was sure you were here, he would've torn this chamber apart until he found you."

"Shit."

"There's a tunnel in the back. You'll have to scrabble through on your belly, but Makishta told me it's there." Isis paused, her lower lip trembling. She rose and stepped over to the door where she gripped the bars. "I don't know if she thought I might somehow get free, but she insisted the crevasse is over there behind a stack of gunny sacks."

"Isis," Dillon gulped and threaded his fingers with hers, "I'll get you out of here, babe. We'll find Rory, and the three of us will be one again. I promise."

"Don't make promises—" Her voice cracked, and she tried again. "Don't make promises you can't keep, my love."

"That's one thing Mama Rosa always taught me," he replied, his heart crying out at the pain in her eyes. "I never make a promise I can't keep. Never."

"But..."

"Shush. I'll be back. I'll figure something out."

She nodded. "Okay."

"I promise, Isis. And the next time you see Makishta, tell her if she helps me, I'll get her away from Fanes, too."

"She'd like that," Isis whispered, her voice cracking again.

"I need to get back to Sareenah's dwelling," he said, despair tearing at his heart. "If she discovers I've escaped, she'll probably come straight here and take it out on you, not to mention the two Alter-Females who helped me slip out."

She nodded and kissed his fingers.

"I love you."

"And I love you, Dillon, but I'm worried because I haven't heard anything from Rory. I can't even sense him. You don't think something bad has happened to him, do you?"

"You can't let your fears rule your mind," said Dillon, forcing reassurance into his tone. "Think positive. Believe."

She nodded hesitantly.

The tile opened again, and light filtered into the storage room.

"Makishta! Bring the water skin and follow me down to feed Isis!"

"Go," she said. "Go before Fanes finds you for sure."

He gripped the bars framing the sides of her face. "I will come back for you. I promise."

"Go!" she hissed.

"I love you, Isis." He kissed her lips, their taste salty from her tears. "You, Rory, and I will be together again. Don't worry." He couldn't bear to leave her here at the mercy of Fanes's fists and abusive tongue.

She waved him away, her frantic gaze on the square of light in the ceiling.

He squeezed the bars so tightly his fingers protested.

How can I just leave her here?

Oh, how he wished he could rip the bars free, make them transform into ashes, or even vanish!

Heat flared in his palms. The area where he clasped the bars began to glow softly. He let go suddenly, his hands itching from the intense heat that infused them.

"Hide," Isis whispered, her attention on the square of light in the ceiling.

Dillon tiptoed back to the same place he hid before. Hope and elation billowed in his soul. He'd been told him that Alter-Humans possess one or more special talents. If he was correct, he found one of his. Now to wait until Fanes left so he could try freeing his mate. He prayed the guy didn't see him in the darkness. He hunkered behind the crate. Concentrating, Dillon imagined his mind encased in a cave that only he had access to so that Fanes couldn't pick up on his thoughts or emotions.

The Alter-Male and Makishta advanced on Isis's cell. Fanes pushed the water skin through the door, and the young girl passed a plate of food through the slot at the bottom of the cell door.

"Upstairs with you," Fanes ordered the girl.

She turned and quickly reached the steps, climbing up into the dwelling.

He held the glow stone high, his attention riveted on Isis. "Eat. You will need your strength to keep me happy."

Isis said nothing.

"You will come to love and respect me," he added with assurance.

"I highly doubt that." Her voice emerged from the gloom in the back of the cell.

He laughed and faced the light spilling from the ceiling. "We shall see, my sweet Isis. A few days of solitary confinement should change your mind." He left, stepping up the shallow stairs and dropping the tile back in place.

"Dillon?" Isis called quietly.

"I'm here, babe." He withdrew his red stone and used its light to maneuver to her prison.

"You blocked your thoughts," she said. "If I couldn't detect you, then I know Fanes couldn't either."

"But why would he take the chance and not search for me down here?"

"He's as arrogant as my aunt is. He doesn't think there is any way you could have escaped Aunt Sareenah."

He set the stone between his feet and placed his hands on the center frame that ran horizontally across the door's center. "Step back."

Puzzled, she backed away, her chain rattling against the floor.

Dillon concentrated on the iron, imagined it turning into ashes. The bar began to glow warmly, the color spreading throughout the frame and into the rest of the door. He let go and watched as the hue faded, then drew in a deep breath and blew hard.

The door burst into a shower of ashes.

Coughing, Dillon entered the cell and grasped Isis's chain, doing the same to it. He blew on it and the links puffed into circular clouds of ash. Even the band around Isis's ankle turned into dust particles.

"How did you do that?" Isis asked in awe.

"I guess it's one of my powers."

"But your talents shouldn't appear so soon. It takes days, sometimes weeks."

"Are you complaining?" He chuckled and pulled her to her feet.

"No! Let's get the hell out of here!"

She grabbed the glow stone and led him to the back of the chamber. There, Dillon found the bags and behind them a small hole in the base of the wall.

"I'll go first," he said.

"No," she placed her hand on his arm, "let me. You might not be able to cope with the tightness of this passage. Hang on to my ankle like you did the last time."

He nodded and watched as she pushed herself into the hole. When only her feet poked out, she shook one of them, indicating he should grab it and follow her.

Dillon knelt, grasped her right ankle, and wiggled into the tight fissure. Thankful for his mate's guidance, he managed to concentrate on pushing himself forward with his elbows, knees, and toes. He banged his head against a sharp rock. Pain zipped across his skull, but he ignored it and wiggled onward.

Finally, Isis shook his hand free, followed by her hands grasping his and tugging him forward as he managed to scrabble the last three feet. He emerged in an unused shroom patch. The heady spiciness of the fungi surrounded him. Dillon stood, brushed himself off, and swept Isis into his embrace. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too," she said. "But what do we do now?"

"Somehow we have to find Rory and then get out of this valley. Maybe we should go Topside until we can figure something out."

"I have friends here who I trust," Isis said. The way she spoke told Dillon she was musing aloud. "A few of them know my aunt is cruel and not to be trusted, so one of them might hide us for a day or two until we can think of something."

"Sounds like a plan," Dillon said. He glanced around, noting the surrounding mushroom patches and the workers leaving them to return to their abodes. Nervousness assailed him. "Someone might see us and report to Fanes or Sareenah," he stated. "We should get going."

Nodding, Isis pointed toward an underground stream burbling into an irrigation pond. "We can follow the stream into the wall. It comes out at another section of dwellings. I have a friend there who might hide us."

She stepped into the water, sloshing forward, and he followed.

"I'm so sorry about all of this, my love. I feel so guilty. I know I've let you down—"

Dillon grabbed her upper arm and spun her around, intent on assuaging her fears. "I was upset and terrified at first, but what Sareenah has done is not anyone's fault. We're together now, and being together and finding Rory is all that matters."

She blinked away tears and nodded. "You're right."

"Come on," he said. "Let's find a place to hide, then we'll talk."

She took his hand, and Dillon followed her into the fissure where water gurgled forth. In a matter of hours, his entire life had been turned upside down. Even his body's strengths and abilities were different. His appearance had changed, too. He had developing powers and a kinship with another man who shared Isis with him. Although everything was daunting and difficult to wrap his mind around, Dillon knew two things. They had to find Rory, whom he truly cared about, and he loved Isis more than anything.

They would work it out and be together again. He couldn't let himself think otherwise.

<u>98</u>

Chapter Four The Escape

As Dillon followed Isis to her friend's abode, he fretted about Rory's situation. Where was he, and how were they going to find him?

In a matter of hours, Dillon had been thrust into a new life, but now, it seemed like a century since he'd first entered the caverns with Isis. He *had* to find Rory. It didn't make sense to him, but a poignant ache assailed his heart at the idea that Rory was in pain or afraid. If something happened to Rory, God forbid, would Isis be able to handle it? The thought sent a piercing pain into his heart. He couldn't allow himself to think such thoughts.

However he still had to be logical about the situation and he needed to be prepared. If Isis wasn't pregnant yet, and Rory was killed by Sareenah or tossed to the Lava Demon, which was a concept Dillon had trouble dealing with, then Isis would never have the child she desired so much. Without an heir to take the rightful place as Lady of the Lair, what would happen to Isis and the Community?

If Sareenah succeeded with her devious scheme, none of it would matter anyway. Frustration settled over him.

"Isis," he said softly. "If a female leader of the caverns is called the Lady of the Lair. What's a male leader called?"

"Master," she replied over her shoulder. "He is the Master of the Lair. Why?"

They traveled along a narrow, cobbled path that wound its way up into the higher regions of the Community. "I was thinking about Rory." He paused as a lantern bug buzzed between them. "If you only have a few cycles left, and something has happened to Rory, finding another genetic match as a mate might be impossible. That will mean your aunt wins."

"True." She motioned to another trail that led to a lone home nestled against the dome of the cavern. "But right now, I can't think about such things."

"There's one thing I have trouble believing."

"What is it?"

"The Lava Demon," he replied. "What the hell's a Lava Demon and how can something like that exist? Surely it's a fable or legend used to keep Alter-Humans in line."

She shook her head, the curls of her dark mane bouncing around her shoulders. "I've never seen the demon, but each Lady or Master swears it exists. The Lava Demon is supposed to be composed of hot liquid rock and have coal-black eyes that smoke and flame."

Just as he thought. No one had ever seen it, so the Lava Demon must be a tall tale.

"When was the last time someone was thrown to the demon?" he asked.

"When my aunt first took the throne, an Alter-Female insulted her, so the Lady sent her to the demon's pit."

"Did you see this happen?"

"No," she answered, "but I did see the execution ceremony before the guards escorted the woman into the tunnel that leads to the demon's lava pit." She looked over her shoulder at him. "It might not be real, but right now I don't want to take the chance it does exist and land in its lava den."

He quirked his eyebrows. She did have a good point. Dillon never would have believed people like Alter-Humans existed with their extraordinary abilities either, but now he was one of them.

100

"Besides," Isis said, "I won't let myself believe anything bad has happened to our mate, and I have to keep telling myself my aunt's devious plans will fail."

At the words *our mate*, something clicked in Dillon's mind. He focused on Isis's ass swaying along the path, his brain whirring a thousand miles per hour.

She's right. Rory is my mate and I care about him. I truly want to be with him just like I do Isis.

An overwhelming sensation descended upon his heart, and he almost wept from the euphoria it created. Rory was a part of him now just like Isis was.

"Zohmari? Are you..." She glanced at Dillon. "Damn. I have to remember not to use telepathy. You must not use it either, my love. If our thoughts are caught, Sareenah and Fanes can zero in on them and find us."

He nodded.

Half a dozen hewn steps led up to the home's front door. Metallic silver and black outlined it in a stark design of blocks and ess symbols. Isis reached just inside the door, rang a bell, and then waited.

A servant poked her head through the fur hanging over the door. "Yes?" Her gaze settled on Isis. "Oh, I didn't know you were back, miss. Come in! I will tell Zohmari you are here."

"Please keep my presence quiet to all except Zohmari," said Isis. "This is a very urgent and private matter, so the utmost discretion is needed."

The servant dipped her head and held the fur back for them to enter. She vanished down a corridor.

Moments later, a tall, willowy Alter-Male appeared dressed in a shimmering gold loincloth. He enveloped Isis in a tight hug.

"My dear, what brings you here?" he asked, his voice low, melodious.

"The Lady has turned on me," she said. "This Alter-Male is Dillon, my donor mate, but my aunt has deemed him her donor mate as well."

"I don't understand." Zohmari frowned, his silver eyes shimmering with consternation. "Such things sometimes happen, child."

"She's banished Rory somewhere and says that she will not step down when I conceive my heir!"

A horrified expression settled over the man's face. "Quickly, let's go into my library where we can talk in private."

Dillon and Isis followed him down a hall lit by bright rose-colored stones embedded in its ceiling.

Zohmari turned left into a large chamber full of hewn cavities housing a plethora of books. A half-moon table crafted from golden wood resided in the center of the room. Three large chairs with padded fur seats sat in front of the desk. Along one wall, more deeppink rocks exuded a warm, comforting glow. The aroma of knowledge and the spicy scent of aging texts blanketed everything.

"Now, dear child of my soul," the older man said, "what has happened and why has the Lady of the Lair gone mad?"

Later, after everything that had transpired over the last few hours was relayed in detail to Zohmari, the Alter-Male sat back in his chair. He tucked his long, silver hair behind his ears, and then steepled his long, pale fingers together as he regarded Dillon from behind them. After several minutes passed, Dillon's unease grew.

"I see only one alternative," said Zohmari, "and that's to escape Topside."

"But Dillon hasn't assimilated yet," Isis protested. She scooted to the edge of her seat, her bare breasts jiggling with the sudden movement. "He must learn our ways and grow accustomed to life in the Community."

"Who says?" The Alter-Male glanced from her and back to Dillon. "It's merely the custom, Isis, not the law. He has only recently

102

been converted to an Alter-Human, so teach him our ways while Topside and do it in secret. If you remain here, your lives are in jeopardy."

"But for how long?" she asked. "I don't want to be cut off from my friends down here and those I consider family."

Dillon detected the emotion in her voice and longed to comfort her, but if he used telepathy, someone might hear him. Instead, he shifted and placed a hand on her thigh. She smiled back and laid her hand on top of his, squeezing it.

Zohmari watched the exchange and smiled. "You have found your true mate this time, Isis. I feel it." He stood and strode to a bookshelf where he traced his index finger along the spines until he found the volume he wanted. "Your father gave me a few things should something like this ever happen."

The way Isis stiffened drew Dillon's attention. He sensed a revelation that would shock them both.

"My father suspected something like this would happen?" she asked. "Did he know his sister was so conniving or did he suspect she wanted to steal the throne all along?"

"Well, let's just say that your father and Sareenah never saw eye to eye on anything." Zohmari pulled the book from the shelf and turned, facing them. "However, their arguments brought upset to the family and to the Community. Many whispered about the circumstances in which Sareenah became the Lady of the Lair."

He handed the book to Isis. Expecting to see fluttering pages as she opened it, Dillon sucked in a surprised breath at the hidden compartment revealed within it instead. Isis shot him a startled glance and grinned.

"That, my dear child," Zohmari said as she riffled through the documents, "is the deed to two hundred acres with a large house on it. There are several cars and servants." She snapped her gaze up to meet Zohmari's. "Father left all of this to me? But I thought he was born an Alter-Human?"

The man shook his head. "No, he was converted by Daphne, your mother, the former Lady of the Lair, and two Alter-Males converted Sareenah, but one died of a Topsider disease, and the other male was one of several who died with your parents in the tunnel collapse."

"Let me see the birth certificate," Dillon said.

She handed it to him, returning her attention to Zohmari. "I don't understand. If my father wasn't born as an Alter-Human, then who was he before he was converted?"

"Holy shit!" said Dillon.

Zohmari pointed at Dillon, his expression amused. "Apparently your new mate has figured it out."

Dillon pointed to the baby's name typed on the birth certificate. "Don't you know who this is, Isis?"

She frowned.

"Your father was Samuel Wellenvice!"

"Who?" She shook her head. "My surname is Waverly, not Wellenvice."

"My mother and her sisters are all avid fans of his. They love his movies."

She stared at him in wonder. "My father was a m-movie s-star?"

"Yes, and *the* heartthrob of every red-blooded woman at that time," Dillon explained, excitement coursing through him. "I've seen his movies, and my mother has told me a lot about him. Of course, with the way the media is, it's difficult to say what was really true and what wasn't. Samuel Wellenvice made about six movies, and then just disappeared. There was a huge scandal. Some thought Samuel had been murdered, and others believed he couldn't handle the sudden fame, so he went into hiding. Rumors flew for months after his disappearance." He scanned the document again just to reassure himself it was real. "I understand now why there was such a stink. Everything in his estate was left functioning as if he was still alive, but there was no body, no trace of him anywhere in the world. He left it like that should you ever need a place of refuge." He laughed. "No

104

one ever thought to look below ground, so he could slip Topside whenever he wanted to check on his estate, bank accounts, or whatever, and then return here to live as he chose."

Isis studied him gravely. Although Dillon realized his excitement confused her, he also felt the waves of disbelief and upset emanating from his mate.

"It's a shock to you, babe," he said, "but not only are you the heiress of the Community, you're also an heiress beyond these caverns."

She turned, looking at Zohmari again. "My mother was the cause of his disappearance, wasn't she? He wasn't wooed by someone else first?"

He nodded. "He fell in love with your mother and gave up everything for her."

The older man's words snared Dillon's attention. He pondered the information for a moment. Samuel's love for Isis's mother had been so great he'd tossed fame and fortune aside to be with her. Although Dillon had little in the way of material things, he understood Samuel's feelings. Dillon would do anything for Isis, or Rory for that matter.

"But what about Sareenah?" Isis questioned. "Wasn't she famous, too?"

"No." The older man rocked back in his chair. "She lived with Samuel, your father, but he merely supported her. His fame was another source of contention between them."

"Well," said Dillon, "Sareenah doesn't seem like the kind to give up luxury for a life in an underworld."

"That's where you're wrong," Zohmari stated. "Sareenah is all about power and being in the limelight. She was just a recipient of Samuel's money and an occasional pretty woman on her brother's arm during galas. Her Alter-Human mates had little trouble convincing her that she belonged with them. She was well aware of what was going on in the Community and that Daphne, her brother's mate, was the Lady. Sareenah's journey into the Alter-Human world wasn't about love or a new life. It was all about sniffing out an opportunity to seize power.

Isis's sudden understanding of the situation shot through Dillon. He turned to her, their gazes locking. Fear and anxiety shone in her eyes.

"I just didn't think your aunt would go to such lengths to maintain that power," Zohmari said. "If she's willing to risk all to remain Lady of the Lair, when the Community knows you're the rightful heir, then she's lost her mind."

Isis nodded. "That's what I've been trying to tell you, Zohmari. If it hadn't been for Dillon finding me and helping me escape, I would've been Fanes's prisoner until I died. If I'm nowhere to be found, then the Community cannot dispute my aunt's claim. So if I go Topside to stay, she still wins."

"But you'll be safe," Dillon interjected.

"Exactly," Zohmari said.

She frowned and sat back, tapping her hand on the arm of the chair. "So Waverly was my donor father's real name and Wellenvice was his stage name?

"No." Zohmari paled.

A sense of worry from the older man crashed over Dillon with startling force. Isis must've felt it, too. She glanced sharply at Dillon, then back at her friend and mentor.

"Zohmari?" she said. "What haven't you told me?"

"There's something you should know," the Alter-Male said, his tone subdued. "Although you've always known that Samuel was your donor father, I'm your primer father." He sighed and looked away. "My last name, when I'm Topside, is Waverly. Sareenah told you the wrong name because she didn't want anyone realizing you might be related to the Wellenvice movie star."

Isis gaped at him. Wonder, anger, surprise, and disbelief radiated from her and rolled over Dillon in waves.

106

"You're my other father?" The pitch of her voice grew higher, more strained. "Why didn't you ever tell me, Zohmari?" she asked.

"In a word, Sareenah."

He took a suede string from a desk drawer and passed it to her, indicating that Isis tie up and secure the faux book.

Dillon sensed the turmoil within the older man, but the chaos mounting within Isis left him reeling. He wanted to soothe her but felt helpless. How could he console her when everything she believed to be true was actually a lie?

"Your aunt is all about power, child," Zohmari continued, "but I never thought she'd go this far. It wasn't long after Samuel and Daphne died that Sareenah came to me and asked me to step aside so she could raise you as the next Lady of the Lair. I didn't like it, but I couldn't refuse the Lady's wishes, and you were just a toddler at the time. Instead, I had to be content with watching you grow up. I could be there for you and mentor you, but was forced to keep the truth hidden. If I had breathed a word of the truth to anyone, Sareenah would have had me killed or, at the very least, imprisoned me for the rest of my life. And if either of those things had happened to me, who knows what your life would have been like."

"I can't believe this is happening," Isis said.

Dillon pulled her from her seat and onto his lap. He wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tightly.

"I'm sorry, child," said Zohmari.

"Once Sareenah realizes Isis and I are gone," Dillon began, "won't Samuel's estate be the first place she looks?"

"My aunt won't leave the Community." Isis nestled her head in the crook of Dillon's neck. "She will be too worried someone will usurp her position in her absence. Now that I have my donor mate, everyone knows I can conceive at any time. Once that happens, I'm officially the Lady of the Lair and can take my rightful place on the throne."

He looked at Zohmari.

"She's right," the older man stated.

"But Sareenah insists I'm her other replacement mate." Unease skittered down Dillon's back. "Won't she be pissed if she can't have me?"

Isis blinked at him.

"She's denying your rightful place as the Lady, and she wants to conceive an heir, too," Dillon explained. "Having a child will help Sareenah keep her place on the throne, or at least that's what she believes."

"Damn," Isis whispered. "You're right. Like I said, she won't leave the Community, but if she's right and you are her replacement mate, then she'll send someone to bring you back to her." She swallowed hard, the sound of it loud in the room. "And that might be the way she gets me out of the picture."

He frowned. "What do you mean?"

"If she has me killed while I'm Topside, she can make up any story she wants to cover the truth."

The blood fled Dillon's face, leaving his cheeks cold and prickly. He rubbed his palms over them in an attempt to restore warmth and to ward off the numbness.

"I'm sorry, my love," Isis said. "I don't mean to upset you so."

"But we can't leave the Community without Rory," Dillon protested as he worried about Isis's wellbeing. "He's our other mate."

"You might have to." Isis's primer father stood and paced the floor behind the desk. "The longer you two remain here, the greater the chance Sareenah or Fanes will find you."

"No," said Dillon. "We can't just leave Rory down here!"

Isis raised her head and looked into his eyes. "You do love him, don't you?

Mutely, he nodded. A ball of pain wedged beneath his breastbone and forced him to take shallow breaths. "I love you both. I can't bear the thought of something terrible happening to either of you."

108

She brushed her lips across his and smoothed a strand of hair from his brow.

"Stay here for the evening," Zahmori strode to the curtained door, "and then leave when everyone is asleep." He called for his servant, who appeared at the doorway. "Have the cook prepare a meal for my guests and then settle them in the guest chamber so they can rest for a while."

She nodded and left.

"Come." Zohmari motioned to Dillon and Isis. "Follow me to your room. You'll be able to clean up there, too."

Dillon helped his mate off his lap but held her hand as they followed the Alter-Male out of the library and down another tunnel. An odd sensation drifted over Dillon. At first dizziness fell over him, then nausea struck him in the gut. He glanced at Isis, who gulped and closed her eyes for a moment.

"Are you all right?" he asked her.

"I think," she gulped again, "I might..."

She slumped, but Dillon caught her in his arms.

"Isis?" He stroked her hair back from her face. "Isis, what's wrong?"

Zohmari paused and turned, a huge smile on his face. "It's the first sign that she's pregnant!"

"What?"

"It's a transitional phase." The Alter-Male brushed the backsides of his fingers along his daughter's cheek. "When an Alter-Female conceives, and the life within her begins, her body shuts everything down to concentrate solely on the embryo. It's the Alter-Female's way of making sure the new life isn't interrupted and lost. Her body allows the embryo to get a firm hold within the womb so he or she can continue to develop." His smile grew larger. "It looks like I'll be a grandfather."

Surprise wafted through Dillon, followed by elation and an intense need to protect her and his unborn child.

"How long will this phase last?"

"Minutes to hours." Zohmari waited as Dillon lifted Isis into his arms. "It depends on the Alter-Female and how her system works." He motioned for Dillon to follow him. "Let's get her to your room."

With his heart thrumming happily, Dillon walked sideways down the narrow corridor, holding Isis close. Zohmari stopped at a doorway and held a fur aside for him to step into a chamber done in creams and black.

"I'll leave you two alone for a while, but I'll send a servant with water and toiletries so you can clean up." The Alter-Male turned and left the room, whistling a jaunty tune.

Dillon placed her on the bed and straightened her legs so she'd be comfortable. He traced the swell of one breast with his fingers and down to her flat stomach where his and Rory's child might be growing at that very moment.

Isis pregnant? A fierce sense of protection assailed him. Not only did he worry about Rory, but now that Isis had probably conceived, it was essential to be extra careful with her so the child would be safe, too.

Zohmari was right, however. Until things settled down with Sareenah and Fanes, it was best to escape to Topside, especially now that Isis was with child. And it was essential he avoid Sareenah's clutches, too, not to mention protecting Isis from harm. How would he know a Topsider from an Alter-Human when in his or her human form? Fear for the three of them nearly rendered him unconscious.

He fought the smothering sensation and finally managed to calm his heart rate and slow his breathing.

But what about Rory? How did they go about finding him? They just couldn't leave him behind. Dillon refused to go without his male mate. Period.

A different servant, one with dark, gleaming eyes, tapped the stone wall just outside the chamber's entrance before she stepped

110

through the fur drape. "I've brought toiletries so you can freshen up." She dipped her head. "If you need anything, just call for me."

"Thank you," Dillon replied.

She left the room, and Dillon brought the toiletries, a pitcher of water, and towels over to the bed where he quickly gave Isis a sponge bath, and then did the same for himself. Thoughts and worries danced in his brain as he bathed. One question after another bounced through his head until he developed a headache. He crawled onto the bed with Isis and drew her next to him, spooning her curvy body.

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"Dillon, my love," Isis whispered into his ear. "Wake up! Dillon!"

He roused and sat up on one elbow. She sat on the edge of the bed, and her primer father stood watching him from the center of the bedchamber.

"You're awake," Dillon said. "Are you really pregnant like Zohmari thinks you are?"

She nodded happily and held up both hands. A dark band encircled her forearms just behind the wrist bones. Each one looked as if someone had placed henna tattoos around them.

"What are those?" He looked sharply at her.

Using her right hand, she gently rubbed the dark band on her left wrist. "Another sign that I've conceived. We don't know why yet, but when Alter-Females are pregnant, these bands," she held her arms up for him to see again, "show up, and then about a week or so before the baby's birth, the bands disappear, alerting the mother she's about due to give birth and not to stray far from her home."

Dillon rolled off the bed and hugged her. "I'm delighted."

"Really?" She stared up at him with tears shimmering in her bright, sapphire eyes.

"Absolutely." He kissed her soundly and held her that way for a moment.

"Tell him, Isis," Zohmari finally spoke.

Dillon had forgotten the Alter-Male stood behind them. He startled slightly and released his mate. Suspicion tiptoed through his mind. "Tell me what?"

"While we slept," Isis began, "my father contacted some of his trusted colleagues in the Community. Rory is being held down in the Lava Ward."

He frowned. "What's that?"

"It's a prison for those who will be sacrificed to the Lava Demon," Zohmari supplied. He paused as a servant entered the chamber and handed him a large leather sack. Once the young lad had gone, Zohmari crossed the room and handed the bag to Dillon. "I was unable to obtain a key to his cell, but Isis can lead you to the ward. It's after midnight now, and the guards have changed and have already checked on their prisoner. You'll have to figure out how to reach Rory and release him. I can do no more except cover for you both should someone inquire if I've seen you."

"How the hell are we supposed to get past the guards?" Dillon queried.

"We'll figure something out, my love." Looping the satchel's strap over Dillon's head, she glanced at her primer father. "Did the servants pack us a change of clothes for once we're Topside, including something for Rory?"

The Alter-Male nodded. "I've also included the book with Samuel's documents and the papers that prove you are the sole heir of his estate should anyone question your claims."

She stepped into Zohmari's arms and snuggled her head against his shoulder. "Thank you, Father."

He sighed and kissed the top of her curly head. "Be safe, my child, and protect my grandbaby." He looked at Dillon over the top of her head. "Keep my daughter close and guard her with your life."

"I will," Dillon replied and swallowed a lump in his throat.

"Well, enough tears and fears," Zohmari joked. He stepped away from Isis. "You must go before it gets any later. A servant will lead you through the house and into the small back tunnels that bypass the Community."

Dillon gaped at the older man, who chuckled.

"Why do you think I had my home carved so close to the cavern's dome? I found the passages and claimed this section as my own in case I should ever need to use them." Zohmari waved them on their way. "If possible, send word to me that you've reached Samuel's estate, but only if you're certain no one will intercept the message."

"Thank you," said Dillon.

The Alter-Male smiled and, with tears glistening in his eyes, turned away.

The servant led them deeper into the bowels of the home until they reached a shallow crevice running from the floor to the ceiling.

Isis thanked the young boy and pushed into the crack. Grabbing her hand, Dillon followed her. The leather travel bag caught on the walls, but hard tugs from Dillon now and then kept it squeezing through the narrow passage behind him.

The crevice widened, but the ceiling dropped until Dillon was forced to stoop as he kept close to Isis. They traveled the corridor for a long time, stopping once so they could ease the cramps developing in their backs from the awkward walking position.

Dillon developed the sense of traveling downward. Eventually, the passage tapered again and then leveled.

"Let me see where we're going to come out," Isis stated.

"Be careful."

She smiled. "Don't worry." Cautiously, she peeked outside. "We're on the river. That's good."

"How is that good?"

"We can float out of the Community into the tunnel where the passage to the Lava Ward is located."

"Won't someone see us?" he asked.

She grinned. "We're not taking a boat. We're going to let the current transport us. The water's very cold, but you'll be fine. Alter-Humans have a high tolerance for severe temperatures."

Quickly, she led him out of the crevice and down a short, gravelly slope to the river. As the water rushed by, Dillon detected the coldness emanating from it.

"Hold my hand," said Isis. "Don't let go. The bag should be watertight, so our clothes and food will be fine, but don't let the bag get away from you. We'll need the clothes and food stowed in it." She chuckled as her gaze swept the surrounding area. "And it's hard to blend Topside when you're walking around half naked."

She tugged on his hand, drawing him into the water with her until they stood waist deep in it. Dillon sucked in his breath at the iciness of the river.

"Now," she said, "keep hold of my hand and kick off the bottom. Let the current hold you up."

He did as she instructed. The water caught them, and buoyed by it, they moved downriver toward the big, gaping hole where the river disappeared.

Dillon's skin grew cold, but once he adjusted his breathing, an inner heat seemed to stem from his midsection and radiate out along his limbs. With the sack bobbing on the water behind him, Dillon pulled Isis into his arms. Floating together, they lay in the water half on their backs, half on their sides, and watched the Anasazi-like dwellings drift by above them.

A lantern bug buzzed next to them. It skimmed the surface, its pinchers swishing as if it were washing its hands, and then it rose into the air and lumbered higher as it made its way to an upper level.

Once they floated into the dark tunnel, Dillon lost track of the insect. Dark red and bright orange stones glowed here and there on the ceiling and walls. The smell of limestone and age pervaded the region.

"There," Isis whispered. "See that amber-colored rock glowing on the right? That's where we need to go. There isn't a guard there, but there will be one a few yards inside the passage to the Lava Ward." She rolled onto her belly, but kept a firm grip on Dillon's hand. "Help me swim toward it. By the time the current reaches that point, we should be able to feel the bottom and walk up to the ledge."

They swam with the racing water. Dillon kicked his feet hard, but the bag wanted to drag him due south with the current. Breathing faster, he managed to help Isis propel their bodies to the ledge where the amber rock shone down on them.

Finally, his foot struck something, and Isis said, "You can stand up now."

Together, they waded to the ledge. He pulled himself up onto it, then grasped Isis's hands and hauled her up on the big, wide stone next to him.

"So how do we get past the first guard let alone the others posted in the ward?" he asked, his voice low.

"Well, that depends on what the guards have been told." She pressed herself against the wall to the left of the hewn passageway and indicated he should do the same. "If they know nothing about what's going on, then I'll just say we're paying our last visit to Rory."

He moved to stand next to her, the wall gritty against his bare back. "And if they do know the details and have been instructed not to let us in to see him?"

"Then I may have to kill them."

"What?" he hissed.

She threw him a stern look. "Shh! What other choice do I have?"

"First of all, you're not going to jeopardize the life of our child." He fought to ease the frantic beating of his heart. "And secondly, if we're caught, both of us will be thrown to that Lava Devil."

"Demon."

"Whatever. We'll be sacrificed for murdering someone just like they say Rory did." He shivered and urged his inner heat to warm him faster. "There has to be another way, Isis."

She sighed and studied the river.

"Is there a back passage to this ward?" he asked.

"Not that I'm aware of."

An idea began forming in Dillon's mind. He smiled and relaxed slightly. "Go over to that pile of rocks and hide there. I think I know what to do."

"Are you sure?" She studied him dubiously, her eyes glowing eerily in the dim light.

"Yes, but if I don't come out within the next half hour, go to your father's estate and stay there. You can't risk anything happening to our baby or you, okay?"

She nodded.

"Promise me, Isis."

She kissed him, her tongue wandering the seam of his lips. Desire fluttered through Dillon, and he pulled her tighter against him as if their embrace was going to be their last.

Finally, she stepped back and said, "I promise, my love. I trust you, too."

"Is there a protocol for approaching the guards? Is there anything I should know or have if I want to pose as one?"

"No, not really. My aunt knows who her guards are, so since she's the one who primarily deals with them, no one else is down here except for a prisoner's visitors or Sareenah's advisor."

"Good. Now get over there."

She took the bag he handed her and peeked into the passage, then trotted over to the jumble of stones and crouched behind them.

"I'll be back as soon as possible," he whispered. "At least, I hope so."

Her voice drifted over to him. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

He straightened and concentrated on his body. Slowly, he felt the change slip over his skin. As if thousands of little needles poked him, the transformation from his human appearance into the form of an Alter-Male happened within seconds.

He ducked into the passageway. Several feet inside, hundreds of small rocks glowed in various hues, lighting the way. Dillon told himself to remain calm and act natural.

Rounding the bend in the passage, he encountered an Alter-Male sitting on a rock in the middle of the corridor.

"Stop!" The guard stood and held his hand out like a traffic cop. "What business do you have here?"

"I've been sent by the Lady of the Lair," Dillon stated, his tone firm and all business. "She wants to interrogate the prisoner further, so she sent me to fetch him."

"I know all the guards," the Alter-Male stated. He looked Dillon up and down, his odd teal-green eyes full of skepticism. "You, I don't know."

"The Lady assigned me as a guard today," Dillon said. "I've only been converted a week, but the Lady felt I'd make a good ward sentry."

"I need to check," the other male said.

"Go ahead, but when the Lady gets pissed at you for interfering with her wishes, don't blame me."

At his words, the guard paled. A wide range of emotions crossed his face.

Finally, he shrugged and motioned for Dillon to follow him. "I'll alert the other two sentries and get you a set of cuffs and some ankle binders to incapacitate him.

"Thank you," said Dillon.

Several yards down the corridor, the path opened up to a small chamber. There, the sentry paused, and spoke with two much older Alter-Males who sat behind a stone table sharing fruit and cheese from out of a suede bag. He explained the matter, and the taller of the two handed him a set of cuffs and ankle binders.

"Follow me," the first sentry said to Dillon. "I'll stand by while you put the cuffs and binders on the prisoner, then you can be on your way."

He led Dillon down another passage, around two sharp bends and to a dead end where a steel door cordoned it off, creating a cell.

Rory sat on the dusty, gritty floor, knees up, forearms braced on them, head back against the wall. Dirt and sand clung to his skin, and a dark bruise had begun to form on his left cheekbone.

At the sight of it, fury blew through Dillon. Gritting his teeth, he maintained his composure.

"The Lady needs to speak with you," the guard stated gruffly. "You are to be transported to..." He glanced curiously at Dillon.

"To her dwelling," Dillon supplied.

"Then returned here to await your sentencing," the sentry finished.

Scrambling to his feet, Rory looked past the guard and met Dillon's eyes. With his pulse thundering in his ears, Dillon prayed Rory didn't react and give him away. His mate showed no emotion but waited as Dillon entered the cell and fastened the steel cuffs on his wrists and the binders on his ankles.

"How did the prisoner get that shiner?" Dillon gestured up at Rory. "Don't you think the Lady will be furious if he's returned to her in such condition? It's her right to administer punishment, not anyone else's." He checked the links running between his mate's feet, hoping his statements were on spot and sounded convincing.

"The prisoner arrived here with the bruise," the guard replied, unease in his voice.

Somewhat relieved, Dillon nodded. He'd been prepared to thrash the sentries' asses if they had been the ones who had harmed Rory. Thankfully he wouldn't have to, but it still pissed him off that someone had taken a cheap shot at his mate.

118

"Very well." He straightened and mentally cursed the trembling in his bones. "The binder and cuffs are secure. Let us be on our way so the Lady doesn't become angry."

The Alter-Male followed Dillon and Rory back to the small chamber. Dillon nodded to the two sentries there, waved to the first one, and making a show of it, roughly pushed Rory down the passage and out to the ledge where Isis was hiding.

On the wide rock, the river rushing below it, Isis let out a small cry and hurried to them, throwing her arms around Dillon and Rory.

"I can't believe you just walked in and then walked back out with him!" she cried. "How did you do it?"

"Well, let's just say the next crime Sareenah adds to my list of injustices will be impersonating a guard," Dillon said, laughing.

"And his act was convincing as hell!" Rory exclaimed, chuckling, too. He lifted his arms and lowered them over Dillon's head so he could hug him. "Thank you."

"Hey, we're a threesome, a trinity," Dillon replied and hugged him in return. He pushed Rory's arms back over his head and touched the cuffs. They glowed, turned black, and then disintegrated into dust. Next, he knelt and did the same to the ankle binders.

"Did you kill someone?" Dillon asked.

"No." With a firm head shake, Rory stood, brushing the ashes from his body. "There was a struggle as I tried to get away, but it was Sareenah who killed the Alter-Male. He didn't feel it was right to manipulate my mind or that Fane's took the rightful Lady of the Lair to be imprisoned in his home, so when the Alter-Male protested, Sareenah murdered him and blamed me for it."

"That bitch," Isis hissed. She kept throwing fearful glances toward the entrance to the ward. "We better get moving. We can float downriver until we reach a small sub community, then hike out of the caverns from there."

She lowered herself into the water and motioned for them to follow. Dillon grabbed the pack and jumped into the water with Rory

right behind him. They let the current carry them about half a mile downstream. Lights glowed ahead, and a small community of about a dozen stone homes took shape in the gloom.

Minutes later, the river carried them to a bend where they swam to the shore and waded out of the water to collapse on a sandbar.

Hidden from the village, Dillon lay panting as he let all his stress and worries fade into the darkness. Now that they'd found Rory, they could get the hell out of the caverns and go Topside where they would be relatively safe and could await the birth of their child. As long as Sareenah didn't send someone after him to drag him back to her, then the three of them should be fine and live quietly at Isis's new estate.

All they had to do was exit the caverns without being seen by the wrong person. Surely they could do that and slip away unnoticed, Dillon mused as he stared up into the cavern's ceiling where lantern bugs winked on and off.

"What's this?" Rory said.

Dillon raised his head and looked over at him and Isis. Rory held her by the wrists, studying the dark bands encircling them.

"Is it true?" Rory questioned. The note of hope and wonder in his male mate's voice tugged at Dillon's heart. "Has it finally happened?"

With an enormous smile spreading over her face, Isis nodded.

Rory swept her into his arms and held her tightly as they both laughed and shed tears of happiness. Crawling over to them, Dillon wrapped his arms around his mates. They stayed that way for a long time.

Finally, Dillon moved back and sat on the sand.

Rory let Isis go and said, "I was so worried about you and Dillon."

"Us?" Isis gaped at him. "Dillon and I were about to go crazy fearing the worst had happened to *you*. Then when we heard about your sentencing," she shuddered, "I almost fell apart, but Dillon was there for me and insisted we'd find you."

He turned his dark eyes on Dillon. A shiver of delicious anticipation shimmied through Dillon as he met his mate's gaze.

"Were you really that worried?" asked Rory.

"Yes." The pace of Dillon's heart accelerated. "I was so afraid for you, and I feared for how Isis would react, too, should the worst have happened. And now that Sareenah may come after me to force me to mate with her, it puts us all in even more danger."

"What do you mean?" The expression on Rory's face turned stony.

Dillon lowered his gaze and stared at a flat, mineral-flecked stone lying on the sand by Rory's knees. "We've spoken with Isis's primer father and have figured out that what we thought was a dangerous situation is actually even more serious than we imagined."

"We'll tell you everything once we're Topside," Isis insisted.

"Regardless," Dillon continued, "I've come to realize many things the past few hours." He gulped, unable to voice the words without feeling weak, vulnerable. "Most of all, I now know that if feel something very special," he said, his voice breaking. "Damn." He glanced up at his mates. How did he tell another man that he cared for him so deeply?

"Go on," Isis urged, her voice but a whisper. "Tell him, Dillon. He needs to hear it, and you need to say it."

"I just can't believe," he glanced at Rory, then back to the pretty stone, "that I've not only fallen in love with the most beautiful and amazing woman I've ever met, but also a strong, intelligent, and handsome man." He looked up at his male mate and conveyed his feelings through the tone of voice as well as with his eyes. "I love you both. I love you, Rory."

The smile that Rory offered him melted Dillon's heart. He grabbed Dillon and tugged him into his lap. Before Dillon could gasp, Rory kissed him so soundly that Dillon's mind went blank, but his libido responded in a most surprising manner.

Rory grasped Dillon's hardening cock. "Are you ready to perform the rest of our trinity mating?" A storm cloud of love and desire churned in his eyes. "I don't want to pressure you, but I truly sense you've reached that point of acceptance. We need to do it to be one unit and finalize our circle of trinity."

Moving to kneel at their sides, Isis also placed her hand on Dillon's erection. She gazed into Dillon's eyes, her expression pure adoration and sincerity.

"I'm not sure," said Dillon. His heart pounded so hard the thump of it echoed in his ears. "I don't understand the feelings I have right now, but they're wonderful all the same."

"Will you let me show you?" his male mate asked. He looked briefly at Isis. "Let us show you, love you?"

Hesitantly, Dillon nodded. "I want this. I really do." A smile tweaked his lips.

"We're protected here," said Isis, "so we should be fine for a couple of hours." She moved to the bag, opened it, and withdrew a large, sheer blanket that shimmered with warm, fiery hues. "We can lay on this." After spreading it on the sandbar, she lay down on her side and patted the area in front of her. "Come here, you two."

Rory took Dillon's hand, and together, they crawled onto the cover and reclined next to their Alter-Female.

"First, penetrate Isis," Rory began, "then I'll enter you." He caressed Dillon's cheek with the backside of his long fingers. "I'm assuming this is your first time for this act?"

Nodding, Dillon tried to get a grip on his raging desires. His heart pounded even faster. Anticipation and adrenaline whizzed through his body at lightning speed, leaving him breathless and slightly lightheaded.

Isis rose on to her hands and knees, presenting her ass to Dillon. His cock grew so hard it became painful. Behind her, he balanced on his knees, flipped her filmy, damp skirt over her round bottom, and scooted closer to position his cock at her pink opening. The need to plunge into her took his breath away, but he also anticipated how Rory would feel pressed into his ass. At the thought, tingling assailed his spine, and Dillon battled to curb the growing need to come all over Isis's ass before he even entered her.

"Mmm, enter me, my love," she murmured and wiggled her ass. "I need you inside me, and once Rory enters you, we'll be one entity." She shoved backward and nestled her cunt against his cock.

With a savage moan, Dillon sank his dick into her pussy. Her body readily accepted him. A gasp ripped free of his lips as her hot, tight walls encased him. He began thrusting, and Isis groaned, meeting each of his motions. Her jiggling breasts enticed Dillon to lean over her and cup their weight in each hand.

She dropped her head and began a backward bumping motion that forced Dillon's cock into her so deeply he felt the opening to her womb brushing the head of his cock. He sucked in a sharp breath and steeled himself for the rush of lust that settled in his balls and spine.

Rory knelt behind Dillon and placed his hands on his waist. His warm, gentle touch thrilled Dillon, and a shiver of unidentifiable need sluiced through his body.

"Are you ready?" Rory pressed his pelvis against him, his cock hard and eager against Dillon's ass.

Dillon didn't stop thrusting as he answered, "Yes, I want you now."

Running his hands up Dillon's back and then down again to his hips, Rory massaged Dillon's muscles. Although he wanted Rory, Dillon realized how anxious he was about this part of their relationship. However, he needed him, too, wanted him to join their bodies so that they could be a true threesome, a whole, connected unit.

Dillon slowed his actions and finally held Isis still. She whimpered in protest, but remained motionless so Rory could join them.

She glanced over her shoulder and grinned at first Dillon, then Rory. "I love you, both."

"The three of us love one another," Dillon replied.

"Exactly," said Rory, who slid one hand down over Dillon's butt and parted his cheeks. "I'm going to get you ready for me, Dillon. Relax and trust me, okay?"

Dillon nodded and strove to calm his breathing. He felt Rory's thumb enter his ass, stroking the edges of the muscle ring hidden between his cheeks. The sensation inflamed his desire. He fought the urge to pummel Isis's hot, wet cunt, but he had to remain still and let Rory prepare him for penetration. Breathing heavily, he pushed back against Rory's thumb and was rewarded with a delighted sound from the Alter-Male. Rory worked his digit in farther, moving it back and forth several times.

"Please," Dillon gasped and squeezed his eyes shut, "take me, Rory. Let the three of us be one person."

Isis wriggled her hips. "Come on, Rory. Enter him and complete us."

Rory slid his thumb out of Dillon. "I'm going to put saliva on you to ease the pain you'll feel, but I assure you the pain will pass once your body adjusts to me."

The next thing Dillon felt was something warm and wet sliding into his rear, followed by Rory's hard cock pressed between his cheeks and against his opening.

"Are you ready for me?" he asked Dillon. "I don't want to hurt you, so you must be sure."

"I'm positive," Dillon breathed.

If they didn't do something soon, he'd blow his wad inside Isis before anyone moved a muscle. Right now the desire rocketing through Dillon's body had him tighter than a cable supporting the Golden Gate Bridge.

"All right," Rory whispered and placed both hands on either side of Dillon's hips. "Take a deep breath. Here I come."

Gently, Rory pushed against Dillon's asshole, the muscles parting to allow his cock access. As the man entered him, a burning sensation settled in Dillon's ass. His muscles stretched, and the burning grew more intense.

"Breathe," said Rory. "You must breathe through it and not tense your body."

Dillon filled his lungs and relaxed as he let the breath out, concentrating on not only the feeling of Rory's cock in his ass, but also his own cock within Isis's tight pussy.

Withdrawing slightly, Rory pushed in again, this time a bit deeper, then repeated the process several times until his full, rigid cock lay embedded in Dillon to the root.

A fire erupted in Dillon's body. It began in his lower back, spread to the base of his spine, into his ass, and flowed into his balls and his cock.

"Gah! Oh, my!" Dillon gasped for air, the need to fuck and ejaculate so overwhelming he grew dizzy.

"Are you okay?" asked Rory.

"Just fuck me!" Dillon began thrusting into Isis.

With a growl of delight, Rory pumped into Dillon's ass. The sensation of another man's dick inside him as Dillon's cock was inside his female mate was so amazing Dillon lost himself in the feelings. The patting sounds of their bodies meshed with the soft noise of the river water rushing by. Dillon moaned, his cries blending with Isis's soft squeals and Rory's grunts of desire. Clasping Isis's breasts again, Dillon squeezed them rhythmically, imitating the movements her inner walls would make once she orgasmed and milked his cock. The size of Rory's cock stretched and filled Dillon. He'd never imagined sex with another man could feel so damn good, but being physically connected to Isis and Rory at the same time blew his mind.

"I love you both," Dillon cried. He felt their souls touch, their minds becoming one.

"I'd say this through telepathy because it enhances our intimacy, but we must not use it in case someone tunes into it," said Rory. "We are yours forever. The three of us will be one until death separates us."

"And we will raise our baby to be a good person and a fair and just leader," Isis added. "The four of us will be a family."

At that, her insides clenched Dillon's cock so tightly he grunted. A rhythm began within Isis, and she threw her head back, shouting to the upper regions of the cavern. Dillon couldn't hold on any longer. The cum surged to the tip of his cock, and, stiffening, he let himself go, and his seed spurted into her. Rory let out a cry of joy and stiffened, too. Dillon felt his partner's cock become twice as hard, and a throbbing followed it. He sucked in a delighted breath of air, and, as he withdrew from Isis to thrust again, he pushed backward even harder, driving Rory's cock deeper still.

The man howled and lowered himself over Dillon's back where he bit down on Dillon's neck as he pumped vigorously, filling Dillon's ass with his seed. The heat of the liquid within him fueled Dillon's desire for Isis, and another mini orgasm assailed him. He pumped into Isis even harder and released a few more drops of cum.

Slowly, Rory withdrew from Dillon, and Dillon did the same with Isis. They collapsed onto the spread, limbs akimbo, and lay panting. Dillon stroked Isis's breasts, his head upon Rory's shoulder.

Dillon must have dozed off because he startled awake as Isis nudged him and said, "Come, my love. We must be on our way."

"Yes," Rory added with a soft smile. "It's growing late. We must protect our mate and our unborn child. Once we're Topside, I'll relax."

It seemed as though he'd been asleep for hours. "How long was I asleep?" asked Dillon.

"About half an hour." Moving the bag to the blanket's edge, she waited as he rolled off of it onto the sand. "I told Rory everything that has happened since he was taken prisoner, what Fanes did, and how Zohmari is my primer father. I've also explained our fears about my aunt and her plans for you as her mate and her hopes of conceiving an heir to help secure her stolen throne. As a result," she offered Rory a sympathetic smile, "Rory is now very nervous about someone discovering us here. I feel the same, so we should be going."

After helping her fold the cover, Dillon waited as she placed it inside the sack.

Rory led the way around the small village and down along the edge of the river for several yards. A cave yawned to the left, and the Alter-Male strode into it with Isis on his heels. Dillon trailed her, an odd sense of regret filling him.

When had he grown accustomed to having the caverns as his new home? How had it happened so quickly? Dillon really didn't want to leave now, but he knew it was essential for their survival until something could be done about Sareenah and Fanes.

They walked for a long time. Throughout their trek, Dillon admired the beautiful stalagmites, stalactites, underground creeks, and dripping, glittering outcroppings and cathedral-like ceilings. How could he have thought such a world was dark, dusty, and boring?

Finally, the tunnel they traversed grew brighter. The closer they approached the exit, the more Dillon's vision adjusted to allow in the natural light. He wondered if anyone would catch them before they reached Wellenvice's estate.

Dillon emerged on a bluff overlooking the city below them. The first pink smudges of dawn clothed the sky. His excellent eyesight detected a faint trail winding down the hillside and into the shallow valley. Birds began their early morning songs, and a breeze laden with the aroma of wet grass and honeysuckle wafted over the ledge they stood upon.

Rory rummaged in the bag and tossed some clothes to both Dillon and Isis before taking out pants, shoes, and a shirt for himself. They changed into them, and placed their Alter-Human attire in the sack.

"Change back to your human form, Dillon," said Isis as her body rippled and shifted. Behind her, Rory transformed into his Topsider form, too. Needling crossed Dillon's skin as he morphed into his former self.

"Well done," Rory stated with approval in his eyes. "You're a fast learner and seem to be adapting quickly to our Alter-Human lifestyle."

"If we take the trail to the fork halfway down," said Isis, "it leads back to the tourist center where we can take my Corvette into the city and drive to my father's estate."

Dillon sat down on a small boulder. "What do we do when we get there?"

Once Rory shouldered their travel pack and he walked over to Dillon, he answered, "We'll contact other Alter-Humans who are Topside and join forces with them against Sareenah."

"And we must remember to get word to Zohmari so he knows we reached the estate safely," Isis said as she slipped on a pair of sandals.

"We have too much at stake to not think everything through very carefully," Rory said, handing Dillon a pair of socks and boots from the pack. He cast a fond look at Isis. "Especially now that we've finally conceived a child and heir."

Isis joined them at the boulder and slipped her arms around Dillon's and Rory's waists.

"We'll figure something out," Dillon said with conviction. He yanked on the hiking boots. "I have a great Topsider family, so we'll have their support if we need them."

Isis stared at him. "But they won't know who or what you have become."

"True, but we'll cross that bridge when and if we come to it." With a gentle kiss to her upper arm, Dillon stood. "We better get moving. We have a life to live and plan." He smiled. "And I intend on enjoying every moment of it."

"But what if Sareenah or Fanes catches us?" asked Isis, her expression troubled.

"You have to think positive, babe." Rory kissed her forehead. "Many Alter-Humans are against Sareenah's rule. It's only a matter of coming up with a good plan to dethrone her and gathering enough help to do so."

"We'll win this fight," Dillon insisted. "After all, we have love on our side, and you are and will be the next Lady of the Lair."

"But how are we going to do it?" she asked as she took Rory's hand and let him lead her to the mouth of the trail.

"We do it together through the strength of our love," said Dillon.

Rory and Isis paused, smiling at Dillon over their shoulders.

"Well," he grinned back, "let's get going. Today we start our lives together."

As they descended the path, the sun topped the horizon, warming the city below them and instilling a sense of determination and hope within Dillon.

Somehow, some way, the three of them would defeat Sareenah. After all, they had love on their side.

THE END

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