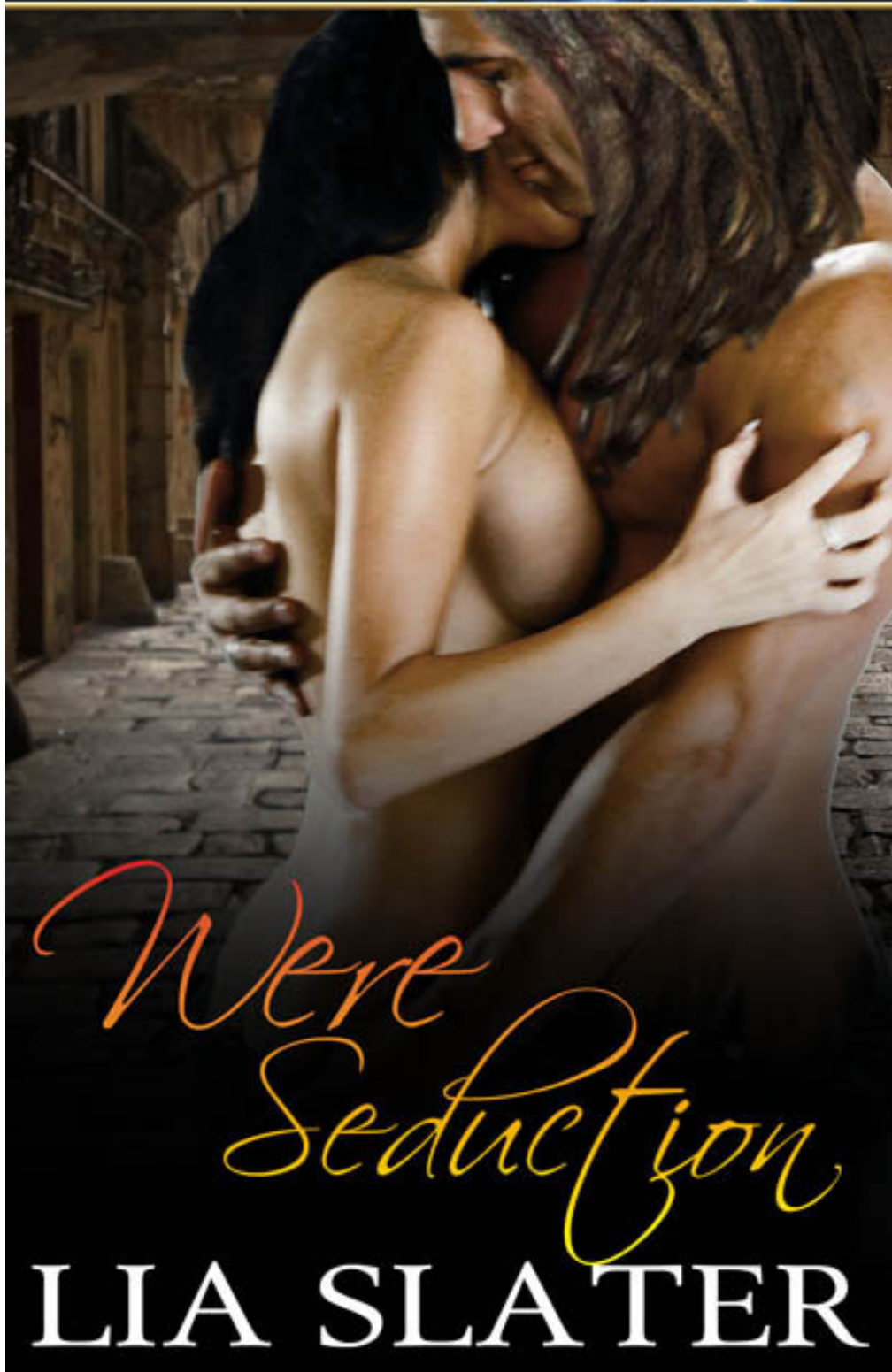


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



*Were  
Seduction*

LIA SLATER

## **Were Seduction**

*Lia Slater*

*Book two in the Were Legends series.*

After living over a century without the touch of a man, Ambria Nogle is surprised that seducing Count Kollens isn't all that difficult. Unfortunately, falling in love with the Were is just as easy. As an empath, she can see right through Kaige's brooding façade and into his heart. Now if only she can convince him that her heart is just as genuine.

Kaige isn't sure what to think of the wicked little witch who's stolen his nights and captured his thoughts. Their sizzling chemistry dulls his usually sharp senses when they're together, making him uncertain of her intentions. But soon he finds trusting Ambria isn't the problem. Falling in love with her is.

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Were Seduction

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# *WERE SEDUCTION*

Lia Slater

## **Chapter One**

The ballroom was congested with humans and Weres, packed elbow to elbow. Or maybe that's how it seemed to Ambria. The mixture of intense emotions throbbed at her temples, making her woozy.

She hadn't wanted to come to this ball. She knew the large crowd would have this effect on her. But it was the best way to meet Count Kollens, the most powerful Were in Paqualette aside from the King and Queen.

Ambria had seen the newly appointed Count from afar a handful of times and the energy he created had always made her curious. As an empath, her sensitivity to other's feeling was strong, sometimes unrelenting. And the vibes Count Kollens radiated were disturbing, puzzling and utterly compelling.

Tonight was no different. She eyed him as she waited in the receiving line to meet the royal couple. The Count stood by the King and watched over the room with a frown on his face and a deep-seated anger streaming from every pore on his body.

Although the Were was dressed in as fine a suit as the King, he was by no means a refined man. His long brown hair hung past his shoulders in unkempt dreads. His tanned skin gave off the impression that he spent most of his days in the sun. And his smoky gray gaze scanned the room, making him seem like a predator searching for raw meat rather than an ambassador to this country.

Nope, Ambria was not looking forward to the task of seducing Kaige Kollens. Perspiration moistened her cheeks at the mere thought of stepping that far outside her comfort zone.

Lorzener, the high priestess of Ambria's coven, stood beside her, nudging her along. Her words from two days prior were still vivid in Ambria's mind.

“We’re invited to the balls now,” she’d said. “Why not mix it up with the wealthier crowd? I hear Count Kollens is a bachelor, and a fine one at that, too. You should work your magic on him, Ambria. Maybe you could become his mistress and share the wealth. Give back to the coven that has given so much to you. Besides, it wouldn’t hurt you to get out and socialize once in a while.”

Ambria had seen it coming. She’d lived with Lorzener for the past thirty years of her immortal life and all that while she’d lain low under the high priestess’s wings, where it felt safe. The coven of witches had become her only family and she’d do anything for them. They meant the world to her. But the seduction of anyone, in particular a Were, wasn’t something she’d imagined ever doing.

The line moved along quickly and Ambria’s legs felt like dead weight under her ball gown as she walked closer toward the brooding Count. He certainly did intrigue her. And she supposed it wouldn’t hurt to meet him just to see if this plan had any hope. Who knew if the Were would even find her appealing? There was no guarantee and it had been so very long since she’d even talked to a man, let alone tried to get one into bed. But she had to try, at least. And if all else failed, she supposed casting a love spell was also an option.

Her coven, the people she loved most, deserved her help. If she could continue to use witchcraft to bring income in, she would. Unfortunately, the coven couldn’t make a living casting spells for the people of Paqualette if the people had no respect for them. And she imagined Count Kollens had more than enough riches, enough to treat his mistress to an extravagant gift once in a while.

Mistress. The term bounced around in her aching head. Did she dare? She blew out a shaky breath and came face to face with Queen Nayla—a newly made Were, much to the chagrin of this mostly human country. Ambria curtsied in front of Her Majesty and relaxed a little. The Queen was a genuinely happy person and the energy she exuded lifted Ambria’s spirits, if only for a moment.

"Pleased to meet you, my Queen," she said, and found she actually meant the words. "I'm Ambria Nogle of South Paqualette Valley. Of the witches' coven."

"Ambria, what a lovely name. I'm pleased to meet you, as well. I'm so glad to finally have you as a guest in our home. This is my husband, King Mace."

Ambria felt his irritation even before she looked into his glaring eyes. The Were had a serious problem with witches, she knew, having met him before he'd been King. Unfortunately, she hadn't been on her best behavior that evening and had antagonized him, probably worsening his already bitter view of her coven.

"We met." He nodded tersely and then gave his wife a loving grin. "The night you were given the Were plague."

"Oh. I see." Queen Nayla smiled wider and turned to Lorze. "High Priestess Lorzener. How are you?"

Ambria couldn't concentrate on the rest of their conversation since both King Mace and Count Kollens were now staring at her, inadvertently directing their strong feelings onto her. The area behind the back of her eyes throbbed painfully. It appeared these two had some very potent opinions. She quickly did a silent spell to block them. The spell wouldn't last more than a minute but she'd take as much relief as she could get.

"Enjoy your time at the ball," the King said behind a frown. "I assume you're aware of the no-witchcraft rule?"

"Yes, of course." *Oops.* She hadn't had a clue. Lorzener hadn't mentioned it. That would make the seduction more difficult, especially if Kaige didn't find her attractive. True, no one would know if she used witchcraft—or that she just had. No one but her coven members, anyway, but she didn't want to take the chance and end up in the dungeon. Not that seducing Count Kollens for profit's sake was any less risky. But what was her other choice? She didn't want to let down the only family she had left in this world.

"Don't mind him." Kaige stepped forward and pushed the King back a foot. He surprised her by giving her a cute, crooked smile. His teeth were straight and white

against the tan of his skin. He seemed almost delightful with his emotions blocked. "He's not the most social person," he said. "The Queen hasn't fully tamed him yet."

King Mace narrowed his eyes in warning but didn't reply. Instead, he slid an arm around his wife's waist in a protective manner. As if he didn't need anyone else's approval except for hers. Their relationship fascinated Ambria. She couldn't help but wonder if the couple would've lasted if the Queen had remained human. The past had shown Ambria that Weres couldn't be content with a human partner. Or at least her personal experience had shown her that.

Kaige held his hand out, grabbing her attention again. "Pardon His Majesty's rudeness for not introducing me. I'm Kaige Kollens."

The King cleared his throat. "He's Count Kollens, governor of Eastern Paqualette and ambassador to the Weres."

"Right." The Count took her hand, which wouldn't seem to stop trembling, and brought it to his lips. "But please call me Kaige. The other stuff is for business, not pleasure." His lips were warm and soft against her skin. He took his time, allowing her to notice the masculine angle of his jaw, the enchanting charcoal hue of his eyes, his long black lashes and the texture of his large rough hand.

A warm pool of lust stirred deep in her womb, making her breath halt for a moment. Up close, he was possibly the most captivating man she'd ever seen.

Maybe this task wouldn't be so difficult after all. And she supposed Lorze was right about socializing with people outside the coven. It did Ambria no good to hide from the world like a coward. Yes, it was simpler to cower away from the world but if she allowed her empathetic abilities to rule her life she'd surely become a burden to her pseudo family.

"It's lovely to meet you, Kaige," she said, pleased she'd been given permission to call him by his first name. He wasn't a stiff nobleman like she'd thought he was going to be. No, it seemed that he didn't enjoy the formalities of his new position at all. Her stiff shoulders relaxed just a bit.



"Please call me Ambria." She curtsied for him and made sure to keep eye contact. She'd never been schooled in the ways of seduction but she was certain showing her interest was the way to go. With the way her stomach fluttered in his presence, it wasn't a difficult task at all.

"Will you save a dance for me, Ambria?" He released her hand just as his emotions flooded past her fading spell.

They hit her body with a bang and curiosity had her sifting through them quickly, trying to untangle and decipher. He was interested and amused. There was desire and approval. Anger always seemed to resonate from somewhere within his psyche but it didn't appear to be directed at anyone in the vicinity. Not at her, at least. Not yet.

"I would love to dance with you," she said, after a short pause. She did her best to keep her voice upbeat when guilt was already eating at her insides. She'd never seduced a man before and certainly not with the intention of using him.

*Oh curses, what am I doing?*

Beside Kaige, the King exuded wariness and dislike. His suspicion of witches was not a new revelation and for once, he was right to suspect foul play. Ambria lowered her gaze as another whoosh of shame swept over her.

Not sure what next to do, she curtsied again, a little clumsily, and made her way across the ballroom to wait for Lorze. No matter what happened next, the evening was sure to be unforgettable.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kaige kept an watchful eye on her all evening. Though his curiosity was piqued, he remained a cautious distance so as not to scare her away too quickly. Most human women he met in Paqualette were still very frightened of Weres, even after their own Queen had become one. This woman hadn't seemed overly anxious. She had, after all, accepted his invitation to dance. Yet there was something odd about Ambria. Her stunning face showed a collage of moods. Her full sensual lips easily turned from a

dazzling smile to a deep frown. Her feminine, shapely brows lifted dramatically when there was no reason for shock. The creamy complexion of her cheeks tinted pink as men silently passed by her.

The woman, as a whole, interested him in more ways than one. At that moment, she stood by herself in the corner of the ballroom with her head down and two fingers pressed to her temple. Was she ill? Was she shy? Hell, was she insane?

Men approached her every so often and she sent them on their way with a gentle smile. Then her gaze would find him and he'd be taken back by her beauty. Again.

Her long black hair cascaded in glossy waves over her milky shoulders and down her back. Kaige could easily imagine the locks brushing his chest as she straddled him. In his mind he could see her large brown eyes narrow seductively as she looked down on him, her rosy lips part as she moaned, her pale skin flushed crimson. Her ample breasts would bob as she rode his stiff, aching cock. Her nipples would tighten and beg to be suckled. What color they would be? Pink? Rosy like her lips? Darker maybe?

"Kaige." Mace's admonishing tone shook him from his exquisite fantasy.

"What now?" Kaige turned and made sure his coat hid the erection pressing against his slacks. It was bad enough he had to come to this damn event. Couldn't a Were have some peace?

"Watch it, wolf. Nayla and I may have appointed you Count but I'm still your leader, of our pack and this country."

Kaige held back the words pushing up his throat. He'd never been good at being submissive to his alpha leader and Mace was well aware of that fact. Still, they'd learned to become good friends throughout the years. If Mace hadn't rescued him from a vicious Vampire slave ring a half a century ago, Kaige would probably be dead. Or still suffering at the hands – and fangs – of those filthy bloodsuckers. He owed Mace his life and his servitude.

He nodded and evened out his temper. "What do you need?"

"I'm here to warn you about the witch you've been slobbering over all evening."

Irritated, Kaige tugged at the neck of his confining shirt. "Don't bother with a lecture, Mace. I haven't got the patience." There was a fine line between serving Mace in business and allowing him to pry into personal matters. His friend and leader had always been good about keeping his nose out of Kaige's private affairs and he didn't appreciate any comments about Ambria. Especially since nothing had happened between them yet and he didn't want anything to stand in the way of his chances.

"You know what kind of trouble we've had with them in the past. Do I need to say more?"

It was true all the witches they'd encountered in their journeys had been greedy and underhanded at times, including the coven that had helped Mace save Kaige and Blanca, a female pack member, from the Vampires' control. But that only gave Kaige more reason to want an affair with this woman. He knew he wouldn't get attached. It would be sex without the worry of falling in love, or losing control of his senses.

"I can handle the little witch. Don't worry about me."

"About you? Please. I'm worried about what damage she could do to the quarter of Paqualette that you manage. If some temptress gets her claws into you—"

"You can stop right there, Mace." Kaige shook his head in disbelief. Did his friend have so little confidence in him? "No woman, witch or otherwise, is going to get their claws into me. And whether I decide to bed Miss Nogle or not has nothing to do with my role as Count. Do you doubt my competence?"

"No, of course not." Mace looked up at the ceiling and blew out a breath. "Fine. See who you want but I'll be keeping a closer eye on this coven. Since their high priestess infected Nayla with the Were plague without my consent, I'm even more wary."

"Yet Nayla is happy and healthy with child because she's Were now."

"I know. Still, be careful. Understood?"

Kaige didn't bother answering. What kind of fool did Mace take him for? His frustration stayed with him as he left Mace's side and strode across the ballroom toward Ambria.

She lifted her head sharply and stared at him as if she'd heard him coming. Her forehead creased cutely and she chewed on her lip nervously as he approached. Yes, he obviously frightened her. Damn it. Why were humans so ignorant?

"How are you, Ambria?" He didn't wait for an answer. "I've come to collect my dance. Shall we?" No point in giving her a chance to back out now.

She raised a brow. "Sure, after you tell me why you're upset."

Kaige took a step back, surprised by her words. "Why do you think I'm upset?"

"Hmm, let's see." She tapped her chin as if thinking over her answer. "Maybe it's your brooding face and the way you marched over here as if to conquer a country."

He grinned at her boldness and decided to play along. "I've only come to conquer you, sweetheart. Will you fight or surrender?"

"Fight or surrender? Are those my only two choices?" Her naughty smile devastated him, forcing him to draw in a deep breath.

"What else do you suggest?" He reached out to push a lock of hair behind her shoulder, then allowed his thumb to linger, running it along the soft column of her neck.

Her pink tongue darted out to lick her bottom lip and her gaze raked over him, studying him, as if planning out her next words. He would've thought she was calculating his demise if it weren't for the shy way she tilted her head, not quite meeting his eyes. No, her words were brash and daring but her timid voice told a different story. A story he wanted to hear from start to finish.

"Well?" His cock swelled as anticipation overcame him. Funny how the mere minutes he'd been in her company had been more exhilarating than all he'd experienced the past two years accumulated since his pack gave up drifting and settled into this uneventful, human-infested country.

It appeared that *this* human had promise. Ample, curvy bundles of promise.

"I'm not much of a fighter, Kaige, and I don't concede very easily." She peeled his hand from her neck and held it against her waist, just below her bosom. Her body quivered just enough for him to notice. If he moved his thumb a twitch, he could brush it against the swell of her tantalizing flesh. "Why don't we work this out peacefully?"

Hell, forget the dancing. "How about a quiet walk in the garden then?" he asked. "I promise I won't change with the moon."

Her cheeks pinkened and he wondered if he'd overstepped his boundaries. Who knew what sort of propriety crap these humans were used to. Were females were so much freer with their bodies.

"I have a better idea." Her voice was a whisper as she leaned into him and gazed up with those sinful chocolate brown eyes. Her supple breasts crushed against his chest and he risked glancing down at her succulent cleavage. There really was something wonderful about a woman in a ball gown. It left just enough to the imagination. Now if he could just get the damn thing off her.

He cleared his throat and forced himself to meet her eyes. "I can't say I've ever been more intrigued in my life. What's your idea?"

"I've never been to Eastern Paqualette and this ball is giving me a headache. Why don't you take me to your home? I'd love to see it."

The wolf in him panted for what was to come. "What else would you like to see?" he asked, just in case she was being a tease. One had to be careful with witches.

She looked down for a moment, as if to gather her courage, then she met his gaze again. "Your clothes on your bedchambers floor. The size of your mattress. The ceiling above your bed. Shall I go on or will you allow me some modesty?"

His heart stopped beating, probably because all his blood had funneled to his cock. "Sweetheart, I'll allow you the sun and the moon if you keep up the boldness. It's sexy as hell."

## **Chapter Two**

With each minute passing on the carriage ride to Kaige's estate, Ambria grew more anxious. Instead of ravishing her as soon as they'd left the ball, Kaige had kept to his side of the bench seat with his hands clasped firmly at his sides. No words were spoken. Just the palpable promise of what was to come lingered thick in the air between them.

How had she ever thought she could go through with this? Seducing the Count? A Were nobleman. She'd only been with one man in her life, a husband who'd abandoned her after the Were plague epidemic. He'd fully transformed into a Were and she hadn't. Somehow the plague left her with the curse of being an empath and the so-called gift of immortality. She assumed her weaknesses were the same as Weres, who could only die of decapitation, starvation, or hunger. But she'd never wanted to learn the full truth.

She simply never aged beyond her twenty-four years. She'd never been ill or sustained any life-threatening injuries. Any other human would call her lucky, she supposed. But after the love of her life left her to drift with a werewolf pack, she'd been so heartbroken she decided never to chance loving again.

What was eternal life good for without the ability to love?

Kaige remained quiet beside her but she sensed he was eager to get home. He'd taken off his coat and tie and he'd loosened the buttons on his shirt to reveal some of his chest. The tanned muscle had flexed as he moved, showing a portion of what was no doubt a toned, sculpted body. He was a powerful being and so very intimidating with his deep frowns and piercing eyes.

She wondered for a moment what other women thought of him. If she didn't have the ability to read his emotions, would she have had the courage to enter his carriage?

Probably not.

He was a fascinating creature. Most likely all bark and no bite. She held back a smile as she remembered the relief he'd felt as he freed himself from the restraining clothes, as if they'd been suffocating him.

Poor Kaige. He'd gone from free, roaming werewolf to an esteemed Count in just under two years. Did he want any of it? Ambria wasn't sure.

He sat stiffly and stared longingly out at the crescent moon. The only sounds were the horses clip-clopping along the unpaved trail, the wheels of carriage rolling over the bumps and rocks and the driver creaking back in forth in his seat in front of them.

"Does it bother you when you don't change?" she asked, wanting to break the silence between them and ease her nerves.

The idea backfired. The anger he hid so well from society reverberated from his body in waves. He didn't look at her as he answered. "One night won't kill me. I've gone much longer in the past."

The past, huh? What had happened to the man for him to bottle up such rage? Ambria's curiosity couldn't be contained. "What happened that kept you from changing?"

He looked at her and gave her a wicked grin, probably attempting to hide the anguishing pain radiating from his mind. But, of course, she wasn't fooled. "You really want to know? A young, innocent human like you might find my war stories a little frightening."

"I've seen more than you might think." She'd certainly felt more than her share from the minds of many.

"Really?" He turned toward her and slid his arm along the seat behind her. He sat so close she was able to catch his unique scent. It was crisp and wild, masculine and mesmerizing. Oddly, she wasn't frightened by his closeness. His aroma was calming, like a sedative that helped ease her chaotic and now guilt-ridden mind.

He stared at her with eyes that looked almost black in the dark carriage. His hand came up to cup her cheek while his thumb lightly brushed her heated skin.

She stilled. His touch was startlingly intimate and she felt it in places that had long gone untouched.

"Probably," she said, breathlessly, not even sure what question she was answering anymore.

"I like you, Ambria. You keep me on my toes." His gaze fell to her lips.

"Is that the only reason you like me?" She had to ask. His emotions were clouded when he was so close. Or maybe it was her mind that was foggy.

"Definitely not." His fingers trailed slowly down her neck and stopped short at her chest, just above her swollen breasts.

Her skin prickled and warmed, skin that had been deprived of a man's attention for far too many years. She'd forgotten how wonderful it felt. The anticipation. The promise of pleasure. Her nipples beaded into tender buds and grazed against the abrasive fabric of her dress. An attraction to this gorgeous creature was expected but this... She hadn't expected to want him this much this soon. Her breath felt thick in her lungs.

"May I continue, sweetheart?" His husky voice was against her cheek.

She hadn't noticed he'd leaned in so close until his lips brushed the shell of her ear. Her heart beat out of tune, hard enough that he must hear the pitter-patter. She wanted to open her mouth and tell him she didn't do this, not with anyone in over a hundred years.

Oh, wow. Had it been that long since a man had touched her like this? Her knees wobbled and her stomach twisted. How lucky that she wasn't standing. She swallowed and found that her mouth was dry. She focused on his feelings, wanting to know what he thought of her, sadly. What should it matter? This would only be an affair. Emotions were irrelevant. Yet, she couldn't stop herself from searching.

His mind clearly shouted out his desire, his eagerness, his need to continue. Then, suddenly, suspicion and anger took their place.



"I don't know what's going on behind your peculiar expressions, sweetheart, but I don't suggest you try any witchcraft on me." His voice was stern but Ambria could sense something wounded yet cautiously hopeful in his aura. "I'm not a man who'll stand to be deluded or tricked or whatever else you might have inside your top hat."

"I'm not using any witchcraft on you, Kaige." And she meant it. Thankfully she hadn't needed to use a spell to get him to want her. "And I won't, I promise." She hoped it wouldn't come to that anyway. She wasn't sure her bravado could reach those limits. Or her conscience.

He watched her for a moment while his suspicion fizzled and faded out completely. His gaze softened and he raked his hand along her side from her chest to thigh.

"I believe you," he said.

How he could trust her word that easily, she wasn't sure. Trust didn't come easy for her. Knowing what people really felt underneath their words didn't help her cynicism. Thank goodness for white lies and restraint. The mind could be an awfully cruel place.

It was lucky that her coven sisters and Lorze were able to block their emotions from her most of the time. Otherwise she wasn't sure she could live with them, knowing what they truly felt about her day in and day out. She'd rather be a hermit like she'd been the seventy-plus years before she'd met Lorze. Isolated and lonely. But sane.

"What are you thinking now, sweetheart? It's difficult to tell with you." He squeezed her thigh gently. The warmth of his large hand burned through the fabric and heated her skin.

Her hand, with a mind of its own, lifted shakily and reached for the bare skin that shown under his shirt. The seduction didn't feel fake, not when her entire body yearned to keep going. To touch him, to explore his godlike body. She glided her fingers down his chest, taking delight in how his tight muscles bunched and his breath halted. She sensed that he was pleased with her bravery and was excited to his very core. His lust coated her skin, wrapping her up and taking her along for the ride. She couldn't resist.

It may have been more than a hundred years since she'd had a man but she couldn't fathom waiting another second. Not when this man made her wet with need. Not when her pussy ached at the mere idea of him being inside her.

*Curses, who was under whose spell?*

"I'm thinking how much I want you to kiss me." Her voice was rough, winded, but she got the necessary words out. Oddly, it was easy to flirt with Kaige, easy to be herself.

He licked the area just under her ear, a warm and luscious sensation. Her skin heated like a fireball had been lit inside her, crawling from the moist path and settling low in her belly.

"I'm going to kiss you." His hand worked quickly to bunch up her dress past her stockings to her bare thigh. Then up to her waist. "And touch you. And taste you." His voice was smooth and caressing.

A slight breeze blew into the carriage and swept teasingly against her bare skin, reminding her that the dress was all she wore.

"Is that a fact?" she whispered, trying her best to be the bold seductress.

Who was she kidding? She was going to explode before the lovemaking even began. Years of being untouched had obviously made her more responsive. The lightest brush of his knuckles against her bare leg had her insides coiled tight, ready to spring.

He reached between her thighs and grazed a finger across her moist folds and she tensed, unsure of how much more she could take.

A low groan rumbled in his chest and against her ear. "I'm going to lick your juices and fuck you with my tongue."

"Dear gods." No one had ever used such daring words with her before and oddly, they had her panting for more. She clasped her hands onto his shirt, holding on for dear life. Her pussy ached with anticipation. Impatient, she moved against his finger, wanting friction. Wanting him to put those words into action.

She met his heated gaze. His lips were so close to hers, they brushed with each bump of the carriage. His breath was warm and smelled of the champagne that was served at the ball. She wondered for a moment if he was drunk, then found that she didn't really care. Not when his finger lightly skimmed the lips of her pussy. The faint teasing motion was torturous but so good.

Two could play at that game, she decided, and flicked her tongue into his gorgeously wicked mouth.

"Oh, now you've done it." He smiled devilishly and lifted her onto his lap as if she weighed nothing, forcing her to straddle him. Gripping her hips, he held her down.

Her bare flesh molded to the thick erection underneath his slacks. With each jounce of the rickety carriage, she moved against him, building up a wonderful sensation deep in her womb.

Have mercy. She hoped his estate wasn't anywhere close. She held tight to his broad shoulders and bit back a moan. What would he think of her if she were to orgasm before they made it to the privacy of his home? In the open carriage for all to see.

"Don't fight it, Ambria. You can be as loud as you want. It's just the two of us."

"And your driver."

"My driver is an old friend. Part of my pack. He won't mind. Trust me."

Instinct took over and she indulged herself by rolling her hips against his cock. Her thighs trembled and her cunt seared with intense pressure. Verging on insanity, she nuzzled his neck, panting and shivering. She didn't remember ever feeling this desperate for sex, for release. It had been too long.

"Do it again." His voice was gravelly. "You're so ripe, sweetheart. So goddamn ready." Without waiting, he reached in between them and spread her folds.

"Kaige." Her mind went blank as he raked along her sensitive nub, then slid a finger inside her wet channel. After so many years of celibacy, the single finger seemed

to stretch her muscles, fitting in snugly, sparking sensations that had long been forgotten.

His breath hitched and her vision blurred.

"Kaige," she moaned again and savored how he eased slowly into her slick pussy. "Yes. That's good. So good." Her voice was needy and oddly husky but she was beyond caring.

She shifted her pelvis, urging him in farther.

"That's it, sweetheart." His finger bent just so, finding that perfect spot that made her want to scream. "Come all over me."

"Yes. Oh, yes."

She clenched her eyes shut, clinging to his shoulders as the heavy building pressure toppled over and burst free. Waves of coiled heat surged from deep in her cunt to every one of her nerve endings. She buried her head into his neck and wrapped her arms around him. Her skin tingled and her body hummed deliciously as the orgasm rolled through her, finally, slowly fizzing out.

Not waiting for her to recover, he removed his finger and adjusted her skirt. Too soon. What was the hurry?

"Ambria. Sweetheart."

His tone was tender and serious but she couldn't focus enough to listen. She clutched his shirt and attempted to calm her breathing. Years. So many goddamn years since she'd orgasmed from a man's touch. A single finger shoving her over the edge. Wow. Why hadn't she done this a lot sooner?

Because she'd always been afraid to get too close. She'd never wanted to know what a man truly felt about her, especially after an intimate act like this.

"Ambria." His voice was soothing against her ear. His lust was still apparent, which was a relief, but there was something else there. Concern, maybe.

"Hmm?" She could barely move, she was so relaxed.

"We're here, lover. Let me take you upstairs so we can continue this."

Startled with the realization that the carriage had stopped, Ambria jerked her head up and looked around. The driver, a handsome Were with shoulder-length chestnut hair and light eyes, stood outside the opened door.

Opened door. She'd been so far gone in her own little world, she hadn't noticed.

"Would you like some help out, madam?" The driver smiled, showing deep dimples on each cheek. Amusement and a wild desire thrummed from him as his sweltering gaze took in her compromising position.

"Not tonight, Gambel," Kaige said, answering more than what his pack member had asked verbally.

Not tonight? So the pair had shared women before? Ambria wasn't sure how she felt about that. She'd seen quite a bit of scandal in her hundred and thirty years and she knew Were packs tended to share sex freely until one chose a mate. Then they remained loyal to that mate for eternity. All in all, the idea of Kaige sharing a woman with Gambel wasn't shocking. But when the woman in question was her, well...

Her cheeks heated, yet a small part of her wondered what it would be like to have both the Weres' attention in bed—the selfish, sex-starved part of her. She pushed the thought from her mind and eased off Kaige's lap, fixing her skirt in the process.

Kaige didn't wait for her to finish as he scooped her up and jumped onto the ground in the sleek way only a Were could master. "Welcome to my home." He kept his gaze in front of him and strode up the stone path to his house.

Ambria held on to his neck and shoulder, liking being held by him a little too much. She reminded herself again that this affair wasn't permanent. Or real. But thinking about exploiting the man who had just selflessly given her a mind-numbing orgasm left her feeling shameful. A painful knot tightened in her belly and she blew out a breath to try to ease her tension. It was all happening so fast, she wondered if it was too late to tell him to stop and take her back home. She hadn't expected to like Kaige, or to feel this

comfortable in his presence. Sure, she knew she'd need to be attracted to him and that certainly was the case but...

*Stop thinking so much, Ambria.*

Lorzener had told her to enjoy herself. Above all, Lorze had wanted her to get out and have fun. Her words still played in Ambria's head.

"You've been cooped up in South Paqualette Valley for far too long, Ambria. Take advantage of your beauty for once and get yourself a man. Better yet, a Were, so you can finally get over that idiotic husband who left you stranded with nowhere to go. Who knows, maybe you'll find some vindication in seducing a Were."

Ambria rested her forehead against Kaige's neck and inadvertently inhaled his calming scent. In all honesty, she didn't desire vindication. She never had. She only wanted to remove Ramsey from her mind once and for all. After more than a century, one would think she'd have moved on. The pain had dulled, of course, as did many of her memories. But she'd never dared to allow any other man close. It still baffled her that someone she loved with her heart and soul could so easily turn his back on her. The wound that Ramsey had carved in her heart had left a scar that just wouldn't seem to fade.

Maybe this affair was what she really needed to finally get over him. Maybe, just maybe, Lorze's unconventional advice was right on target. The knot in Ambria's stomach loosened a bit and she allowed herself to take in her surroundings.

Kaige's two-story estate was quaint and unassuming. Not something she'd envisioned a nobleman living in but it was lovely, nonetheless. Eastern Paqualette had been unsettled territory until the Weres took over the area. She imagined every home was newly built and every road was yet to be paved. Looking around Kaige's home, she saw that the forest was still thick. It was likely the Weres didn't spend much time in their homes, anyway, since they were part animal. They needed fresh air and room to roam. Something she'd always envied them for. Their freedom. Freedom of mind and of flesh.

Gambel, the handsome carriage driver, opened the door for them. "Enjoy your time, you two." His gaze did another once-over of her body. In the light of the home, she could see that his eyes were an attractive light golden tone. "Let me know if you need anything," he said without averting his attention from her.

"I will. Thank you." Again, her mind wandered the possibilities of having both their attentions in bed. But Kaige's growing irritation halted the fantasy.

"Get out, Gambel. You've made your point and my answer is still no."

Ambria's heart fluttered to know Kaige was, in a way, protecting her from something. She wasn't sure from what but he held her close, as if he thought she was fragile, easily breakable.

A rush of disappointment along with prickles of loneliness streamed from Gambel as he met Kaige's eyes and nodded. "Understood. See you when daylight comes."

Why a gorgeous creature like Gambel was lonely, she wasn't sure. Just as Kaige's inner turmoil puzzled her. Given the Weres' new standing in Paqualette, she'd think all their worries would vanish. But she supposed everyone had their own history to battle with. In any case, her heart went out to the both of them and she wished she could ease their minds somehow.

When Gambel was gone, Kaige set her on the wooden floor, slammed the door shut and backed her up against it. The look in his smoky, sultry eyes told her he had plans for her. His emotions confirmed that.

He seemed taller and broader as he hovered over her. She was just a prey lurking in his shadow. An all-too-willing prey. The desire she'd felt in the carriage came back with a rush of heat that instantly had cream pooling in her pussy.

"It's time to get this dress off of you." He brushed his knuckles from her neck to her beaded nipple.

She sucked in a breath. "What are you waiting for?"

Kaige carried her straight to the guestroom, not wanting to take the time to run upstairs. Any free second he could spare teasing and touching her was like gold. The way she responded to him was unlike anything he'd ever experienced with a woman. Her skin prickled and her breath halted at the slightest touch. Her lips quivered when he held her close. The whimpers in the carriage while she'd sat on his lap had surprised and excited him. And the intense orgasm she'd succumbed to when he'd fucked her with his finger told him so much.

Either she was the horniest woman he'd ever met or she hadn't been loved properly in a very long time. He'd bet the next full moon it was the latter. A woman with that tight of a pussy wasn't a whore, to be sure. No, her little passage had been so tight he'd wondered if she was a virgin. The thought still remained as he gently laid her down on the bed.

No way would he have allowed Gambel into the bedchambers with this particular woman. Possibly someday she'd be ready for two men but not tonight.

Tonight she belonged to him.

He kneeled on the mattress and removed her shoes and stockings, taking delight in how her breathing grew ragged. She clenched the blanket and stared up at him with pleading eyes. The moon glowed through the window against her supple skin and shiny dark locks of hair. No doubt he was in trouble with this one.

"Have you been with a man before?" He had to ask. His bloody conscience wouldn't allow him to willingly ruin a virgin.

She nodded. "Yes," was her only answer.

"One? Two? How many?" Why he cared, he wasn't sure, but he hoped it was no more than a couple. Every woman he'd been with in the past had experienced multiple lovers and it hadn't fazed him. Somehow his feelings were different this time.

"Only one." She whimpered as his hand ran down her perfectly shaped calf. "Does that bother you?"



"No, not at all. Don't be silly." He tried to swallow his next words but they escaped his mouth. "I only wonder how I'm lucky enough to be your second." His suspicion of witches was an annoying concern in his mind. He wouldn't end the evening if she outright told him she was using him to gain riches. No, that would make the sex more exciting, in fact. Afterward, he'd have her shackled overnight in the castle's dungeon as punishment. But if she planned on secretly deceiving him and making him look a fool, then she was asking for bigger trouble. He'd been used plenty in his long life and he was done with it. He may not have had control when he'd been a Vamp's blood slave but he did now.

Her expression changed a few times, making it hard for him to read her. Such a peculiar woman.

"Kaige." Her voice was soft as she sat up and kneeled in front of him. "I'll admit there's a lot more to me than meets the eye. And I'll freely explain those quirks to you if we continue our relationship after this evening."

His cock hardened as she reached for his buckle and began undoing it. "You're trying to distract me, lover." He grasped her wrists in one hand and pulled his belt free with the other.

Her breath hitched but she wasn't frightened. With his Were senses he could smell her lust, the ripeness of her pussy. She was soaking wet for him.

"It's been a long time since you've been with that one man, hasn't it?"

She gulped. "Longer than you could possibly imagine. When I saw you tonight, Kaige, I knew I wanted to be with you. I usually shy away from men but you're different. I'm comfortable with you."

His jaw twitched as he held back a grin. Interesting how he believed every sweet word she uttered. He wasn't usually this trusting but he wanted to believe her with every cell in his body. She looked up at him now with such innocence and longing. Her seductive eyes enchanted him. Her responsiveness to his touch enthralled him and made him mad with curiosity. How would she react when he licked her succulent

pussy? How crazy would he make her when he slid his cock into that tight little passage?

He glanced down at her wrists as he held her with one hand. She wasn't trying to break free. She wasn't frightened of him. She wasn't bartering her body for gold or jewelry. She wanted him, plain and simple.

"If you're my mistress then you must be loyal to me."

She nodded.

"You must also realize that I won't marry you. Ever. If a long commitment is what you want from me then you might as well leave right now. A Were mates for life and I'm not ready for that."

She licked her lips and silence filled the room as he waited for an answer.

Any answer.

Hell, why couldn't he have kept his damn mouth shut and just enjoyed her body? *Real smooth, Kaige.* Way to woo the lady.

Slowly, her mouth curved up into a smile.

"Ambria, you're driving me mad with your silence."

"I was waiting to see if you had any other demands but if you don't, then let's continue." She glanced at the belt still grasped tightly in his fist. "Are you planning to use that?" She sounded hopeful.

His mind went blank and his balls tightened, ready to release. Into her. He couldn't remember ever wanting anyone so thoroughly. So pathetically. And it infuriated him that she had this power over him. He had to grab some of it back.

"Take off your dress," he said through gritted teeth.

A look of wariness passed over her eyes if only for a moment, but he caught it. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing." She was lying, he knew it. The more he watched her expressions the more he could read them.

"I won't hurt you, Ambria."

"I know." She reached behind her back and began untying her dress. "And I'm not as fragile as you think."

He chuckled, amused with her bravado. Human women tended to think they were tougher than they really were. This one was no different. She was five and a half feet of spunk with nothing to back it up. But she was also adorable and sexy and worthy of every bit of attention he was going to give her tonight.

When her dress fell past her shoulders, showing him her lush breasts and rosy nipples his amusement faded. Her bosom was more beautiful than he'd imagined. Rounded and high on her chest. Her nipples were sweet raspberries ready for his mouth, budded and wanting.

She wore nothing underneath her dress. Nothing but the stockings she'd had on her feet. He knew the modern way in Paquetalette and the surrounding areas was to wear an underdress and knickers of some sort. Apparently this woman didn't care for that rule—he'd realized that in the carriage when there hadn't been a barrier to stop his roaming fingers. Now, he was looking forward to seeing her in full view.

The dress fell to her curvy hips and he had to clench his fists to keep from tearing it off the rest of the way. She was taking her time seducing him. Driving him insane was more like it.

Her hands trembled some as she slid them back up her belly and covered her breasts.

"No." He reached out to stop her. "Keep going. Please." Why did the woman switch from wanton to timid in a matter of seconds? She boggled his mind.

She tilted her head and met his gaze. "I can't tell if you like what you see."

"Sweetheart, words cannot express, believe me. I'm dying to see all of you. My fingers are itching to touch you." He gestured to the dress. "Now, please, take it off. I can help you if you like."

She bit into her bottom lip. "All right," she said and fell back onto the mattress. "Help me, Kaige."

His head was dizzy with desire as he took hold of the fabric and eased it down her legs. A dark patch of hair arched temptingly to the most luscious-looking pussy he'd ever seen.

Excitement thundered through him and he tossed her dress to the floor and spread her legs. He dipped his head and inhaled her scent of arousal, drugging his senses. Oh, yes, she was ripe as a peach.

Kaige grasped her ankle and brought her leg up, ready to lick his way to heaven. He swept his tongue down the inside of her calf. Her skin was soft and smelled of innocence. Innocence he wanted to take as his own. He would ruin her tonight and he'd enjoy every second of it. He dragged his lips to the inside of her thigh and skimmed his teeth along her supple flesh. Her body trembled and delicious little sounds whimpered from her lips. But she said nothing.

He could do better than that. He lifted her other leg and repeated the action, tasting her fruit-scented skin and reveling in her soft flesh. She blew out a breath and combed her hands into her silky hair. The way she stared up at him told him she was both unsure and eager for him to continue. Either way, he wasn't stopping now.

After tearing off his shirt he climbed up her quivering body and did what he'd wanted to do since meeting her. He pressed his lips to hers. They were soft and pliant. Hesitant yet willing. She parted for him and he slid his tongue into her delectable mouth, sweeping in boldly. She tasted of strawberries and a hint of champagne. Her mouth was sweet and her tongue was tentative but growing bolder as she flicked it against his.

His bare chest grazed against the peaks of her breasts and he yearned to remove his pants so he could feel the rest of her lying underneath him, to put the full weight of him against her feminine curves. She dug her fingers into his scalp and held him to her lips

as she indulged in the kiss, growing more urgent with each second. Her sighing and whimpering nearly did him in.

She sucked on his tongue feverishly and spread her legs for him to show him she wanted more. In return, he pressed the column of his erection against her moist heat. He could feel the wetness even with his trousers separating them.

Damn. She made him weak with desire. Dizzy and drunk and mindless. It was too much. He had planned to take his time and taste every inch of her body. He'd wanted to ready her for his cock, ease into her so there would be no pain. But now he couldn't hold back. He'd lost control and the wolf in him was clawing to be released.

She arched her hips, pressing her heated pussy against the hardness in his pants. He growled for her to wait. If she wanted him, then he'd give himself to her.

He broke the kiss and quickly undid his pants, yanking them down his hips. Not bothering to fully undress, he found her slick entrance with the head of his cock.

"Yes. Please. Kaige, now." She bucked her hips impatiently.

Losing all restraint, he drove inside her wet, slender channel.

"Ah!" She cried out and braced her hands on his shoulders, digging into his skin.

With every last bit of control he had he stilled himself and waited to see if she was all right to continue. She enveloped him snugly in her warmth and slick juices but his shaft begged for friction, for release.

"Oh, wow, Kaige."

"Yes, Ambria." He held perfectly still as her tight, hot pussy hugged his cock.

She arched her chest and ran her fingers along his neck, stopping to brace his jaw. He watched her curiously as her eyes rolled back and her mouth parted.

"Mmm," she moaned, making his cock even more impatient. "It's been so long, Kaige. You feel so...oh, so good. So very good." She squeezed her walls around his shaft and he had to fight back the urge to explode.

She was ready to come. Already. Here he'd thought she was in pain and instead she was getting off on him. She lifted her hips for more and he filled her to the hilt, driving the rest of the way into her cushioned heat. Sweet mercy.

"Oh. Oh, yes. Kaige." She guided him back down for another lusty kiss and moaned into his mouth. She was more than ripe, she was desperate.

He had to wonder if the one man she'd been with had been a complete failure. Hadn't she ever had a decent orgasm? He eased out and slowly inched back in. Her walls contracted around him and she nearly bit into his tongue.

Enough kissing.

He wanted to make her scream. Molding one hand to her rounded ass and one to her back, he lifted her with him as he sat up, kicking his bloody pants off in the process. She straddled him and wrapped her arms around his neck. In this position, he lodged even farther into her slick channel. His cock curved up inside her, encompassed in glorious heat.

"Kaige." Her eyes were wild, her skin was moist and her lips pouted. Damn, was she not the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen?

"Work yourself up and down on my cock, lover." He grabbed the soft flesh of her ass with both hands and showed her what he meant, lifting her just so and letting her slide back down. Up and down again.

Hell. His balls knotted tight. She felt so good riding his throbbing shaft. Her pants and moans let him know she was enjoying this too. More vocal than any woman he'd been with before.

Her breasts jiggled as she worked his cock, enticing him. He caught a nipple in his mouth and sucked, tasting her rigid peak. He licked circles around the bud until it was engorged and swollen, then flicked the sensitive pearl, making her hiss. When he thought she couldn't take it anymore, he moved to the next one, bringing her closer to release just as she did him.

The sounds she made were sweet and wicked at the same time. And he knew they drew Gambel's attention.

Kaige sensed him outside the bedchamber's door. The Were was pushing his luck but Kaige understood his desire. Ambria was unlike any woman in their pack, or any human woman who had dared to enter the pack's territory in hopes of being fucked by a Were.

Ambria startled somewhat when the door creaked open and Kaige prepared to order Gambel out. But his lover's voice stopped him.

"Gambel," she said between gasps of air. "Do you want to watch?"

She wanted him in here? The mere idea sparked the feral beast within him and excited him even more. What else would his little witch want? It was like opening a present and finding another box inside, then another and another.

He couldn't wait to see what was in store for him next.

## Chapter Three

Ambria moved against Kaige again, taking delight in how his thick cock stretched her pussy walls. The evening was going far better than she'd ever thought possible. She only hoped she hadn't made a mistake by inviting Gambel in. She wasn't sure what she'd been thinking, only that she'd wanted to comfort the sadness that ebbed from his being. He seemed harmless, likeable. And where she'd felt an underlying anger with Kaige at times, she felt desperate loneliness in Gambel.

With Kaige's permission, he'd pulled up a chair and sat close to the side of the bed. His golden gaze consumed her as he took in her nude body and how she connected with Kaige.

"Do you mind if I sit this close?" His voice was deeper than before and his confident half grin told her she didn't really have a choice either way. He'd taken off his coat and shirt and sat only with a pair of trousers clinging to his strapping legs. His body was as muscular as Kaige's but not quite as lean or tan.

She'd never considered herself petite but she certainly felt it being the center of the two large Weres' attention. Petite. Feminine. Curvy. Sensual. *Wanted*. So very wanted.

Once again, her mind drifted to the fantasy of being touched by both strong men. Strangely, she wasn't ashamed or embarrassed. Knowing the Weres had shared intimate moments before made this seem almost normal. She was intrigued by the Were way of life and each second longer she spent in their companionship she grew more at ease. As if this was somehow a home away from home. It was oddly comforting.

"I don't mind," she said between breathless pants. "Do you mind, Kaige?" She kissed his cheek, his neck, his shoulder. She already knew his answer.



“Whatever pleases you, lover.” He drew her nipple into his mouth again and another wondrous spark shot from her breast to her center. She moaned to show her pleasure and arched toward him.

Though having Gambel in the room with them wasn’t something she’d planned, now that he was here she craved to entertain him and please Kaige at the same time. Both souls seemed in need of a dose of happiness. She wanted to ease their minds and make them forget what ailed them. Their torturous memories, whatever they may be, could be put on hold for this evening.

They both intrigued her and brought out a wild side of her she quite enjoyed. A side she’d tried to share with her husband so many years ago, but was rejected.

*If he could only see me now.* She smiled wickedly and took Kaige’s tongue into her mouth. He held her face and kissed her with a blissful passion. The drugging taste of him couldn’t be described as any flavor she’d ever sampled. But his essence melded with hers and when their tongues connected she didn’t know where hers ended and his began. He consumed her. It was as if they were two souls intertwined, two souls who had known each other forever.

She lifted her bottom up and down his slippery shaft and the perpetually marvelous sensation building and tugging in her lower belly grew just a bit higher. He filled her deep and stretched her walls.

“Let it go, Ambria.” Kaige gripped her ass and moved her up and down. His cock thrust high, ramming against her innermost walls, sliding against her sensitive flesh, then halfway out and in again.

Not yet. She wanted to hold on for just a bit more and indulge in every thrilling sensation that nipped or sparked at her insides. She wanted to feel every inch of him as he arched his cock up and into her. It had been so very long.

His rough hands skimmed down her back, holding her close in a possessive manner. She ran her fingers over his muscled arms, then his broad shoulders. His body was firm and masculine. His face was stunning and incomparable. With his unique

looks, Kaige was every woman's exotic dream. She couldn't help but wonder what life would be like if she were his. His wife. His mate. But she dispelled that silly notion right away. Her reason for being here wasn't to find a husband and he'd outright told her he had no desire for a longtime commitment.

"Ahh." Her thoughts vanished as he spread her ass cheeks and massaged her flesh. His hands against her untouched skin sent shivers up her spine.

His fingers lightly skimmed her anus with teasing strokes. Back-and-forth movements that triggered another awareness all together.

Gambel twisted in his seat nearby. He said something to Kaige in their drawling, sensual Were language. The tone of the words along with his strong lust told Ambria he wanted to do more than watch. Her body responded with a surge of heat that scored from her ears to her toes but she wasn't bold enough to act on it.

Kaige shook his head as his answer, breaking their kiss. But Gambel seemed to think differently. The golden-eyed Were stood from the chair and sat on the bed behind her. His warm fingers grazed her skin, sculpting tenderly along her spine. Heat from both Weres encompassed her body and, oddly, she felt secure in their presence. They wouldn't hurt her. They'd please her. She'd sensed it with every cell in her body.

Yet it had been so long since one man had made love to her. She wasn't sure she was prepared for what these two powerful Weres had to offer.

"Not tonight, Gambel," Kaige murmured, as if he'd sensed her unease. He ran his hands to her waist and held her close.

"I know." Gambel's hand stilled on her back. "I only wish to touch, if that's all right." His long fingers splayed out along the sensitive skin of her back.

Silence filled the air as both Weres waited for an answer. Ambria had a feeling they'd do anything she asked of them. The lust was apparent as was their selfless desire to please her.

"It's all right," she whispered and met Kaige's eyes. With renewed boldness, she licked his full bottom lip and squeezed her pussy walls against his thick erection.

He groaned and gripped her hips, lifting her and setting her down. She savored the feel of his full length gliding along her sensitive walls. Gambel continued to run his hand up and down her back as Kaige moved her hips faster and deeper in a steady rhythm. She indulged in the desire pouring from each man as it directed toward her. Their pleasure cocooned her, penetrated her. Kaige's undulating hips lifted her with each thrust, driving her higher. She moaned and pressed her nails into his fevered skin.

"Ambria, your pussy is so tight. Come with me, lover."

"Come, Ambria," Gambel cooed and kissed her shoulder.

She couldn't suppress the building heat any longer. The lust of two men. The steady driving rhythm of Kaige's cock. His smoky gray gaze sensual and piercing as he held on to her and stared into her eyes. She cried out for mercy as the crashing wave rolled thunderously from her pussy. Her vision grew cloudy as she gasped for air. And every last muscle in her body grew rigid...then wonderfully limp with ecstasy. As if she'd been instantly cured from any stress that had ever burdened her mind. Her thoughts, fears and worries were wiped clear for that glorious moment.

Kaige held tight to her, not allowing her to fall back, as he thrust into her once more before allowing his own release. Their moist bodies fell to the mattress in a limp heap and Kaige nestled into her neck.

She smoothed a damp dreadlock from his cheek and smiled at how satisfied he looked. His thoughts had disappeared as well. Nothing bothered him, there was no anger or bitterness, just a pleasant humming calm. An odd sort of pride swept through her. She'd pleased him. She'd made him happy for this brief moment in time. Having this knowledge almost made it worth being an empath. Almost.

The sound of the bed creaking grabbed her attention and she glanced in Gambel's direction to see him rising. The lonely emptiness she'd sensed from him was still there and maybe even stronger. Yes, he'd enjoyed the show but it hadn't seemed to dull any of his sadness. He took a step over to where they lay crumpled on the bed and reached out to run his knuckle down her cheek.

"Thank you for allowing me to watch, Ambria." His voice was calm and gentle and there were no ill feelings toward her or Kaige as he said his words. Only a hint of envy and desire.

"I enjoyed having you here." She spoke the truth and wondered if next time he'd do more than just touch.

Kaige pressed his lips to her cheek and lifted from her body. Both Weres stared down at her as if she were a beautiful, sensual, rare type of orchid. She lost her breath when she sensed their feelings matched.

Unsure she deserved such reverence, she turned her eyes away. After all, if Kaige knew what had prompted this eventful evening, well, she wasn't sure he'd look at her at all.

Kaige ordered Gambel to go, leaving just the two of them. Ambria forced herself to meet her lover's gaze just as she sensed another of his creeping suspicions begin to arise again. He spread out beside her and propped his head up with his hand. His eyes were penetrating and watchful. Intelligent and all-knowing. Eyes she imagined she could stare into forever and never grow bored.

After the intimate moment they'd just shared, she didn't like the idea of him not trusting her completely. Worse, she loathed the fact that he had no reason to trust her. Her stomach twisted and she attempted to swallow down the clog of guilt rising up her throat.

Gathering her strength, she tugged lightly on one of his dreads teasingly, then ran her fingers across his steely chest, giving him a smile he couldn't ignore. "You look at me as if I'm a specimen you're about to dissect. Should I be frightened?"

He chuckled and rested a heavy hand on her belly, warming her. "I don't expect you frighten easily. Am I right?"

"You certainly don't scare me," she teased, then her thoughts broke free like a dam wall giving. "To be honest, I've lived a large portion of my life isolated from society because of my fear of the unknown or, rather, the fear of knowing too much." She

chewed on her bottom lip, unsure why she'd just divulged that personal of a statement. Being in his presence, inhaling his calming aroma, indulging in his touch, had provoked her to do and think things she'd never thought possible.

"Isolated." He seemed to toss the word around in his mind. "That explains a lot."

"Like what?" She turned toward him and he pulled her close so that the softness of her skin met with the firmness of his.

"Your every response to me was intense and heightened. Like you were being touched for the first time." He looped a lock of hair behind her ear and kissed her forehead. "It was a turn-on, to say the least. If I was arrogant enough, I'd bet I put your past lover to shame."

Hands down. "You'd win that bet." Her words came out husky and she realized she wanted him again. So soon. "My husband was, uh, shall I say, not very generous in the ways of lovemaking."

"Your husband?" He lifted a brow. "You were married to him?"

"A long, long time ago. Really, it's a distant memory now."

His lips twitched up to a smile. "You talk as if you're ancient. I wouldn't guess you older than twenty-five. When were you married?"

She didn't see the harm in telling him. It wasn't a secret, after all. She couldn't speak of her coven's financial woes or the reason she'd ended up in his carriage but she could tell him everything else. In fact there was nothing she wanted more.

The news she shared was dismal, at best, but she spoke it with a grin on her face. "He left me not long after the Were plague epidemic."

Kaige narrowed his smoky gaze. "What are you saying? You're not Were. I would be able to tell. How could you still be alive?"

"No, I'm not Were. But the plague did change me. I haven't aged in all these years." She swiveled her head back and forth to show him how exactly she hadn't aged.

Amusement and curiosity seeped from him as his smile widened. "So, are you immortal?"

She furrowed her brows. It was something she'd always wondered. "One can never be sure, can they?"

He laughed a hearty laugh that made her want to laugh right along with him. "I suppose not until they're tested. You make a good point, Ambria." His smile faded just so. "I have to say this is very unusual. I've never heard of such a thing. And it has nothing to do with witchcraft?"

"No, not at all. I hadn't started practicing magic until I met the High Priestess Lorzener about thirty years ago." A weight felt like it had lifted from her. She'd never told anyone outside her coven about her condition, as it were. And Kaige seemed to be taking it quite well.

"So. My next question—" He ran his hand down her spine until he reached her buttocks. There, he palmed her flesh and lightly squeezed. "You hadn't been touched like this in over a hundred years?"

A titillating zing traveled from his hand to her pussy and she squirmed against him. "No." She forced out the word.

He drew out a long breath. "Explains so very much. Where did you come from, Ambria?"

"A little village in the valley."

He laughed again. The deep tenor vibrated into her heart and, again, matched his thoughts. She was beginning to realize many of his looks and words equaled his emotions. Other than that hidden anger, he was an open book, which, she had to admit, was a rare and pleasant surprise.

And it made her want to learn so much more about him.

She gave a contented sigh and glided her fingers over his shoulder. With his dreads swept to one side, she could see two circular scars at the base of his neck. The moon

glowed through the window, emphasizing the discolored indentations, and she wondered how she hadn't seen them before. They looked like bite marks, maybe. From a Vampire.

"What happened to you here?"

A burst of rage pulsed from him but he quickly lessened it to a buzzing agitation without any physical reaction at all. Someone who wasn't an empath wouldn't have realized anything was wrong, making her even more curious.

He sat up and peeled her hand away from the two scars. Any happy thoughts that he'd been feeling were now gone as if he'd put up a thick wall to block her out. "Those are none of your concern."

She ignored him. Her desire to fit pieces together was too strong. "Are they the source of your anger?"

His expression changed to shock, then irritation, and he pulled away from her. He stood from the bed and stormed to his bureau. "Why would you think I'm angry?" With forceful movements, he ripped out a pair of drawstring linen pants and jerked them on.

"I can tell," she said. "I'm sensitive to those sorts of things. To emotions. And your anger is a constant." Curse it all, why was she admitting this to him now? Or ever? Hadn't she confessed enough of her eccentricities to him tonight? She sat up on the bed and pulled the covers over her body, suddenly feeling exposed and timid.

"I told you not to use your witchcraft on me, Ambria."

"It's not witchcraft. It's just who I am. It's another effect the plague left with me." Memories of arguments with her husband about this very issue rose to mind and she grew more anxious. Ramsey had never been comfortable with her strong ability to sense emotions, especially when his feelings for her had started to falter. She'd known it was over between them before he'd said a word.

Kaige shook his head and murmured something in his Were language. Then his piercing gray eyes met hers. "I'll have Gambel prepare the carriage to take you home."

Just like that he turned cold on her. No warm emotions were left under his cloud of bitterness.

Her own fury erupted and she couldn't contain it. "And where are you going?"

He didn't answer.

Then it dawned on her. She looked around the room and realized too late that he hadn't bothered to take her to his private bedchambers. He'd brought her to his guestroom instead. The action shouldn't have troubled her but it did. She'd just had an intimate moment of passion with a stranger who hadn't respected her enough to allow her in his own bed. Had she read his emotions all wrong when she'd felt his warmth?

Possibly. No. Undoubtedly.

She'd looked too deep and had ignored what was at the surface. And now he was sending her home as if she'd done something wrong, as if she were a child who needed to be punished.

No amount of pleasure, no amount of riches, was worth this humiliation.

"I asked you a question, Kaige." She made her voice firm and pointed. "I'd like an answer."

"Sweetheart," he began, but there was no sincerity behind it. Not like before, making her wonder again if she'd imagined his earlier affection and hating that she cared. "If you're to be my mistress then you'll need to learn I won't stand any meddling behavior. I don't want you using your witchcraft to sense things about me. I don't want you asking questions and pestering me for answers. You'll be in my bed, not in my personal matters, understood?" His hand fisted tightly on the bureau.

No, she didn't understand. "If I'm to be your mistress," she said through clenched teeth, "then you'll regard me with dignity and respect. I'm not a whore, Kaige Kollens, and how dare you treat me as such?" She spit out the words but, admittedly, she had a hard time believing her own case. She'd just seduced this man in an attempt to become his mistress and gain some wealth for her coven. She was the entire definition of a whore.



But he didn't know that. Hopefully, he would never know that.

How could she continue this escapade if she wouldn't be able to look herself in the mirror? Giving her body in exchange for profit? Maybe she deserved to be treated like a cheap prostitute. Tonight. But no more. She wouldn't continue this affair. She'd simply find another way to live up to her obligations. There had to be some other way.

Kaige dropped his head then slowly met her gaze again. His eyes cut through her menacingly, slicing off the last ounce of pride she'd been holding on to.

"I've had enough of this discussion." He frowned. "I've said my piece and if you won't agree to my conditions then there is no point in continuing this affair." He scrubbed a hand over his face and some of his bitter walls toppled, allowing her to see a tinge of self-doubt. "Tomorrow, I'll have Gambel bring the carriage to your home at dusk. You'll have until then to decide if you're ready to play by my rules. If you don't come back with him, I'll have my answer."

She already knew her answer but before she could reply, he strode out of the room and slammed the door behind him, leaving her more alone with herself than she'd ever imagined a soul could be.

## **Chapter Four**

Ambria's headache felt like she'd had one too many glasses of champagne the night before. Her entire skull throbbed as if her brain was swollen. Unfortunately, her hangover had nothing to do with alcohol.

"What do you mean you sent his driver away?" Lorze stood at the side of the bed, hands placed firmly on her hips. The room spun but Ambria could still make out her friend's black-and-silver-streaked hair and the fine wrinkles that lined her eyes and tight-lipped mouth.

In truth, Ambria was much older than Lorze. Ambria had met the powerful witch when they'd both looked to be in their late twenties but in reality Ambria had been alive for a hundred years. But thirty years had passed, aging Lorze and, of course, doing nothing to Ambria.

Some might say it wasn't fair. Some, possibly Lorze, might envy a woman who didn't age in appearance. Little did any of them know, Ambria would give up her supposed immortality in a second if what went with it was her gift of empathy. It was an ability as much as it was a disability. And it made her want to hide from the world.

Today was no different. The onrush of emotions she'd felt last night at the ball had been too much. Maybe if she were more practiced, the evening wouldn't have been so hard on her physically and mentally. As it was, she didn't see her headache easing any time soon.

Lorze continued with her unrelenting, booming voice. "I agree that he shouldn't have treated you that way but this coven needs your help, Ambria. You do realize we've run out of many of our staples. How can we cast spells when we have no ingredients? How can we keep our clients when we can't cast spells?"

"I'm very sorry for that but I can't bring myself to be around that man. Not for the reasons you want me to. I'll come up with another way to bring us income." She pressed her throbbing head against the pillow.

"How? You can barely stand to be around anyone except this coven. I've understood that reality for all these years and I've allowed you to work without interacting. But it's time for you sacrifice a little for your coven. It's quite selfish of you not to when you have this opportunity. Really, Ambria, what are you thinking?"

Ambria blew out a breath. "I'm thinking I made a mistake. Kaige isn't the man I thought he'd be."

She hadn't realized she'd actually like him. Or care what he thought of her or that it would hurt not to earn his respect. She hadn't thought she'd feel shame when he left her in a bed that didn't even belong to him. And then he had Gambel drive her home in the middle of the night. The longest, most humiliating carriage ride of her life.

It had been silly of her to ask personal questions of Kaige and to divulge her own secrets as if they were true lovers. She'd felt comfortable with him, more than any man in a very long time. And she'd made the mistake of letting him past the gates through her guarded walls. Really, really dumb.

Lorze sighed and sat down on the bed beside her. "You weren't looking for a husband, Ambria. You were looking for a wealthy man who could possibly help you help yourself."

"And the coven."

"Yes. Of course the coven. We're in this together, my dear. We're a team. You can't deny that. And Kaige is a handsome Count, for heaven's sake. Yes, he's a Were but no one's perfect. I'd think you could overlook a flaw or two in order to help out your sisters. Obviously I was wrong."

Ambria closed her eyes as the throbbing intensified and her stomach began to sour. She'd gladly continue this conversation later if she could just get some rest. "I'll make it up to you, Lorze, I promise."

"Oh, I know you will." The mattress moved as Lorze stood. "Think it over. You'll see what needs to be done."

The door closed sharply and Ambria winced. Was the coven really in such dire circumstances? She hadn't thought so, but how could she not take Lorze's word? Her longtime friend never lied to her before. Not that Ambria knew of anyway.

Whatever the situation, she could only hope she could find a way to help her coven sisters without having to see Kaige again.

Her heart couldn't take it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kaige kept his attention divided between Blanca and the road leading down to his estate. Any moment now, he'd find out if Ambria had decided to continue their relationship and it drove him mad knowing he was going to be disappointed if she wasn't in the carriage with Gambel. No matter how much he told himself an affair with a witch was a bad idea, he still wanted her. With a hunger that surprised him.

"Are you listening to me?" Blanca thrust a hand on her hip and glared up at him, giving him that gutsy attitude she so liked to flaunt.

"Of course." He smiled at her and his heart softened, as it always did when she was near. Together they'd suffered the hell of being blood slaves to the Vampires. They'd witnessed each other's most agonizing, shameful moments. And after they joined Mace's pack, they decided to leave the past in the past and never mention what suffering they had been through. It was too humiliating to relive. It was best to forget the memories and move forward.

She didn't smile back, making him worry that the usually lighthearted Were had some bad news for him.

"Tell me what's going on, Blanca."

"The pack of Weres that passed the border yesterday decided not to settle here. They left last night, going north."

"All right." Kaige prompted her to go on. "Did they explain why?" It was unusual that the pack hadn't wanted to settle. After the Great Were War had left most without homes, a Were-friendly country like Paqualette was like an oasis.

Or should have been.

"Yes. I spoke to their alpha and he'd said that he wasn't comfortable settling so close to Vamp country."

Kaige scoffed. Okantalor, the country that bordered Eastern Paqualette, did indeed have a hefty coven of Vampires, but they'd also shared an alliance since before the Great War. Had that changed?

"Kaige." Blanca sighed as if the weight of the world rested on her shoulders. "The pack leader warned me the Vampires were no longer friendly toward our country. They passed on a message to Queen Nayla." She pulled an envelope from her smock and handed it to Kaige.

He quickly read through the note. In more words than were necessary, the Vampires stated that because Queen Nayla had aligned herself with the enemy, Weres, the alliance between Okantalor and Paqualette was now void.

"Oh, hell."

Nothing more was written but only an idiot would think this would stop at a simple letter. Vampires had clashed with Weres since the day after the Were plague, an epidemic that had struck a quarter of the world's population over a hundred years ago, killing most and transforming others into werewolves. Some thought that the Vamps were threatened by another immortal species joining their ranks. But Kaige knew there was more to it.

Vampires needed sustenance and for as long as time existed, they'd used human blood to fulfill their needs. But humans died too easily.

And Weres were immortal.

Weres could be bitten and drained repeatedly, meaning the filthy Vamps wouldn't have to keep searching for fresh meat. Even though it was said Were blood wasn't quite as satisfying as human blood, the Vamps chose convenience over taste.

And when the Vamps saw the opportunity to align with humans against Weres, they took it. Or so they said. Little did the humans know that the Vamps didn't want to annihilate all Weres. No, some they enslaved.

Kaige shook the blasted memories from his head. He'd decapitate himself before allowing a Vamp to use him like that again. And Blanca...well, he'd make sure those bloodsuckers never touched her again.

"You take this to Mace at once," Kaige said, trying to remain calm and not worry her. "And tell him I want you to stay in the castle under the guards' protection until this blows over. And that's an order."

Her fiery amber eyes widened. "Are you joking? You want me to hide away while my new country gets invaded by Vamps? I don't think so, Kaige."

"Don't be a fool. You've been through enough with those goddamn bloodsuckers. I won't allow you to be in harm's way again."

"And what about you?" She shoved at his chest and, to give her credit, she pushed him back a half a foot. "You were right there with me and you know damn well that we have to protect our boundaries from those monsters."

The sound of the carriage wheels rolling down the road drew Kaige's attention. He sniffed the air for Ambria's scent but found nothing. And Gambel riding up with a frown on his face didn't give Kaige any more hope.

Why were women so impossible? He turned back to Blanca to warn her again but she'd shifted to a wolf, leaving her smock shredded on the ground, and was halfway out of sight before he could say anything more.

Damn it.

Gambel jumped down from the carriage and approached. "Sorry, Kaige, she wouldn't come."

Blood pounded at Kaige's temple. If ever there was a night he needed a woman's touch, it was tonight. And he found he only wanted Ambria's sweet caresses.

"Why not?" He suppressed a growl. "What did she say?"

Gambel grinned. "I believe her head was hurting her and that her words were not entirely of sound mind."

Kaige narrowed his eyes at his friend. "What did she say, Gambel?"

The Were blew out a breath and looked to the stars. "Her exact words were, 'Thank you for driving all this way but you can go right back and tell the pompous ass that I won't be his mistress, his whore, or anything else for that matter.'"

"She said that? She honestly thinks I thought of her as a whore?"

"You did take her to the guestroom, Kaige. Then you had me drive her home in the middle of the night. Anyone with half a brain could see how she'd come to that conclusion."

Kaige paced the dirt path, silently cursing as he rehashed the details of the night before. Everything had gone well up until the end. Then something had snapped inside and he'd needed to get away from her as fast as possible. She saw too much, got too close, too soon. And it had scared the hell out of him.

"It doesn't matter." He stopped in his tracks and faced his friend. "She's just a silly witch. It was a bad idea anyway. I should've listened to Mace. Witches are nothing but trouble."

"If you say so," Gambel murmured. "But that witch has an amazing a..." His words faded when Kaige peered at him. "Attitude." He winked.

Kaige couldn't help but agree. "Her attitude is extraordinary, isn't it?" He spent one evening with the woman and somehow it wasn't enough. Despite last night's

apprehension, he wanted more of Ambria Nogle. So much more. "How do you suppose I make it up to her?"

Gambel undid a couple of his shirt buttons as he thought it over. "She's a beautiful woman, obviously. I'm sure she could have her pick of men. Why she chose to spend the evening with you was remarkable in the first place."

"Thanks for the vote of encouragement, friend. I can always trust you to be on my side."

"No problem. Do you want my honesty?"

Kaige lifted a brow. "Having you been holding back?"

"A little. Here's how I see it. If she were my woman and if I had the income of a Count, then I'd shower her with gifts and make her feel wanted."

"I see," Kaige said.

"Then when she forgave me for my idiocy, I'd bring her back to my bedroom, my *personal* chambers, and give her the gift of multiple partners." Gambel smiled deviously. "She does think I'm sexy. I can tell."

"You'll stay away from her unless I invite you in."

"And what if she decides she doesn't want you?" Gambel took two steps back, out of arm's length. "What if you can't be forgiven? And, I don't know, what if she's interested in me?"

Kaige's jaw tightened as he clenched his teeth. "Did she tell you she's interested in you?"

Gambel shrugged a shoulder. "No. But it's possible, you know. I may not be a Count or a second-in-command to my Were pack. But I do have my charm, do I not?"

Kaige wanted to strangle the charm right out of him. "Like I said, stay away from her. She's mine."

"Really? Yours, huh? Now that's interesting."



Hell, Kaige hadn't meant to claim her. He had no intention of mating with Ambria. Ever. If she'd been within hearing range and had declared herself as his as well, then the simple binding ceremony would be complete.

Kaige shook the thought from his mind. He had way too much life to live and too much Vamp ass to kick to get hitched with a woman. Even if the woman was as enchanting as Ambria.

His mind wandered back, yet again, to how she'd trembled under his embrace and quivered at the flick of his tongue. And he questioned if he could ever tire of hearing her whimper and moan under his attention.

Highly doubtful.

There were so many things about Ambria that he liked and still wanted to discover. She was a puzzle he wanted to piece together and enjoy. A dessert he wanted to savor.

Kaige turned to his friend who was eyeing him suspiciously. To hell with it. "So you suggest I get her a gift?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Ambria hadn't heard a carriage or a horse approaching, so when Kaige banged at her front door and called out her name early the next morning, she assumed he must've traveled in his wolf form.

Oh boy. She glanced out the window and the glare of the rising sun burned her eyes and triggered her migraine to pulse harder. Ugh. When would this headache wither? She smothered her pillow over her face.

"Ambria!" he called and pounded at her door again.

Did he ever sleep? Better yet, didn't he realize other people slept?

And here she'd thought for a brief, naïve moment that he wasn't as arrogant as other Weres. Dumb of her to think he was any different than her selfish, estranged husband. Dumb. Dumb. Dumb.

She startled when she heard her front door swing open, then seconds later, her bedroom door. She sat up and stared at the wild-eyed Were. His dreadlocks were messier than ever and the only items he wore were his drawstring pants and a small leather satchel hanging from his neck. His chest was bare and he wore no shoes. He looked scrumptious, damn it.

"I apologize for storming in like this." He put his hand up as if to stop her from arguing. "You didn't answer and last night Gambel said you weren't feeling well and I began to worry that you'd become deathly ill. Why didn't you answer your door?"

Her headache panged from sitting up too quickly so she carefully dropped back onto her pillow. She didn't have the energy to argue.

"Ambria?" He took two long strides to the bed and sat next to her. His warm hand covered her forehead. "Are you all right? What's wrong with you?"

"Just go away, Kaige." She closed her eyes and wished the pain away, *wished* she didn't like the warmth emanating from his body or the feel of his hand on her skin.

"Am?" He gripped her shoulders and gently lifted her limp body onto his lap. "Am, are you ill?"

She groaned and propped her aching head against his shoulder. His unusual wild scent drifted into her nose and she inhaled. "Mmm." His aroma was nice, she thought, and sniffed again. Nice and soothing. Like a balm for her aching skull.

His large hands searched her, one raking into her hair at the back of her skull while the other rubbed along her spine. She relaxed into his touch and the throbbing in her head slowed to a dull pinch. Just like that, the migraine she'd had since yesterday was weakening to the point where she could begin to think clearly. A sigh of relief gushed from her lungs.

"I had a headache." She didn't dare move, afraid the pain would return.

"Does it still hurt?" His hands slipped down the back of her silky nightgown and she realized for the first time that she was barely covered.

"Not right now." She swallowed down her rising desire as he held her close to his warm solid chest. She should be angry with him but his presence calmed her. That, and the memory of his intense lovemaking was still fresh in her mind. The evening they'd spent together had been wonderful—up to the very last part when he'd pushed her away.

She nuzzled closer and inhaled. "There's something about your scent that soothes me."

Oh, why had she admitted that? Really dumb.

He chuckled softly against her ear. "I'm glad I'm good for something. I was beginning to wonder."

Curiosity had her meeting his gaze. His sultry, sexy, smoldering gaze. *Wrong idea, Am.*

"What?" She cleared her throat and hoped she didn't look like hell. "What do you mean by that?"

"I realize now, possibly too late, that I may have treated you badly when you were in my home."

"May have?" She arched a brow.

"I did treat you badly. And I give you my deepest, most heartfelt, apologies. I was an idiot."

Ambria sensed his sincerity yet she could barely believe her ears or trust her senses. Then again, the Were had a hot-and-cold switch that he seemed to use quite frequently. "You're apologizing for what, exactly?"

"Well, Gambel had brought it to my attention that I should have shown you to my private room the other evening rather than the guestroom."

She bit back a smile. "What else did Gambel say?"

A small current of irritation that much resembled jealousy vibrated from him but he put it to a stop immediately. She'd never been around anyone who could so easily restrain his emotions. It was fascinating.

He wrapped his arm around her possessively, making her short nightgown ride up her thighs even more. She paid it no mind, feeling safe and—despite her better judgment—sexy in his arms. It wasn't just his smell that pleased her, she realized with a heavy heart. His mere presence lifted her spirits. She wasn't afraid of what she might read from his mind. In fact, she wanted to know every emotion he had and the reasons behind them.

Deciding to forgive him—probably too easily—for the rude behavior he'd displayed the other evening, she snuggled closer to his muscled chest.

Kaige cleared his throat and explained. "Gambel said that it probably wasn't the best idea to send you home in the middle of the night, especially before resolving our little disagreement."

"Gambel's very perceptive. I like him."

"Most women do," he said without a hint of jealousy. "But I believe you like me more." His voice dropped an octave and it made being alone with him in her bedroom a heck of a lot more intimate.

Of course, sitting on his lap and feeling his erection stiffen against her thigh didn't help matters. He was large and unbelievably hard. Her pussy squeezed tight as she remembered just how he'd felt deep inside her.

"Do you?" He leaned in and drew her earlobe into his hot mouth.

She sucked in a breath and lost all train of thought. "Do I what?"

He eased her onto her too-small bed and wedged his body between her welcoming thighs. "Do you like me more than Gambel?" A devious smile quirked his luscious lips.

She gulped. "Yes. Much more."

"Good." He tore his satchel over his head and placed it on the floor next to the bed.

"But," she said as he came back for a kiss, "I don't think I should be your mistress. It's a bad idea all around." There. She said it.

"How can I change your mind?" He sat up on his knees and ran his hands down her opened thighs. Her body trembled under his intimate touch and fevered gaze.

"You can't," she managed to say, yet her hips lifted and shifted to inch his hands farther down her thighs, as if her mind had no control over her body.

"I'll do anything." He groaned as his finger raked over her swollen labia, which was already moist with need. "Let me make it up to you. Let me please you."

She hissed out a breath when he slid his finger into her slick cunt. "This isn't fair." Her voice grew raspy and her body temperature rose to the point where perspiration lightly moistened her cheek. Why was it so difficult to resist him?

He eyed her. "You said you were sensitive to feelings, correct?"

"Yes. I'm an empath," she stated with utmost confidence. If that didn't scare him away, she wasn't sure what would. Only, a small part of her hoped he wouldn't scare away. A small, extremely dumb part of her.

"You can sense that I want you then?"

She sighed as his finger curved up and pressed against *that* spot. "Without a doubt."

"Well, my sweetheart, a Were is sensitive to all the other five senses. For instance," he inhaled and closed his eyes briefly, "I can smell your lust for me. The moment you begin to think naughty thoughts, there's no hiding it from me."

Oh. She didn't know if that fact was mortifying or convenient.

"And," he inserted a second finger and grinned, showing her his teeth, "my sense of touch is incredibly heightened."

"Ah." She dug her heels into the mattress and silently begged that he'd quit torturing her and just fuck her brains out. She couldn't remember why she'd been protesting. It hardly mattered at the moment.

"All your little whimpers and moans don't escape my ears." He tilted his head and glided his long fingers in as far as they could go, out, then back in again.

Ambria squeezed her vaginal walls and hitched up her hips, wanting more. She was..... wet and oh so ready for him. The sound of her slick juices against his brilliant ministrations proved that as well as the achy need pulsing in her womb.

"And I see all your interesting expressions." His voice was rough, deeper than normal. "I realize now why they change so much."

He adjusted his movement just slightly and her blood liquefied into boiling lava about to erupt.

"What about taste?" she asked, realizing too late that she'd only meant for that to be a thought.

His smile widened and he licked his bottom lip. "If your taste is as appetizing as your smell then I'm in for a treat."

*Wow.* Her pussy contracted around his fingers. She could come just by listening to the man talk. His voice was deep and hungry. His words were blunt and refreshing. She wondered if he knew just how much he eased her mind. And teased her body.

He removed his fingers to untie his drawstring and all her thoughts, doubts and questions vanished from her mind. The only thing capturing her attention was how his magnificent cock sprung from his pants and arched proudly toward his muscled stomach.

She drew in a breath as she took in the rest of him. The sun was shining brightly through the window now, allowing her to see every tanned muscle, every defined line, every exquisite inch of him. He was lean and hard *everywhere*.

And it dawned on her that she never had a chance of saying no to being his mistress. There really was no other choice. Not when she wanted him with every cell of her being.

She caressed her swollen breasts through her silken nightgown. Her nipples were beaded painfully tight and pleading for his attention.

His hungry gaze followed her movement. "I like that."

Three simple words that made her belly quiver and her confidence soar. Three simple words that dared her to do so much more, anything really, just so she could hear them again. She so wanted to please him. The one man who somehow knew how to edge his way past her defenses.

Besides her coven sisters, who could block her from sensing their emotions, she'd never met anyone she'd felt comfortable with. Instead, she found herself searching his feelings, wanting to know every last bit of who Kaige Kollens was.

And right at that moment he was her captive audience, completely entranced with her next move.

She ran her hands down her abdomen, over her mound, and rested them on the inside of her thighs. Boldly, she spread her folds for him. "Taste me, Kaige."

Without breaking eye contact, he maneuvered her to the edge of the mattress and stood before her on the floor. He watched her intently, his gray eyes simmering, as he lifted her leg and leaned down to kiss the inside of her knee. His lips swept across her flesh, skimming teasingly down the inside of her thigh. Ambria shivered at the slight prickle of his unshaved face, tickling her skin.

"Like I promised in the carriage ride," he murmured when his gaze dropped to where she held herself open for him. "I'm going to fuck you with my tongue."

The lust pulsating from him was animalistic and vaguely contained. And, she wasn't sure how, but he seemed to open his mind and unleash that part of himself, directing it toward her. With his eyes maybe. As he stared at her. The thick heartiness of the emotion wrapped around her like a blanket, almost sending her into oblivion before the lovemaking even began.

"Taste me, Kaige." Her voice shook. "Please."

He removed her hand and replaced it with his own. "Just relax and let me make up for my mistakes."

Dipping his head, he laved his tongue from her entrance to her clitoris. She bit into her lip to keep from screaming, not wanting to startle Lorze and her coven sisters. Surely they were in their bungalows, preparing for the day.

"Mmm," he murmured and licked her again. His warm tongue was like lush velvet against her sensitive flesh, tracing along her outer lips, slipping into her pussy, lapping against her clitoris. He consumed her, not missing a spot.

She gripped onto her bed sheet and ground her head back into the mattress. Her womb coiled tighter with each questing pass his tongue made.

"Yes." She let out a husky whisper. "Yes, yes."

He made more delicious noises and Ambria peeked up to watch him. His eyes were closed as if he were passionately kissing her mouth and he seemed to be enjoying this as much, if not more, than she.

His thumb found her clitoris and circled it lightly, just enough to send a spiraling ache through her body. She dropped her head back down and moaned.

"That's it, lover." His voice was strangled. "Tell me what feels good."

As his tongue dipped into her tight cunt, another finger began teasing her anus, which was now slick from her juices. She held her breath, unsure of what he planned and how it would feel. Her husband had never touched her there, had never wanted to.

But she trusted Kaige to give her pleasure. And not reject her. No, not now when his mind was filled with her and her alone. His emotions were affectionate, adoring, desiring...coveting.

She tensed when his finger penetrated her virgin hole but was relieved when there was no pain. It slid in with ease and sent delicious sparks to all corners of her body. Her pussy spasmed and he lapped up her juices as he groaned.



He curved his finger in farther, reaching a place that had her curling her toes. She cried out his name for mercy and jolted with each tiny spring that released inside her — each one making her pant and moan.

The orgasm seemed to last an eternity as he licked and tasted every last drop of her cum while his finger continued to gently knead her most private area. She imagined feeling his cock there inside her and was surprised that she craved it. Kaige had unlocked a box inside her that had been kept shut for too many years.

She squeezed her aching breasts and arched her hips to meet his hot mouth. “Kaige.”

“That’s good, lover. Release it all. Come in my mouth. You taste so fucking good.” His tongue speared into her pussy again and again until she let loose. A desperate moan burst from her lips as intense pulses rocked through her body.

“Mmm.” He removed his finger and concentrated on devouring her juices.

Aftershocks tingled and tickled her flesh. She sighed with contentment and relaxed against the mattress.

“Ambria.” He slid her back up the bed and spread out beside her, propping his head on his hand. His lips were still wet so he casually wiped them with the back of his hand.

“Yes?” She wondered if one could die of ecstasy from just looking into a man’s eyes. He had the most exotic face with masculine lines and hard angles. Both interesting and intimidating. Well, intimidating for some, she was sure.

“I was right.”

“About?” In her giddy state, she smiled from ear to ear.

“You taste,” he licked his lips, “as good as you smell. No. Better.”

Her cheeks heated. “Well, thank you. For everything.”

“You’re very welcome.”

Giggles and whispers just outside her window caught their attention.

"Oh, wonderful." Ambria wondered how long it would take her coven sisters to realize she had a man in her room. "So much for our privacy."

The girls had joined the coven when they were only teenagers, one when she was ten. Ambria and Lorze had practically reared them but now the three were in their mid-twenties and were more like old friends than anything else. They all had a wonderful time together, gossiping and talking about handsome men. Men like Kaige.

"We seem to be interrupted wherever we are." He winked at her.

"Except I won't be inviting them in to watch."

He chuckled and she remembered the warming effect his laugh had on her. "Good to know."

Ambria tugged the covers over her body and watched as he stood and pulled his pants back on. Her heart fluttered just a bit, knowing he'd traveled all this way to apologize...and more. She wasn't sure he'd have bothered if he didn't care for her. She must've made at least somewhat of an impression on him.

The sound of a carriage approaching told her that his trusted driver had come to retrieve him.

"Is that Gambel?" she asked, disappointed that Kaige was leaving.

"It must be. He said he'd come for me."

"He's a good man."

A curious look flashed across his face. "I'm glad you like him. I'm certain the feeling's mutual."

Intrigued, she searched his emotions but whatever he'd been feeling had fled quickly. He walked to where he'd dropped his leather satchel and dug through it.

"Before I leave, I wanted to give you something." Determination filled his voice and his emotions. He sat beside her and opened his hand to reveal a small velvety drawstring bag. "Open it."

She hesitated just a moment but her ever-present curiosity won over and she took the bag from him. With clumsy fingers she untied it and spilled the contents onto her palm. And gasped at what she saw.

A gold necklace with a red and green enameled pendant and an onyx center stone stared up at her glaringly. It could only be described as sumptuous, elegant and...and expensive.

"Kaige." The beauty of the necklace stole her breath away.

"It reminded me of you." He leaned in and kissed her cheek. "The onyx is as shiny as your hair. The colors are as bold and sensual."

"I can't take it." Her conscience spoke for her before she could remember why she had started this affair. Wasn't this why she'd wanted to be his mistress? To receive gifts to help her coven's financial woes?

An awful knot fisted in her stomach. That was before she'd realized how much she liked Kaige. Despite his sometimes hot-and-cold emotions, she found that she enjoyed his company. And she didn't want to lose that.

"Oh, it's yours." He grinned. "Do you know how difficult it is to get a jeweler to open his doors in the middle of the night?"

"I don't know what to say. This is the most beautiful present I've ever received."

He looped a lock of her hair behind her ear and brushed a kiss to her mouth. "My mistress deserves nothing but the finest. I plan to spoil you thoroughly."

She swallowed the glee bubbling up her throat and she wondered if he knew he sounded at least somewhat committed to her. He may have announced that he wasn't interested in anything long-term but her heart couldn't help but do a tiny cartwheel at the possibility.

"Can I put it on you? I'd like to see what it looks like on your neck before I go."

"Yes, of course." Her hands shook as she handed the necklace over and scooped up her hair.

"Now I realize you don't wear much jewelry. Or you hadn't worn any at the ball the other evening, anyway." His fingers worked quickly to clasp the necklace. "But I hope it's only because you're in need of new pieces." He tugged at the pendant and let it fall between her breasts.

Her heart stuttered at how he looked at her, as if she was more precious than the jewelry around her neck. The attraction, the magnetism, between them was undeniable.

"I admit I didn't start out on the right foot," he said. "Or, rather, I'd stuck said foot in my mouth." He chuckled again, making her smile. "But I find I'm fascinated with you, Ambria. If I promise to behave from here on out, will you be my mistress?"

"Will I be your only mistress?" The words slipped from her mouth. It shouldn't have mattered to her but it did.

"For as long as this lasts, yes, I'll be loyal to you." He seemed to choose his words carefully, as if to keep her at a distance yet still have her agree to the affair. The cautious tone was somewhat annoying but what did she expect?

She would very much enjoy being his mistress, getting to know him better and taking pleasure in his body. And she could help her coven out at the same time. Would it be so awful to accept his gifts when he gave them freely?

Anxiety hummed from his body when she didn't answer right away. He brought her hand to his lips and kissed her palm, then her wrist.

Hesitant but more than willing, she nodded slowly.

"Yes?" His lips quirked to a half grin.

"Yes. Of course."

"Excellent. I'd like to see you tonight again. Will you be ready at dusk?"

Her stomach twirled at the aspect of seeing him again. And often. She'd have to remind herself this was only temporary. She'd have to say goodbye to him when the time came.

"I'll be ready."

“Good. I’ll have dinner prepared. We’ll celebrate the beginning of our grand affair.” He leaned in for a quick kiss then walked quickly from her bedroom and out of her home.

She couldn’t help but giggle at his fast exit. It was as if he was worried she’d change her mind. Again, her heart fluttered defiantly. She couldn’t allow herself to fall for Kaige. She just couldn’t.

The pendant was heavy and cool against her chest. She brought it to her lips and kissed the cold stone. Then, with a heavy heart, she unlatched the chain and carefully placed the necklace back in the velvet bag.

Lorze would probably get a hefty price for it. She was good at bartering and would surely make the most out of the transaction.

*No, I can’t.* Ambria clutched the bag to her chest. She’d give the next gift to Lorze, she promised herself. And every one after that. But this one...this one she wasn’t sure she could bring herself to give up. To think Kaige had bothered to wake a jeweler from his sleep just to purchase this necklace for her. No man had ever gone to such lengths to please her.

She pulled her wobbly legs together and sighed at how he’d pleased her body with intense affection and generosity. Asking nothing in return but to spend more time with him. She shook her head. She couldn’t think too much about his behavior. It was silly to exaggerate what was simply an attempt to gain a mistress. With extra care, she placed the bag on her bureau, hiding it from view, and began getting ready for the day.

A day she hoped would pass quickly.

## **Chapter Five**

Gambel smiled broadly as Ambria approached the carriage. He tried his best to hide the sadness lurking in his soul. But Ambria could see right through the Were's façade. His hair was pulled back in a leather band and he wore a white linen shirt that showed off his upper chest and formfitting trousers that curved to his muscles. Give him an eye patch, a peg leg and a parrot for his shoulder and Ambria could picture the man as a pirate. A charming, harmless pirate, that was.

Well, she'd see how harmless he was when he found out what she had in store for him. She gripped the basket in her hand and walked toward him, returning his smile with one of her own.

"Hello, Gambel. Good to see you again."

"Ambria." He took her hand and brought it up for a kiss. "A pleasure to be at your service, my lovely. Are you ready?" His gaze swooped over her body in obvious admiration.

She'd never grow accustomed to the intriguing golden hue of his eyes. At that very moment, she had to catch her breath as he narrowed them at her in a seductive way. Heaven help the woman who fell for this man. She would be in for an adventure, Ambria was sure.

"Ready as I'll ever be," she said, but didn't step forward when he attempted to guide her to the carriage door.

"A problem?" His smile flattened out.

"No, no problem. I do have a request though." She reached into her basket and pulled out the leather pouch filled with the magic dust she'd prepared earlier that day.

"As I said, I'm at your service." He eyed the pouch as apprehension buzzed from him. "What do you have planned for me?"

"This?" She lifted the small bag. "Nothing to worry about. This is for the horses. I'll trickle my dust over them and cast my spell. It's what they need to find the way home without their driver."

He chuckled uneasily. "Without their driver? And where am I going to be if not leading them?"

"In the carriage with me." How else would she get Gambel alone long enough to find out more about Kaige? She'd go mad if she spent another second trying to guess why the man reverberated with anger at times. What had happened in his past to cause such prolonged bitterness?

And some tiny pathetic part of her wanted to know how she could help him work past it. To make him happy. Crap. She was in over her head already.

Gambel grinned and gave her another once-over. "That is a tempting offer, lovely lady. But..." She sensed his desire clashed with his loyalty to Kaige. "I would love to ravish you, believe me, but I'm afraid —"

"Wait." She put a hand up and bit back a laugh at the misunderstanding. "It's not what you're thinking."

"No?" His disappointment was both apparent and amusing.

"No." She shook her head. "Although I do find you desirable, I wasn't planning on molesting you in the carriage."

"Damn." He scratched his head and a lock of his hair fell over his forehead. "What then?"

"I'd be forever in your debt if you answered some questions about Kaige. Questions about his past."

"Oh, that's all? Honey, why didn't you say that?"

She let out the laugh she'd been holding. "I think I'm going to like you, Gambel. You're quite a treat."

"You have no idea, my sweet." He winked. "So you find me desirable, huh?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Kaige signed over the deed to the newly built home that stood on the southern bank of the river and handed it to Blanca. A Were drifter named Ramsey Trent had just purchased the home and its surrounding acreage. Kaige had only met the Were once and had been somewhat uneasy about his quiet demeanor. He'd seemed shady, like he was hiding something, and Kaige had been tempted to send him on his way. Unfortunately, he hadn't found a solid reason to deny Ramsey the chance to make this country his home. Yet. Paqualette had opened its borders to all Weres, though it would be a shame for one to take advantage of the King and Queen's generosity.

It was up to Kaige to keep the peace and eliminate any threats to the fragile humans and nonviolent Weres of Paqualette.

"Have you found anything on this Were yet?" he asked Blanca.

"Not yet." She sighed. "But I can see your concern. There's something not right about him." She paused and tapped the legal document in her palm. "I made an unexpected visit to him yesterday and caught him just as he was shifting back to human. And I noticed something."

"What?" Kaige tensed in his seat.

"He shares our scars." Her voice was a whisper but he heard every word. The scars were bite marks that remained on the skin after a marking ceremony – a common ritual among the Vampires. So Ramsey Trent had been a Vamp's lunchtime favorite, too. How interesting.

"That might explain his quiet behavior. Were the scars fresh?"

"Very. Possibly a month old or less. Can't be sure."

Kaige stored that information. "Can you continue to keep an eye on him?"

"Can't you get Ever to do that? I'm watching the border. You know you need me there." She lightly poked him in the chest. "The Vamps are being too quiet. It's not a good sign."



"I don't know, Blanca. I don't feel comfortable with you so close to danger."

She rolled her eyes. "You know my senses are the sharpest of our pack. If a Vamp crosses the border, I'll know before anyone else. It just makes sense to have me there, Kaige, and you know it."

Warily, Kaige nodded in agreement. Blanca was the best at what she did and the bloodsuckers next door were more of an imposing threat than one suspicious Were. "Ever wouldn't mind making some extra wages, I guess. I'll talk to him."

"Thanks."

He felt the silent bond between them strengthen. But the reason for that bond knotted his stomach and made him tighten his lips. Never again would he allow himself or anyone he loved to be used like that again. To be controlled and tortured for the benefit of the enemy.

"Be careful, Blanca. If there's any sign of danger, I want you away from it immediately. Your job is only to observe and report."

"Gotcha." She gave him a small smile and ducked out of the room. And Kaige hoped he wasn't making a huge mistake.

The sound of the carriage rolling down the road stole his thoughts and he jerked to his feet, anticipation too heavy on his mind. He'd had his cook prepare a meal worthy of the Queen and he looked forward to seeing Ambria's face when she tasted the first bite. Hell, who was he kidding? He hoped dinner ended quickly so he could taste *her* again.

Yes, he had plans for his mistress tonight.

He strode to the foyer but resisted the urge to walk outside and pull her lush body into his arms and kiss her full lips. He stiffened when he heard her laugh just outside the door but he pushed any jealousy from his mind. Gambel was a charmer but he was also loyal. Years of drifting and searching the land for a peaceful place to call home, side by side, in the same pack had proven him a trustworthy friend.

And Kaige had no reason to think Ambria had been lying when she said she preferred Kaige. He saw it in her responses, in her unusual expressions.

The door opened and Kaige took in the full view of her. Her dress was dyed a deep crimson, matching the shade of her pouty lips. Her bodice clung to her skin and lifted her ample breasts into appetizing mounds. Two thin straps held up her dress, allowing him to see her creamy shoulders and not leaving much to his imagination. Clashed tightly in her hand was a wicker basket. And her eyes held a twinkle he'd never seen before.

What was the woman up to? He couldn't wait to find out.

"Ambria." He took her hand and kissed it, leisurely, taking time to meet her eyes and hold her gaze. "You look stunning. That dress is..." He searched for the right word, wanting to be particularly careful not to offend her in any way this evening. "It's delectable."

A naughty smile tilted her lips. "Thank you. I'm glad you like it."

Gambel cleared his throat. "Should I be on my way?"

Kaige knew what the Were was asking. He could tell his friend was intent on sharing Ambria with him and Kaige couldn't blame him. What was more tempting than a woman wearing a wicked dress and a sweet innocent smile to make you wonder? And from the musk scent emanating from her pussy, it seemed she was at least slightly interested in being shared. He was sure Gambel sensed her desire as well.

But tonight wasn't a good night to test out that theory. Kaige looked forward to giving her such an intense pleasure. He wanted to see her writhe feverishly under their attentions. He wanted to fill her with two hard cocks and watch her topple over the edge of ecstasy. The mere thought made him harden. Just not yet.

Ambria lowered her eyes and her cheeks flushed pink. Hell, he'd forgotten she could sense his emotions. That could be a concern if his feelings for her strengthened, which he hoped wouldn't happen. Having her in his bed was one thing; having her in his heart wouldn't do. No, it wouldn't do at all.

He turned to Gambel. "Maybe some other time. You're needed at the border, indefinitely. I'd like you to stay close to Blanca. Help her with whatever she needs."

Gambel's jaw tightened. "I'm sure Blanca's fine. She knows what to look for. I'd only be in her way."

"That's an order, Gam, not a request."

"Very well." One side of his lip curled up in anger but quickly flattened out as he bowed to Ambria then left the house in a blaze of irritation.

Kaige couldn't help but chuckle. "I believe he was expecting to do a little more than watch this evening."

Ambria's cheeks flushed a shade darker but to give her credit, she didn't seem embarrassed. Only modest. "Have you shared a lot of women?"

"None as beautiful as you." The truth flew from his mouth. "None as tempting."

"So indulging in multiple partners is common?"

"Yes. Until one is mated, it's very common. Does that bother you?"

"That you're so free with your sexuality?" She stepped forward and rested her hand on his chest. One finger dipped in between the slit in his shirt and circled over his heated skin. "Or that you want to share me?"

"Both. Either." His mind clouded when she was so near, when she stared up at him with her dark, lusty eyes.

"No and no. Your way of life has been unusually easy for me to understand. Every new thing I learn about you, about your lifestyle, draws me in further."

Kaige wasn't sure he wanted to know what she'd learned about him. Surely, Gambel wouldn't have thought twice before telling her whatever she wanted to hear. Hell, what *had* he told her? The question fled his mind when she lifted up onto her tiptoes and kissed his jaw. He grasped her tiny waist and inhaled her lustful scent, memorizing the heady flavor.

"Do you want to know what I have in my basket, Kaige?"

He grinned at her playfulness. "Yes, I do."

"Then take me to your bedroom." Her voice was raspy and sexy as hell as she pressed her belly against his throbbing cock.

"Dinner?" He managed to get the one word out.

"Can it wait?"

"Hell, yes." He scooped her soft body into his arms and headed for the stairs to his bedchambers. If she truly wanted to be shared then he'd do his best to prepare her for when the time came.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ambria's head swirled as she looked around Kaige's room. He'd set her on his bed and began starting a fire in the fireplace that took up a large portion of his far wall. With his attention elsewhere, she was able to take it all in. The room, like him, was masculine and primal. Animal skins covered the floor. Wood panels covered the walls. His enormous bed was made of logs and black steel, as was the rest of the sparse furniture placed here and there.

She set her basket on the mattress and ran her hands over the brown coverlet. His scent was rich in here. It was everywhere. She breathed in the calming aroma and relaxed. Somewhat.

What Gambel had told her about Kaige's past had helped her fit the pieces together. Now that she knew the source of his anger, she could understand why he chose not to speak of it. The pain, the torture, the humiliation of being enslaved and continuously drained by a Vampire must've burned a bitterness in him so deep it was impossible to forget. She couldn't imagine anyone being able to overpower Kaige in such a way. He was the definition of strength and intimidation. One look from those piercing gray eyes would send any normal man running.

Or maybe his enslavement had made him that way.

It didn't matter. Her only desire was to help him erase that horrible time from his mind. She'd do her best to pleasure him like no woman had ever done. She planned to push herself out of her comfort zone and offer herself to him in any way he wanted to take her.

Her heart pounded at the possibility that she might like whatever was in store.

She might love it.

With a new determination, she peeled the daring red dress from her body and laid it to the side. She had worn nothing underneath, not seeing the point. When he turned, his eyes caught hers and a hunger glistened in them. He strode across the room with determination in his stormy expression, stopping short at the foot of his bed.

His expression was wicked with his jaw clenched and his eyes heavy as his gaze caressed every inch of her body. He clutched his fists at his side and hovered over her as if waiting to pounce on his prey. As always, his emotions matched his actions. He was ravenous, ready to take her in the most animalistic way.

A week ago, she might have been alarmed by such emotion. Now she savored it, wanting to remember every moment she had to spend with him before the affair ended.

She maintained eye contact as she sifted through her basket and pulled out the contents one by one. "I thought you might like this," she said, pleased that her voice was even. She showed him a brown glass bottle. "It's body oil."

Waves of heated lust hummed from his body and he began flicking open the buttons on his shirt. "I do like that. What else do you have there?"

She perched on her hip, ignoring the moisture pooling between her thighs and how her bare breasts ached for his touch. "I know you don't like witchcraft but I concocted this cream." She lifted another glass bottle, this one clear and filled with a pink pudding. "It's edible and quite delicious. Tastes like freshly picked berries."

"I'd rather taste your cum." His gaze swept down to her mound, where it settled for a long moment, before he lifted it back up.

She trembled at his deep tenor and the bluntness of his words. She attempted to shrug casually and set the bottle back in the basket. "Fair enough."

"But I'm impressed with your imagination and your sense of adventure," he said quickly. His Adam's apple bobbed and she could see he was worried about something. Possibly that he'd upset her again?

Her heart leapt foolishly at the notion and she decided to ignore it by keeping on task. She grabbed hold of the half dozen black silk scarves she'd thrown into the basket, drawing them out onto the bed.

A devilish grin curved his lips. "Mmm. I can see why you wanted to postpone dinner. Your toys are much more inspiring."

"*You* inspire me," she said, easily slipping into the role of seductress. Maneuvering onto her hands and knees, she crawled to him, letting her ass tilt upward and her breasts sway with her movements. She inched slowly to him, loving that his intense gaze took her in. Like he couldn't wait.

His nostrils flared and he tossed his shirt to the floor. The desire radiating from him thickened and directed toward her like a warm, heavy hand wrapping between her legs and cupping her pussy. She reveled in the power he yielded. How he targeted his emotion, she didn't know, and didn't care. Maybe he was simply the first to attempt using her empathy against her. Or *for* her.

A growl rumbled from somewhere in his chest as she kneeled in front of him and loosened his belt buckle. She stared up into his eyes, noticing how his pupils dilated when she reached into his pants and gripped his gorgeous cock. He was hot and solid under her grasp.

All male. All hers.

Well, at least for the time being.

"Ambria." His voice was husky, starving.

He seized her upper arms and slanted his lips over hers. His kiss was urgent and burning, demanding. His warm tongue licked her bottom lip, her top, then thrust between her parted lips. He growled again, a wicked and carnal sound.

She opened for him, wanting to taste his essence, wanting to memorize the spicy flavor of him. Her hand took delight in how his solid cock pulsed against her palm. His skin was silky and soft while his shaft burgeoned hard and powerful.

Her other hand worked on tugging his trousers down, little by little. She needed him naked, needed another glimpse of his lean, muscled body. It was a shame a man like this had to cover himself.

His hand slid up her back and into hair where he grasped her and held her close. A contented sigh heaved at her chest as his lips consumed her, tasted her. His sharp teeth skimmed and nibbled. She met him with her tongue, licking and battling for more. More of him. She couldn't imagine ever having enough.

Pleasure tore through her and she heard herself moan as he ran his hand down her spine and gripped her ass. He possessed her, encompassed her. His fingers kneaded her flesh.

She slipped her palm up and down his shaft, pleased with how he groaned and bucked forward. The man who so clearly exuded both power and indifference was literally shaking at her fingertips. Shaking with need for her.

"You tempt me, Ambria." His words sounded much like a warning. "You tempt the wolf in me."

"I want to see you as a wolf. I want to know all there is to know about you, Kaige." And she meant her words. It was frightening how sincere she was when all of this would surely lead to heartache.

Her worry fizzled as his fingers voyaged over her hips, rounded over her mound and curved down her sensitive skin until he found her swollen clit. His skimming touch teased her, making her shiver at the tingles that coursed up her body.

"You wouldn't like to see me that way." His voice sounded distant. "As a wolf. Most humans are frightened."

"I'm not most humans. You know that."

He kissed her cheek, her jaw, her neck. His lips rasped at her skin, his tongue scorched her. "One day I'll visit you when you least expect it. Then you'll see."

Was he trying to scare her away? It wouldn't work.

"I look forward to it." She squeezed his cock and her other hand reached behind him and clasped the tight flesh of his ass. "I want to explore you, Kaige. Every part of you."

He groaned and pulled her hands free of his body. With a quick maneuver he had her wrists clasped behind her back. "You keep this up and you'll be sorry, my little minx. What's gotten into you?"

"Are you complaining?" She was panting now. Her breasts crushed against his steely chest. Her nipples hardened and budded between them.

"Hell no." He smirked. "Just know that I'm following your lead. You want to play naughty, then I'll play naughty. But don't tease me because I won't be able to stop."

"Good." She didn't know where her bravado was coming from but she was enjoying his every response.

She was feeding off his emotions. He wasn't backing down and neither was she. His desire for her lifted her to new heights. It gave her power and confidence. She was ready for anything.

"Fuck me, Kaige."

"Oh, honey. You're gonna get fucked." His grip on her wrists tightened and his expression twisted to a dark hunger. "How naughty do you want to be tonight?"

"I want to be your wildest fantasy." Yes, she wanted to please and soothe him but she couldn't deny she was ready for an adventure. After years of hiding from people's



emotions, she had the urge to explore and try new things. Her skin tingled and her body shivered, knowing Kaige could be the one to help her break free from her fears.

He let out a tortured groan between clenched teeth. "My wildest fantasy is naked and beautiful, kneeling on my bed before me. Ambria, do you have any idea what you do to me?"

"Show me," she said as boldly as she could through her trembling lips. Then she pulled free from his hold and lay back on the mattress. Slowly, she moved, spreading her knees open so he could see her aching flesh.

With a jerk of his hips, his trousers fell to the floor, his belt buckle clinking when it hit the wood. She took in the full view of him. Flickers of light from the fire danced over him, emphasizing his black lashes, striking eyes and the curved shape of his delectable lips. Dark brown hairs sprinkled his upper body and arrowed down to his beautiful stiff cock. Defined muscles carved his chest and rippled his stomach, powerfully V-ing down his pelvis. Every inch of him was perfection. Sculpted art she wanted touch and explore.

She swallowed the moisture filling her mouth and licked her lips as he crawled over to her and hovered over her body. His thighs scraped her sides as he straddled her waist. His dreadlocks hung down and framed her face. Sexy, carefree locks of hair. She kept her fists clenched at her side to keep from grabbing on and yanking him down to her lips.

"Did you make the body oil?" He picked it up and examined the bottle.

What did it matter? Better question—why wasn't he inside her at that very moment? She heaved out an impatient breath, hoping this had nothing to do with his objection to witchcraft.

"Yes, I made it."

He popped open the cork and sniffed. "No scent."

"Nope."

He poured some onto his palm and rubbed his hands together. "It's warm."

"It changes temperatures, depending on the user's preference," she explained, realizing he truly was interested.

"How does it know what I want?"

She shrugged her shoulder. "An empathy spell. Sometimes it helps to be this way."

A sly smile creased his lips. "I suppose so. How does this feel?" He spilled a line between her breasts to her belly. The heat from the liquid was enough to make her gasp but not enough to burn her skin.

She sucked in a breath. His hands quickly followed the path, calloused fingers and rough palms massaging the oil into her skin from her navel upward. The sensation was both coarse and tender. Sweet and powerful. He cupped her breasts and brushed his thumbs over her sensitive nipples. A pang of electricity shot to her core, sending tendrils of bliss to her nerve endings. The liquid cooled to room temperature but that didn't calm the heat growing inside her. She arched into his skilled touch and whimpered as he ignited her with his strokes.

"So beautiful, lover." He dipped his head and sucked her nipple into his mouth. The oil grew ice-cold and clashed with the heat of his mouth.

"Oh, mercy." She squirmed and felt tingling impulses sparking in her womb, zinging from her nipple to her pussy. "I think you've got the hang of it," she panted.

He chuckled and flicked his tongue at her rigid peak. "Yes, and I'm beginning to have a new respect for magic."

She laughed along with him. "Whatever it takes."

The humorous moment passed quickly when his expression changed. He bit into his lip and looked her over as if concocting a plan.

"What's going in that mind of yours, Kaige?" Not able to wait, she ran her hand down her oiled stomach to make it slippery then reached out to grasp his cock.

A groan rumbled from low in his chest in response. "I thought you already knew."

She grazed her fingers over the clipped head of his shaft then down his base. Silky smooth and solid. Her mouth watered. She wanted to taste him. "I can't hear your thoughts, silly," she said, her voice raw. "I can only sense your emotions. Some of the time, that is. Something about your scent mesmerizes me, calms my mind."

"Mmm. I'm glad I have that effect on you." He eased her hand from him and pinned both of them above her head with a firm grip. "Puts us on equal footing."

"I wouldn't call this equal. You're not being fair. Why can't I touch you?"

"Because, sweetheart, you're going to drive me to brink of insanity before I've had my way with you." He gently bit her bottom lip and drew it between his teeth. Any harder and he'd draw blood.

She squirmed to free her hands, longing to run them over his cut jawline, his broad shoulders, his muscled back. Anything. Anywhere. "Kaige. Please."

His eyes were shadowed in the dimly lit room but she could easily see the sexy half grin quirking his lips. "It's a good thing you brought these, isn't it now?"

Before she could ask what he meant, she felt the silk of one of her scarves wrapping around her wrist. *Shoot!* She'd fully intended to use those on him, not the other way around. Within seconds he had both wrists tied and bound to the steel bars of his headboard. She didn't bother protesting, knowing she'd asked for this. To be his wildest fantasy. To toss out her inhibitions and trust him.

She could trust him, couldn't she? The question was an afterthought, something she hadn't considered. Something she didn't care to think about now as he moved down and gripped her knees, spreading her thighs apart.

More waves of lust streamed from his mind, his body, and focused solely on her. There was no anger to be sensed. His tortured memories were forgotten for now as he stared down at her with extreme desire.

She couldn't help but smile at this small accomplishment. Never had she wanted so much to soothe a distressed soul. Never had she longed to be the reason for such hunger. She lifted her hips in invitation, wishing he'd fill her with his hard cock.

"Such a pretty pussy." He ran his oiled hands down the insides of her thighs, making her quiver. A lean, long finger found her entrance and slipped inside. "Slick and snug." He curved his finger just so, sending a jolt of pleasure through her cunt.

She gritted her teeth and arched her hips higher but he eased her back down, placing a heavy hand on her belly.

"Always so ready, Ambria." He winked. "Be patient. I won't disappoint you."

She nodded once and licked her lips, hoping that was answer enough.

A second finger slid in, stretching her. She bit her tongue to keep from moaning as they pressed against her vaginal walls, kneading into her sensitive, spongy G-spot.

"Damn, you're so fucking wet." His voice was rough, on the verge of growling. He gripped the brown bottle and hastily poured some onto her mound. The warm liquid seeped past her clit, onto his fingers and then trickled between her ass cheeks. He burrowed deep inside her then eased out agonizingly slowly. His thumb found her swollen clit, now heated from the oil, and gently circled. Too gently. He was teasing her.

"More, Kaige. Give me more." Her heart beat furiously as her anticipation grew. As the winding knot inside her tightened. Squeezed. "Please."

His eyes glinted in the firelight as he eased from her vagina and slid lower. Ambria grasped onto the steel bars she was bound to as his lubricated fingertip probed her most delicate entrance. Her anus constricted around him, burning sweetly, sparking brilliant flashes down her thighs and into her center.

Every muscle in her body tensed so as to not give in to the forbidden desire. "What are you doing?" Her cheeks flushed and she thanked heavens the room was dark.

"Giving you more. You get what you ask for, Ambria. Now, relax. Give yourself to me. I won't hurt you."

She believed him and allowed her muscles to loosen little by little. Why was it so easy to surrender to this man when she'd been nothing but guarded most of her life?

All thoughts ceased as a second slick finger glided in. "Ah, that's it, sweetheart. You're stretching for me. Let your mind go. It's just you and me."

Pulses of lightning rippled through her body as his fingers plunged deep into her channel. His thumb dipped into her pussy, causing the sparks to sharpen. Hunger surged from his essence and wrapped around her, making her reciprocate. She lifted her hips and met his rhythmic undulations.

Bracing his other hand on the mattress, he leaned over her and sucked her beaded nipple into his hot mouth. His gorgeous lips covered her rosy areola and she lost her breath at the sight. He sucked and tugged, shooting splintering heat to the depths of her core.

"Kaige." She struggled to breathe through her heavy pants. "Kaige. Please."

"Tell me what you want, Ambria." His fingers did something wonderful down below and she cried out.

"I want you! Kaige, I want you. Please."

"Do you want my thick cock inside you, lover?" His expression matched his voice, savage and voracious. "Do you want me to fuck your tight little ass?"

"Yes." What was she saying? "I don't know." But she did want him there. Her body craved it, pleaded for it. "Oh geez. Maybe?"

He smiled and her nerves dissolved. "Do you trust me, Ambria?"

She nodded, unable to speak. Unable to process what exactly she was agreeing to. The thought was so forbidden, so deliciously wicked. And, yes, she wanted it with him. More than she ever thought she would.

He removed his fingers and lifted her hips to bunch a blanket underneath her hips. Her heart was pounding so loud she wondered if he could hear the irregular drumbeats with his super senses. He lubricated his cock, his fist sliding up and down the long, thick shaft. Powerful and mouthwatering. Heat pooled and liquefied in her center at the sight. Kaige was, hands down, the most gorgeous creature she'd ever seen.

And he wanted her. In such a personal, private area. How could she say no to him? Why would she want to? Her anticipation was rising as well as her curiosity.

"Try to relax, sweetheart," he said and pierced her with his dark gaze. It wasn't until then that she realized she'd been writhing for his touch. Her body quivering and twisting against the blanket. "Let your muscles loosen. Your mind ease."

He applied more oil to her bottom and slipped in one slick finger, then another. She could tell she was loose for him. Ready. Eager. The solid column of his cock settled against her mound as he withdrew his fingers. She gulped down her apprehension and gripped tight to the steel bars, closing her eyes as his engorged head pressed against her readied entrance.

"Look at me, Am." His voice was stern. "Be with me."

"I'm here," she whispered and opened her eyes again only to widen them when he began to stretch her. Her mind reeled and her body warmed. She'd fantasized about this intimate act more times than she could count. And now she was living it. With Kaige.

Slowly, he advanced. Her tight muscles opened as she accepted him, consuming him, tightly cushioning him her depths. Her fiery nerve endings sizzled and sparked. Her breath halted, her body stilled.

"Ah, Ambria. So sweet." Kaige gripped her hips with his large hands, steadying her as he filled her with his warm cock.

She loosened more, adjusting to his thickness. Her body hummed with this new sensation. A feverish, rapturous euphoria that permitted her to forget any discomfort. Flashes of light flickered behind her eyes and perspiration moistened her face, trickling down her cheeks. Her body heated and stirred as he began to move oh so slowly inside her tight channel. Whimpers escaped her lips and she tilted her head back, grinding it into the mattress.

"Kaige. Oh, Kaige." Her voice was not her own. It was feral and raspy.

His cock wedged farther in, unbelievably deep, and she nearly lost her mind. She hung tight to the scarves restraining her and let out a throaty moan, loud and breathless. He slipped out halfway and drew back in, slick and sizzling. She burned for him, with him, as he let out a desperate groan.

"So good, Am. You're doing so good." His movements grew more insistent, steadily building up the delicious fire low in her belly.

"Yes. Oh, yes." She tilted her hips, taking him, welcoming him, tightening her muscles to meet his driving lunges.

His fingers dug into her hips, propelling her toward him as he fucked her senseless. Her mind was not her own. Their combined moans and groans filled the room in an animalistic orchestra, taking her higher, her sensations richer.

Yes. Yes. She panted and took pleasure in how he jounced her body, her breasts bouncing with the carnal rhythm.

His fingers trailed down her heated skin and rubbed at her clit. The rough pads of his fingertips teased her swollen nub, firm then light, pressing then rasping.

"Kaige. Kaige!" Her center spiraled higher and tighter. Smoldering. Liquid heat churning faster and harder.

His stiff shaft stroked her delicate, tight channel as pleasure overtook her. Higher and higher. To the point of mindless insanity.

Her release came as an eruption, surging brilliant light and warmth through her womb and into her senses. Her eyes rolled back and she tensed, overwhelmed from the jolts of bliss tearing through her. She cried out and jerked at the restraints holding her arms.

Kaige came with her, spurting his hot cum inside her. He jerked and shuddered, leaning over her. His emotions soared with a high she'd never experienced. Ecstasy followed by extreme satisfaction. He was happy. Deliriously happy.

Ambria couldn't help but smile as he withdrew and fell down beside her. Her body was limp and content. Her mind relaxed. He molded to her side and reached up to tug the scarves loose.

"You're free to go," he teased. "Now I hope you've learned your lesson, you naughty girl."

She rubbed her wrists then turned into him, pressing her breasts to his chest as she stared into his dusky eyes. Her heart swelled, realizing she'd trusted him with such an intimate act...and he hadn't let her down. She could trust him, if only for a while. This affair would be a journey of the soul and body, she predicted. Until she had to let him go. Or until he found out why she'd initiated the affair in the first place. She could only hope he'd never discover that. Now that she was beginning to know him, she found she quite adored him. And she didn't want this to end any time soon.

"Are you ready for your bath now?" He grinned and patted her ass.

She narrowed her eyes. "As long as my hands are free to touch you at my leisure."

He chuckled. "Such a hardship for me. But I think it can be arranged."

"Good."



## **Chapter Six**

The three weeks that had passed had been both titillating and trying, Kaige realized as he followed the guard through the castle on his way to meet Mace. With his mind filled with Ambria day in and day out, he hadn't been able to properly concentrate on his duties as Count. The woman not only consumed his nights but had also taken over his thoughts during the day. At that very moment, he could smell her fruity scent on his skin and it reminded him of how she'd looked when he'd kissed her goodbye that morning.

Her silky raven hair had been messy from their passions, splayed wildly across his mattress. Her lips had been pink and slightly swollen from his kisses. And her bedroom eyes had been sleepy yet cheerful. She was always so damn cheerful.

Pride filled him as he realized he made her that way. He made her happy and vice versa. That notion stuck in his throat and he swallowed it down. No way would he allow himself to fall in love with this woman.

It bothered the hell out of him that she could sense his emotions. Sure, sometimes it came in handy in the bedroom. He found he could direct his passionate feelings toward her and, in turn, she was less and less inhibited. She opened up to him in a way no woman had ever done before. She trusted him. And every bit of faith she put in him made him proud to be her lover. Hell, it made him want to be more than just a bed partner.

Which led to the problem. He feared she could sense him falling into her grasp. His heart was being held by the tips of her pinched fingers and, like it or not, she could choose to let go at any moment.

He supposed that was why he'd been showering her with gifts. In case he fucked up, she'd think twice about breaking it off. It was pathetic, really, how much he

lavished her with jewelry and, sometimes, gold. But the gifts made her smile and he found he'd do pretty much anything to make her smile.

Yes, really pathetic.

"You look like shit." Mace's voice yanked him from his reverie.

Kaige stopped short and realized he'd followed the guard all the way to Mace's den. He spotted him leaning against the fireplace with a brandy in his hand and an amused grin on his face.

"Shit?" Kaige resisted the urge to look down at his clothing to see if he'd dressed himself properly. Living as a drifter—a Were without a home—for so long, he hadn't needed to dress at all. But now that his pack had settled amongst humans he'd had to, er, domesticate himself a bit.

"With that goofy grin on your face. I don't like it. It means you're falling for that witch."

Hell. Kaige had seen this conversation coming; he'd only hoped it wouldn't transpire today or any time soon. After walking across the room, he poured himself some whiskey and downed it with one gulp.

"I don't appreciate your tone, Mace. Is this why you wanted to talk to me? Because I can think of a dozen places I'd rather be than to listen to you nag about my sex life." He scoffed and poured another glass.

Mace's fingers whitened around the glass he held. "I've heard some things, Kaige," he said through gritted teeth. "I'm hoping they're not true."

Kaige downed the second glass. From the way Mace was looking at him, Kaige hoped whatever he'd heard wasn't true either. He waved a hand for Mace to continue.

"You've been giving the witch gold and jewelry."

"Oh that." Kaige relaxed some, glad to know Mace's contempt had nothing to do with his tasks as Count. "I have, yes, but so you're aware, she hasn't asked for any of it. In fact she's been very modest about accepting everything I've given her."

"Right." Mace threw the contents of his glass into the fire, making it crackle and spit, then set it on the mantle. "I can't believe your ignorance."

"My ignorance? Look, I realize you have issues with the coven but Ambria's my mistress and what I do with her is my business."

"Ambria is taking you for a ride. Don't you get that? Do you see her wearing any of your jewelry? Or has she hocked it all?"

"It wouldn't matter to me if she has," Kaige said, the words flying from his mouth as his anger boiled. "Nothing matters but how often she spreads her legs for me."

Fuck. He regretted his words immediately. He'd sounded cold-hearted and it wasn't the least bit true but how else was he going to get Mace to back off? Ambria wasn't the swindling, conniving type of witch Mace was used to. She was sweet and affectionate. Pure and kind. True, Kaige hadn't seen her wear the jewelry he'd given her but that was because she was a simple and modest person. She wasn't pretentious. She'd always appreciated whatever gift he bestowed her and he'd been glad to know she'd have something to wear if a special occasion were to arise.

He scratched his head, hating that Mace was making him think anything slightly bad about Ambria. Hell, he just couldn't believe she'd hock the presents he gave her. And if she had, did it really matter? Kaige was a practical man. So what if she might've exchanged something useless for something useful? It was no secret her coven lived below the average means. His only wish was that Ambria would be truthful with him. One thing he wouldn't stand for was deceit.

Mace snorted. "You expect me to believe that you don't care?"

"I don't give a damn what you believe. No matter what you might think, you have no control over my personal life."

"I'm talking to you as a friend, not a leader."

"You sure the hell could've fooled me. A friend would respect my wishes and see that I'm happy."

"Happy?" Mace shook his head. "I've never seen you so entranced with a woman before. And as your friend *and* your leader I must warn you that I won't allow a witch to hold such power over the Count I appointed."

"What's going on in here?" Queen Nayla stood in the doorway with her hand perched on her hip. Her blonde hair fell over her shoulder in ringlets and her cheeks were rosy. She'd been beautiful as a human but as a Were, she was stunning.

Kaige turned toward her and bowed. "I believe the King was about to give me an ultimatum, my Queen."

She waved a hand at him and walked to stand in front of Mace as if to protect Kaige. "You're calling me Queen?" She rolled her eyes. "This is more serious than I thought. Now why are the two of you causing such a ruckus? And what is this talk of an ultimatum?" She peered up at her mate. "Mace?"

"There is no ultimatum, love. Just a warning." Mace pierced him with a look.

"Well, I don't like when you two argue. Your friendship is what makes you a strong team. And, unfortunately, we need that strength more than ever now that our alliance with Okantalar is broken." She pursed her lips and turned her gaze to Kaige. "Have you or Blanca heard any more on the matter?"

"Just an eerie silence. Our army is gearing up in case of an attack and Blanca is keeping an eye on the border."

Mace placed a protective hand on Nayla's shoulder and spoke to Kaige. "How do you feel about Blanca being so close to the enemy line?"

"I don't like it at all but she's determined. She's agreed not to cross the line and I can't deny she's the best we have. Her senses are excellent." Kaige tried to sound confident in his decision to allow her so close to danger. In truth, he wanted her protected from any threat. She'd been through enough with the Vampires already. He'd seen firsthand how she'd suffered, because he'd suffered right alongside her. He couldn't bear to think of her falling prey to them again.

Mace nodded reluctantly. "I'll trust your word."

Nayla smiled and clapped her hand on Mace's chest. "This is what I like to see. You two working together."

Kaige saw his chance to retreat. "Then our little meeting is adjourned?"

"For now." Mace always melted like butter around his mate, which seemed to work well for Kaige. "But if I find out the witch is somehow keeping you from fulfilling your duties then consider that affair over." He paused before continuing hesitantly. "And you'll be put on probation. You might want to think about how important she is to you before you see her again."

It took all of Kaige's self-control not to respond with a snide remark. He wasn't sure what angered him more—Mace's distrust of Kaige's judgment, or his harsh dislike of Ambria. Either way, Kaige had heard enough today. He bowed to the Queen and left before he said anything he'd regret.

Or started to believe Mace just might have a valid argument.

Damn.

"Kaige!" Nayla called after him.

Hell. He turned on his heel to face her as she walked briskly up to him. Before he could respond she grabbed him by the sleeve and led him down the corridor to the foyer. Away from Mace. Not a good sign.

"What can I do for you, Nayla?" He tugged his arm free of her tight grasp and peered down into her bright green eyes.

"I'm concerned."

"Seems to be the common sentiment around here. I explained that I have Blanca covering the border. Gambel's accompanying her—"

"No, Kaige. I'm concerned about you. I've never see you like this before."

"Like what?" Why did he ask? "If this is about Ambria, then don't bother."

"Oh, Kaige." She looked up into his eyes as if searching for something.

Kaige braced himself. He'd had enough of women trying to read his emotions. Nayla wasn't an empath like Ambria but she'd always had an uncanny knack for reading him.

"You're in love with her, aren't you?"

"No." He spit the word out without thinking twice. Love wasn't an option. Giving over control to another being wasn't an option.

"It's okay if you are. Really, Kaige. I know Mace has his issues with the witch coven but I've only known them to be straightforward. And you seem to be a good judge of character. That's why Mace appointed you as ambassador. He does trust you, no matter how poorly he shows it."

"Nayla, I appreciate your support, I do, but I don't wish to discuss my feelings, or lack thereof, with you or anyone else."

"That'll be your downfall, Kaige." She frowned. "You'll lose her if you're not careful. A woman needs to hear that she's wanted."

"Believe me, she has no doubt how much I want her." He gave her a wry grin and winked, thinking back to that morning when he'd promised Ambria a variety of sexual favors for when he'd see her next.

Nayla's frown deepened and her eyes narrowed. "Do womankind a favor and stop thinking about your manhood for a moment. You can't deny you have strong feelings for her. I've never seen you this taken. This happy."

Kaige wanted to argue with her with every fiber of his being. But he didn't have a defense. Ambria did make him happy. But what of it? That didn't mean he had to sell his soul to the love gods. It didn't mean he had to give up his power and pledge his eternal undying love.

Did it? His heart disagreed. His foolish heart wanted so much to wrap Ambria up in his arms protectively and bind her to him forever as his mate. She made him weak with this absurd notion that he could call her his own.

Was this why he hadn't agreed to share her with Gambel?

No. Maybe. Hell, probably.

If he shared her with Gambel then he couldn't pretend they weren't somehow bound together. Which made no sense.

His heart was an idiot.

His mind would have to work double to straighten this out. Even if he needed to spend a few days away from the woman to gain back his sanity.

Then, well, then he'd push away all irrational thoughts and give her the ultimate pleasure of two partners. Nayla's dainty hand grabbing his forearm pulled him from his thoughts. She gave him a knowing smile and sighed. "Let yourself fall in love, Kaige. It won't kill you, you know."

He merely grimaced. Yep, keeping his distance from Ambria was his only choice.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ambria kicked the covers off her legs and punched her pillow again. Trying to sleep was pointless when her mind wouldn't stop worrying and rehashing every second of the last evening she'd spent with Kaige. Had she said or done something to anger or upset him?

Gambel hadn't come with the carriage in four nights. Each night she'd dressed and waited for him to take her to Kaige's estate and each night she'd been disappointed beyond reason. Considering she'd spent every single evening with Kaige the three weeks prior, she'd assumed the routine would continue.

No, she had *hoped* it would continue. She loved spending time with him. She loved how he calmed and soothed her. She loved how easy it was to make him laugh. She loved how he satisfied her in his bed then talked with her to the wee hours. She loved how he commanded attention and intimidated his inferiors but then treated her with tenderness. She loved how he wrapped her up in his emotions, his desire and affection, so willingly. She loved everything about him.

Curses. She loved *him*. When had that happened?

She curled her legs up and enveloped her arms around them. Sadly, love didn't even begin to describe how she felt about Kaige. Obsessed, maybe, was a better word. There was no other reason she would be lying in bed unable to sleep, thinking of nothing but him.

No other reason why it would bother her that she hadn't heard from him in a mere four days.

Ridiculous. She didn't want to be one of those pathetic women who were so wrapped up in their man that they couldn't function on their own. No, Ambria had survived over a hundred years without a man in her life.

Could it be that she just thoroughly, heartbreakingly *missed* him?

Yes. That was it.

Missing someone didn't make you weak. It just made you incredibly gloomy and anxious. And possibly she could make a spell to remedy that in the morning. Lorze could help her. The woman owed her that much, at least, since Ambria had handed over pretty much every gift Kaige had given her to help her coven. She'd decided to keep the onyx necklace. It was the first gift he'd given her and he'd gone through so much trouble to purchase it. Her heart couldn't stand giving the memento up.

She stood from her bed and walked to her bureau where she had it safely hidden, swathed in a kerchief. The pendant hummed with energy as she picked it up. She gazed into the shiny onyx and saw Kaige's face as it had looked the moment he'd placed the necklace on her neck. She'd cast the spell a few days after so she could remember that moment whenever she looked at the gem. She hadn't been sure why she'd done such a silly thing at the time but now it was clear.

She'd wanted to have a reminder after their affair was over, a reminder of what it felt like to be cared for. To have felt loved.

Love. Ambria felt sick to her stomach at the thought of Kaige ever finding out about why their affair had started.



Just that morning she'd confessed to Lorzener how she felt about Kaige. And that the game was over. Ambria wouldn't take any more gifts from him, not for coven's sake, anyway. Kaige deserved more from her. He didn't deserve to be used.

Lorze had said she'd understood but Ambria hadn't fully believed her. After living with the high priestess for thirty years, Ambria didn't have to be an empath to know when her longtime friend was upset. Lorze could block Ambria's ability all she wanted but there was a lot that could be told by the way she'd lowered her eyes, tightened her lips and nodded her acceptance.

"Just don't do something silly and leave your coven family," she'd said. "You'll get your heart broken and have nowhere else to go. You don't want that, do you?"

No, to be heartbroken was the last thing Ambria wanted. But if she'd learned anything in the past month, it was that she couldn't live life hidden from the world anymore. She couldn't allow her empathy to control her; she had to take control of it.

And whether Ambria was with Kaige or not, it was high time to move on and be independent. She loved her coven sisters but it was unfair to hide behind them. She was determined to move out into the world and find out how she could use her empathy for good. She had to do it for her own self-respect.

An emotion passed through her that wasn't her own and she turned quickly to see if anyone was in her room with her. But she saw no one. It had been a faint feather touch of what could only be described as desperation.

Curiosity grabbed her and she concentrated, attempting to tune into the emotion and find its source. It grew stronger and ebbed with such raw negative undercurrents she had to catch her breath.

She stood perfectly still, unable to move. Hopefully the source of the emotions was only a drifter passing by. Hopefully —

A soft knock on the door made her jump. Who was it? She focused in on the energy and found something faintly familiar. Someone from her past. A Were.

Before she could reason with herself she started toward the door. The familiarity drew her. "Who is it?" she whispered through the heavy wood.

The stranger hadn't tried to break in and she felt no threat from his presence. Whatever angst he was feeling was clearly self-imposed.

"It's Ramsey Trent. Are you...are you Ambria Nogle?"

*Ramsey.* *Oh no.* The name brought back a thousand memories. Memories she'd stored far back in her mind. Memories she couldn't ever seem to fully dispose of no matter how many years separated them from the present.

And now here he was. Her husband. Was it truly him?

She jerked open the door and instantly met his gaze. The same icy blue eyes. The same dark brown hair pulled back in the usual style. The same lips she'd kissed a multitude of times, until he'd refused to kiss her anymore. She glanced down and noticed that he was bare of any clothing, probably since he'd traveled as a wolf.

But he was different. No more did he reek of narcissistic arrogance. In fact his ego seemed to be nonexistent.

"Ambria? Is it really you?" His surprise was apparent. When he'd left her more than a century ago he hadn't known that she'd live on.

"Yes. It's me." She stepped out of her home and closed the door behind her. He hadn't earned the right to enter back into her life. Any part of it.

"How did this happen? I saw you from afar while you were leaving Count Kollens' estate the other day and I wondered if it were you. And here you are. Alive and well." His gaze took her in, pausing briefly at her breasts. "My goodness, you haven't changed at all. Are you Were?"

"No." She crossed her arms over her chest, trying to cover the swell of her breasts beneath her flimsy nightgown. He didn't have the right to look at her with desire. Not after all these years. Her anger rose as the memories flooded her mind. He'd rejected

her because she hadn't transformed with him. He'd left her high and dry with nothing and no one to love.

"How is this possible then?" he asked. "Are you immortal?"

She shrugged stubbornly. She owed him no explanation. He deserved nothing from her.

"Well, you must be." He scratched his head and the raw desperation she'd felt earlier seeped from his body. "I'm glad to know you're still alive, Ambria. I've thought of you often over the years. I always wondered what had happened to you."

"Did you?" Her own emotions drowned his out. How dare he be here? How dare he come to her now? She'd imagined this day, when she would see him again, but nothing prepared her for the rush of fury boiling through her blood.

She'd endured the heartbreak so long ago she'd thought she would be immune to his presence but apparently old wounds healed slow.

"Of course I did," he said. "I hadn't meant to hurt you."

"No? Not even when you'd called me crazy? Not when you'd tried to make me believe the reason you were leaving was my fault?"

"This was all so long ago, Ambria. I barely remember why we separated. I'm sure I hadn't meant to hurt you."

She swallowed down her argument. What would it matter now? She no longer loved Ramsey; she despised him for coming back after all this time. And she questioned if she'd ever loved him. Certainly not as passionately as she cared for Kaige.

"You must have forgiven me by now." He smiled and took a step forward, crowding her against the door.

"Stay back." Her head felt like it was slicing in two as a wave of his lust centered on her. Nausea hit her quickly, unexpectedly. His emotions were polluted, making her feel unclean.

"Why? We're still married, are we not?" He reached out and cupped her cheek. A wicked sneer twisted his lips. "You're mine still, Ambria. Nothing has changed that."

"Bull. I haven't been yours in over a century, Ramsey. Not since you left me."

He moved even closer. The faint scent of whiskey blew out with his hot breath. "I was a fool. Looking at you now, I can't imagine what I was thinking."

Ambria tensed, paralyzed and shocked this was happening. "I don't know you anymore. You're not the same person." Her voice trembled despite her best intentions to remain strong. "You need to leave."

His frosty eyes narrowed as an unfamiliar expression crossed his face. No, he certainly wasn't the man she used to love. "That's not what you said the last time I saw you."

So he did remember. The bastard. Her last words to him had been a desperate plea for him to stay. She'd been so young and naïve. So stupid. But not anymore.

"I said leave," she said firmly, fed up with his audacity.

"I don't think I will." His hands moved swiftly and gripped her upper arms. "I think we should go inside and get reacquainted."

A thunderous growl ripped through the air, startling Ramsey back a foot. They both jerked their heads to the source of the terrifying sound. But as soon as Ambria spotted him, she knew.

The wolf hulking toward them was Kaige.

She'd never seen him in his animal form but there was no doubt in her mind. His gray eyes. His matted brown hair. His raging emotions. It was all him.

Her heart staggered just knowing he was near. He was back. And judging from the vibrations zinging from his body, he was there to protect her.

Ramsey instantly transformed into his wolf form at the threat and bared his teeth. "What do you want, Were?"

Kaige inched closer, teeth snarling, his chest puffed out. He was larger than Ramsey. Much more intimidating than the Were she'd put up on a pedestal so many years ago. But he was hers and he was beautiful.

"Get the hell away from her." Kaige's voice was different, gravelly, threatening.

Ramsey, smaller and darker, attempted to stand his ground, although he reeked of uncertainty. "Count Kollens. I didn't know it was you."

"Now you do. Back away from Ambria."

"But she's mine," he said, his voice growing stronger again. "She's my wife."

"Your wife?" Kaige looked to her then. His suspicion was apparent, along with what could only be jealousy. "Ambria, are you his?" It was more of a dare than a question. Dare she choose the other man over him?

She wouldn't even if her heart gave her that choice. "No, I'm not." She made her voice firm, knowing the magnitude of such a statement. She'd learned about the binding ceremony that tied two Weres as mates. They simply had to give themselves to the other with the words "I'm yours" with a witness present and then they were mated for life. Simple, yes, but powerful.

"Is this the husband you spoke of?" Kaige's mind eased some but he was still cautious. She'd have been annoyed by his distrust of her if it hadn't meant that he cared for her. She could feel how much every time he looked at her. If she were more confident, she might suspect that he loved her as well.

"He is," she said softly, wanting so much to reach out and touch him, feel him. "But I no longer consider myself married to Ramsey. He abandoned me over a hundred years ago. He doesn't have the right to call himself my husband."

*I'm yours, Kaige.* Surprisingly the words lingered on the tip of her tongue but she didn't dare say them. Not yet, or ever. The pang of rejection was too painful and she feared it would be infinitely worse coming from Kaige.

He directed his attention back to Ramsey. "You've never mated with her."

"Well, no." Ramsey bristled and seemed to cower under Kaige's attention. "My lord, I still believe her to be my wife."

"Nonsense. Marriage is a human binding and you're no longer human. If you'd wanted to keep her to yourself, you should have mated with her. She's not yours, Ramsey." Kaige moved beside her, forcing the other wolf to back up. "Nor will she ever be."

"I see." Ramsey dropped his head in defeat, even though a torrent of rage boiled beneath his subservient façade. "I'll be going then."

Ambria wasn't convinced he'd stay away. She placed her hand on Kaige's back, feeling the coarse fur beneath her fingertips. In his presence, she was protected but she had no doubt Ramsey wasn't going to give up this easily. Not when his anger was so apparent.

"Keep your distance from her, Were," Kaige warned, as if sensing her wariness. "If I see you within a hundred feet of Ambria, I'll have you deported from this country. Fifty feet and I'll rip your throat out. Understood?"

Ramsey's lip curled just slightly. "Understood." His icy eyes drifted to her. "My apologies, Ambria," he said, but she read no sincerity in his words. With a nod of his head, he turned and ran off into the forest, taking his corrosive emotions with him and leaving her with a burgeoning headache.

He'd wanted her back. The only question was why.

## **Chapter Seven**

Kaige changed into his human form as soon as Ramsey Trent was out of the reach of his senses. He didn't want to wait another minute to pull Ambria safely into his arms and to erase the flicker of fear hiding behind her eyes. Her tense body softened to his touch and she leaned into him. The feel of her flesh under her silky nightgown allowed him to breathe easy for the first time in four days.

It had been hell trying to stay away from her. A torture he didn't want to repeat any time soon. And now that he had her in his grasp, he knew he wouldn't be able to leave her alone again. Especially with her former husband as a threat. The bastard. Seeing him so close to Ambria, ready to claim her as his mate, had twisted something in his gut. The wolf part of him had been ready to tear into his flesh and drain every ounce of his blood. The human side hadn't argued. But being Count of Eastern Paqualette and the ambassador to Weres came with a responsibility. He had no choice other than allow Ramsey to live. For now.

If Kaige ever saw him close to Ambria again, he would, in fact, kill first and ask questions later.

He trailed his hands over the curve of her hips, her waist, her breasts, her neck and back down again. Damn, he missed her. Every inch of her. The onyx necklace he'd given her rested nicely between the curves of her breasts.

She hadn't hocked it. Mace had been wrong. And Kaige had been an imbecile for doubting her for even the briefest moment.

"Kaige." She twined her arms around his neck and crushed her body to his. "I'm so mad at you," she whispered and kissed his cheeks, his lips, his neck, his shoulders, his chest, and back up again. "Where have you been?"

He savored the sweetness of her lips on his skin, thankful she wasn't *too* mad at him. "I'm sorry, Ambria. I've been an idiot. Will you forgive me?"

She circled her fingertips lazily across the back of his neck and looked at him through thick lashes. "There's nothing to forgive if you promise never to leave me for that long again without a really good reason." She smiled and Kaige nearly lost his breath. "Thank you for being here for me when I needed you. How did you know?"

"My pack has been keeping an eye on him. He's been in communication with the Vamps from Okantalor. I don't trust him."

She frowned and her eyebrows bunched together. "You shouldn't trust him, Kaige. He's not the man he used to be. Not that he was ever a good man, not like you, but now I sense evil and desperation from him."

In all the commotion, he'd forgotten her talents as an empath. It was part of the reason he'd stayed away. If she were aware of his feelings, she'd know without a doubt that he'd fallen deeply in love with her.

Gods help him, there was no use denying it anymore. Fighting his heart was making him more miserable than admitting the truth. To himself, anyway.

"Ambria, I want you to pack some things and come home with me. Tomorrow, I'll have Gambel pick up the rest of your belongings."

Her sensual brown eyes widened in stunned disbelief. Then, as realization dawned on her, she broke out into the largest, sweetest smile he'd ever seen. Ear to ear, cheeks dimpled, eyes glistening.

"Kaige? Are you asking me to move in with you?"

"No, sweetheart. I'm demanding it. I need to protect you and there's no way I can do that with you living so far." His explanation wasn't what she'd wanted to hear, he could tell from the instant change in her expression.

She bit into her lip and eyed him warily. "I can sense your emotions, you know. Why else do you want me to move to your home? And don't lie to me. I'll figure it out."



Kaige blew out a breath and clasped her hands in his. "Can we take this one step at a time, lover? If you can sense how I feel about you, then you know I won't hurt you."

*I love you.* The words filled his mind and body full but he couldn't bring himself to say them. He did the next best thing. He pinned her to her door, pressing his chest to hers, his knee wedging between her legs, his hands taking hers and tacking them above her head – and he kissed her. An act he'd fantasized about every minute of the last four days. The reality was far better.

She whimpered against his lips. Her tense body loosened and molded into his. Her lips parted, accepting his persistent tongue. She tasted both sweet and innocent and wild and wanton. Hell, she tasted like the woman who owned his heart.

Her lusty scent filled his senses and he breathed her into his lungs. His knee pressed between her thighs, feeling the hot dampness there. She may or may not love him back but he took pride in knowing he could always make her desire him.

He leaned into her and rubbed his chest against her breasts. Her rigid nipples pebbled against her nightgown.

A barrier he wanted ripped from her body. But the light footsteps of someone drawing close grabbed his attention and he jerked back and turned, shielding Ambria from whoever dared bother them.

The High Priestess Lorzener stopped mid-stride on the narrow dirt path, halfway between her bungalow and Ambria's, close to ten feet away. She wore a robe over her nightclothes and her hair was tussled as if she'd just awoken. "My lord." She gave a forced smile and her gaze quickly assessed his nude body. "I heard noises. Ambria, are you all right?"

"Yes. I'm fine." Ambria set her hand on Kaige's back and stepped out beside him.

"Good. May I ask the reason for this late-night visit? Your guest is going to wake your coven sisters."

Kaige raised a brow at Lorzener's haughty tone. He hadn't spent much time around the woman and now he regretted that for he knew nothing of the witch's relationship with Ambria. Just how much power did the witch have over the woman he loved?

"Ramsey was here." Ambria moved in front of Kaige, obviously wanting to hide his body from Lorzener.

"Ramsey? Ramsey Trent?" Lorzener closed the distance between them with long strides. "He was here?"

"Yes, and he was very threatening. If Kaige hadn't shown, well, I don't know what he would've done."

"Oh my." The old witch clasped her hand to her cheek. "From what you've told me about your parting, I never thought he'd show up in your life again. Why, he'd abandoned you without a penny to your name and ran off with a pack of Weres." Lorzener met Kaige's eyes. "What kind of man would do such a thing?"

Ambria tensed in front of him. "I remember. No need to go over the details, Lorze."

"He intended to do much worse tonight." Kaige set his hand on his lover's waist. "And that is why I've told Ambria to move into my estate."

"You what?" Lorzener seemed to shrink an inch. "That's ridiculous. This is her home. She's safe here."

Ambria swiveled around to face him. Her chin jutted out stubbornly. "Lorze's right. If the only reason you want me to live with you is for protection, then I don't see the point. My coven is strong. We can put up a protective barrier that covers a mile in each direction. And —"

"Stop." Kaige clenched his jaw. Why was she testing him like this? "That's not the only reason I want you close to me and you know it."

She tilted her head and stared up at him, probably trying hard to read his emotions. Hell. Did he really want this woman to live with him day after day?

Yes. More than he wanted to take his next breath. Not just to protect her from harm. He wanted her by his side, in his home, on his bed. He wanted to be able to walk into the next room and kiss her. Lift her skirt. Spread her legs. Drive her crazy with his mouth. His hands. His cock.

He wanted to be able to talk to her about anything, anytime. Look into her eyes. Listen to her secrets. Soothe her. Pleasure her. *Love* her.

He was desperate for it. He only hoped she wouldn't fight him.

Her lips slowly curved into a sexy, knowing grin, obviously getting the answer she needed. "I'll pack my things," she said, her voice husky. Then she nodded to Lorzener and trotted inside, closing the door behind her.

"She'll be back," the high priestess said in a low voice and stepped closer as if she didn't want anyone else to hear. "Your relationship was not intended to last."

"What the hell do you mean by that?"

Her lips twisted and her eyes glistened, as if she were holding back tears. "You may be a Count but you have no authority to come in here and take away one of my coven members. I've been Ambria's only family for quite some time. She needs me. Her coven sisters need her."

"*You* need her." Kaige had no intention of mincing words.

"Of course." She shrugged her bony shoulder. "Her youthful appearance and beauty does come in handy, does it not?"

Enough with this. "Tell me what you mean by that, woman, and stop with the nonsense."

"I'm sure Ambria can explain it much more eloquently than I. Maybe you can ask her why she so easily went home with you the first night you met. Or what she's done with all the fine jewels you've given her." She swiped at a tear that had strayed down her cheek. "Or you could save yourself some grief and leave now and never look back. She doesn't belong with you, you know. She belongs here with her family."

Kaige was paralyzed, shocked speechless. He wasn't an idiot. He knew what the witch was insinuating. But was it true? Or was this a desperate attempt from Lorzener to keep Ambria here? More than anything, he didn't want to believe it.

But there was only one way to find out.

\* \* \* \* \*

After securing her pack to her waist, Ambria wrapped her arms tight around Kaige's thick furry neck and hung tight as he traveled quickly through the forest in his wolf form. Her heart pattered and her cheeks hurt from smiling so large.

He was in love with her. She'd felt it pouring from him, directed toward her. She'd never experienced such warmth in her life.

Though she wasn't sure why his anger and suspicion had returned when she'd come back out with her bag, ready to leap into his life. But Ambria didn't worry too much. Once they got to Kaige's estate she'd soothe him with love and pleasure him with all that she had.

She only hoped Lorze hadn't said anything about the origins of their relationship. No, she wouldn't do something so stupid. So hurtful. Would she?

Ambria nuzzled her nose into his neck and tightened the grip she had with her legs around his back. He was faster than a horse in his wolf form and the cold air breezed over her body. The night would be unbearable for most humans, but she found the outdoor elements didn't bother her as much. She could handle it.

He slowed to a stop as they neared a clearing. He'd taken an unfamiliar route, one that had no noticeable trail. The area was wild and mountainous but Ambria put her entire trust in Kaige's ability to find his way home.

When he sat on his hind, she slid from his body, landing on soft patches of thick grass. The clearing was green with lavender wild flowers that looked gorgeous under the heavy glow of the moon and stars. She imagined it would be even prettier in the daylight.

"Stay here," Kaige said and deftly leaped atop of a pile of boulders.

She'd think this would be a romantic idea, spending the evening with her lover under the stars, if he wasn't acting as odd as he was.

"Are you all right, Kaige?" she called out to him.

"I'm fine, sweetheart." His voice was rough and gravelly. But he'd called her sweetheart.

Maybe this was simply how he behaved when he was in wolf form. Maybe his emotions were different. Or maybe she was relying too much on her empathy when she should trust her heart. Whether he knew about her deceit or not, she'd love him and make him realize she was the one for him. The only one, forever.

At the highest point of the boulders, he sat on his haunches and howled up at the moon. Not a second later, an echo called off in the distance.

He was communicating with another Were. But what could he possibly be saying?

Kaige bound back to the grassy clearing in one graceful leap. As he ambled toward her, he transformed into his human form. His arms and legs lengthened and straightened from wolf into a lean, muscular man. She'd seen Weres change before but it seemed he was going in slow motion for her benefit. Or his own.

"Am I frightening you, Ambria?" The gray of his eyes seemed silver in the moonlight. They glistened with mischief and suspicion and desire.

"No. Are you trying to?" Ambria kept eye contact and moved closer, homing in on the desire and ignoring the rest. She stopped in front of him and pressed her hands to his solid chest.

He shook his head and his hard muscles bunched under her touch. "My only wish is to please you tonight. There's something I've wanted to give you. I think you're ready."

"I'm ready for anything you have to give me." Ambria let her hand slide down to wrap around his stiff shaft. She loved the silky feel of his flesh. The rigid masculinity of him. He was thick and long. Delicious.

Hers.

"What do you have in mind?" She rubbed her thumb over the pre-cum that trickled from the slit of his cock. Her mouth watered at the memory of how good he tasted, of the many times in the past three weeks she'd sucked on him until he crumpled and released.

A growl rumbled low in his chest. "Come here." He gripped her arms and drew her back a few feet until she was up against a dense tree trunk. He took her pack from her and dropped it on the grass. Then turned her around to undo the back of her dress.

She pressed her hands against the smooth base of the tree as her pulse beat overtime. He worked quickly and tore the dress over her head, the fabric ripping slightly. Then he unclasped her necklace and dropped it on her dress.

His warm, moist lips kissed her shoulder, her ear. His emotions were needy, lustful. "Damn you for making me want you like this." His voice was a harsh whisper. "Your skills at seduction have broken me, Ambria. I should be infuriated with you. I should despise you." He chuckled without humor. "Yet I'm lost in you. I can't help myself."

No. Lorzener *had* told him. She tensed against his touch but she sensed no threat. Kaige would never hurt her. Not even after she'd hurt him so badly. She could feel the heartbreak and resentment as it crashed over her in a wave. Her temples throbbed and her eyes welled with tears. She longed to take his pain away and replace it with love.

"Kaige, I—"

"Shush, woman." He held his body close to her, compressing the solid length of him against her backside. "I don't want to hear any more lies. All I want is one more night. You can pretend you desire me for one more night, can't you?" His voice was low and his cynical tone sat on the fence between rage and sadness. From his emotions, she sensed disappointment and what could only be described as heartbreak.

“Oh, Kaige. I do want you. I—”

“Ambria, please don’t.” He eased her hair over her shoulder and pressed his warm moist lips to the back of her neck, sending delightful chills along her skin. “When I’m done with you here, we can sort this out. I don’t know how much of Lorzener’s words to believe. I’m not sure I even want to know. But I’ll wait to hear your side until after we’ve both been satisfied, and not before. Understood?”

She nodded her head and willed back the angry tears threatening to spill over. “Yes, I understand,” she said, agreeing to hold off the conversation that could possibly tear them apart forever.

A sigh heaved up her chest and she tried to center her attention on the here and now. While Kaige’s hands skimmed the curve of her waist, his lips and tongue trailed a hot path down her spine. Lower and lower until he knelt behind her. His coarse hands palmed her ass and separated her cheeks so he could continue down. She tilted her ass up, wanting him with all of her body, and he licked at her pussy entrance, his velvety tongue shooting sparks down her thighs, making her knees weak.

She bit her lips shut and decided to savor every kiss, every touch, as if it would be the last. Desperately hoping it wouldn’t be. She had to make him understand how much she loved him and how sorry she was for treating him otherwise.

Heat pooled at her center as he flicked his tongue over her pussy, twice, three times. She gripped tighter to the tree and bit back a moan.

“You started the merrymaking without me.” Gambel’s playful yet raw voice was only a few feet away.

She swiveled her head in his direction to see him grinning seductively. His golden eyes twinkled with a naughty glint and his muscled body flexed from head to toe.

Suddenly it dawned on her who Kaige had been calling. And why. He wished to share her. Her body reacted deceptively, heating up and breaking out in gooseflesh. Gambel swept his gaze over her, starting with her flushed cheeks and stopping at where Kaige parted her flesh, licking once more at her juices.

Her lover didn't acknowledge the intruder. But he did stop long enough to stand, take her trembling hand and guide her to the grassy area. She spread out on the soft ground and tugged at Kaige's hand, wanting him to lie with her. Her heart beat fast and hard against her ribs, so loud she couldn't hear the murmuring passing between the two men.

She didn't ask what they were planning. She already knew. Was it wrong that she was looking forward to it? Her body tingled with the anticipation of having their large, rough hands all over her at once.

Kaige spoke again to Gambel in their Were language. A language she was beginning to understand, slowly but surely. Her mind buzzed as she watched Gambel go to her pack and pull out her bottle of body oil. Kaige lay on his side beside her, propping up on his elbow. His hand splayed out on her belly, warming her skin. His silver eyes darkened and narrowed. She inhaled his calming scent and brushed her fingertips along the harsh angle of his jaw. His emotions were cloudy but his lust was evident. At least he didn't hate her. There was hope.

"Do you want this, Ambria? We won't touch you if you say no."

She licked her lips and tried to swallow but her throat was dry. If she sensed any reservation from either of the Weres, she would say no loud and clear. But the hunger spilling from both of them was thick and tangible. She nodded her head. "Yes."



## Chapter Eight

"All right." Kaige eyed her warily, as if trying to read *her* emotions.

She'd gladly tell him how she felt about him, how deeply she loved him, if he'd allow it.

At least she could show him.

She pushed against his chest and he obliged by easing onto his back. Still, he watched her with suspicion.

"What are you doing, sweetheart?"

She knelt in front of him, wedging his legs apart, and gripped the thick base of his cock. "This." She moistened her lips and dragged her tongue over his clipped head, tasting his earthy pre-cum, loving the silky hardness of him.

Kaige hissed in a breath and propped himself on his elbows to watch her next move. His hands grabbed at the long tufts of grass by his sides. Behind her, Gambel murmured something that sounded like *so fucking beautiful*.

She had their attention. All sad or angry feelings had whooshed away with their combined intakes of breath and what remained was a dense lust that wrapped around her like a hot, damp blanket. It clung to her curves, titillating her nerve endings and heating her core.

With renewed confidence, she met Kaige's smoldering gaze. "I love your cock," she said boldly and licked him again—one long, devouring taste along his ever-hardening shaft.

Kaige's ragged breathing was the only thing she could hear in the otherwise silent forest clearing. He stared at her with such longing, it took her breath away.

He was hers.

She wouldn't allow him to deny that. After everything was said and done, they belonged together. No other woman could love him as much as she did and her love would be forever.

To be rejected by him wasn't an option she was willing to consider.

She guided his hard shaft into her mouth, wetting him with her tongue, taking him in deep. Her lips tightened around his width and she sucked. His skin was taut. His flavor was uniquely Kaige. Potent and hers. Drugging. He filled her mouth and yet she took him in deeper, not able to get enough. She moaned at the feel of his engorged head pressing against the roof of her mouth. There was never a better fit.

"Ambria." His voice was low and intimate. "That feels so good, lover."

Her taste buds awakened as they swept along his smooth skin. Her mind was lost in the paradise that was Kaige's essence. Yet she couldn't help but notice when Gambel reached behind her and scooped her hair from her face. His fingers grazed her heated skin as he pulled her locks into a loose ponytail behind her neck. His touch was gentle and patient, which belied the eagerness humming from his body.

A pang of warmth settled low in her belly as his erection brushed against her ass. Mmm. Was it wrong to want him there as she sucked on her lover's cock? No, they weren't objecting. They wanted this as much as she did, if not more. She shyly and inconspicuously hitched her bottom up toward Gambel, allowing his hardness to sit cozily against her ass cheeks.

Gambel's breathing grew harsher but he remained a gentleman, not letting her hair fall back into her face. His free hand felt calloused but tender as he slid it up and down her back, getting her used to his touch.

She centered her attention back on Kaige, sucking on his thick shaft, drawing him in, with fervor and need. The need to taste his release in her mouth. The need to excite him as he did her. The need to love him.

Kaige lifted his hips and met her pace, pushing, driving. A purr vibrated up her throat and against his pulsing erection. He groaned.

"Hell. Ambria." He thrust once more and his body tensed.

A thrill shot through her, knowing he was close to release. She slurped and stroked him with her tongue, drawing him deep, thrusting him over the edge. His body shuddered and hot cum shot to the back of her throat. She swallowed, indulging in his taste and the power she had over him.

Ragged masculine breathing and throaty groans filled the night air.

Gambel tugged on her hair just enough to ease her away from Kaige's still-hard cock—his restrained power obvious and...exciting—while Kaige braced her jaw and guided her, as well. She reluctantly released Kaige, licking at him one last time as they collectively drew her aroused body up to face her lover.

Her cheeks felt flushed as she met Kaige's gaze. His eyes were glazed and wanting, luring her to him. He didn't have to tug hard to pull her on top of him.

"Straddle me, sweetheart," he said huskily.

"I want you, Kaige." She mindlessly obeyed him, placing one leg on each side of his hips. Her pussy was aching with need. She was so ripe for him that wetness dampened the inside of her thighs. Just one thrust of his thick cock would set her off, she was sure of it. She longed for it. "Please take me hard."

"Ah, sweetheart, I will, I promise. But come here first. I want to taste your sweet lips."

She leaned over and met him halfway as he strained up to take her mouth. He braced her face and crushed his lips to hers, greedy and desperate. She opened for his skilled tongue, knowing the pleasure it could bring her. His spicy taste mesmerized her, fed her, and she whimpered. Their lips molded together perfectly, their tongues tasting and battling. Licking and sucking.

But Ambria jerked back in surprise when she felt warm liquid drip onto her back and slide teasingly down her spine to in between her ass cheeks. The oil. It seemed Gambel wanted to play along.

She drew in a breath and tried to calm her rapid heartbeat as Gambel's hand followed the oiled path. He boldly slipped his fingers into her crevice and skimmed them over her anus, then he curved his hand back up her spine before she had time to react.

Kaige watched her closely, not giving her any sign that he objected. The gray of his eyes disappeared into blackness. His hands moved slowly, sliding down to her swollen breasts. He cupped them in his large palms and massaged with a possessive touch.

Gambel moved closer in, pressing his chest to her back as his fingers dipped down again, slipping between her ass cheeks. Two fingers put pressure on her anus and circled, teasing but not entering her.

"Oh my." She could barely think, let alone breathe, as each man touched her so intimately. A surge of heat flushed from one nerve ending to the other. From Kaige's touch to Gambel's.

"Do you like this?" Kaige asked quietly, as if only for her ears, though she knew Gambel could hear.

"Yes," she admitted. "Take me on another adventure, Kaige. I trust you implicitly."

"As you should, Ambria. Enjoy it."

She nodded stiffly and a moan escaped her throat. The long column of his cock pressed against her pussy. It wouldn't take much maneuvering to glide him into her hot, quivering sex. Or to feel Gambel's fingers penetrate her ass.

An urgent yearning thrummed through her, making her dizzy. Before she'd met these men, she'd never dreamed of having two cocks filling her at once but now it almost seemed a necessity.

Gambel's warm lips brushed her shoulder sweetly and Ambria felt his emotions like a feather in a soft breeze. The lust stirring in him alleviated some of his loneliness. His internal pain was not as potent as before.

He wanted her. Badly. They both did.

Well, tonight they would have her. And she would have them.

Kaige didn't give a fuck about anything but being deep inside Ambria. He craved her. Nothing and no one could stop that. Not at this moment while he held her soft flesh in his hands and felt her wet heat curving against his cock.

The other things that Lorze had said he could think about later. Much later.

Right now he yearned to be lost inside the depths of her impassioned brown eyes, inside the heat of her slick pussy. She stared at him as if he were a god to worship. Her innocence showed through even as four hands explored her body.

It was hard to believe she was here with him for any other reason than she wanted him, possibly loved him. A woman's love was something of an enigma to him, having never experienced the emotion in his long existence. But somehow he felt it from Ambria. Either that or she was the most talented manipulator he'd come across in all his days.

He pushed that thought aside as she shifted her moist, velvety flesh against his throbbing cock and a soft moan emanated from her delicate throat.

"Ambria." He groaned, losing himself in the sensation. Paralyzed, he could do nothing but take in her seductive beauty. Her pretty red nipples were pebbled between his fingers. Her soft breasts molded perfectly in his grip. Her skin was flushed pink.

Her lips were swollen from his harsh kisses and from working his shaft.

They parted and let out a small whoosh of air. Kaige glanced up at Gambel to see him kissing her neck. His hands gripping her ass. Soon, they'd fill her body, elevating her to a new level, driving her into unadulterated ecstasy. Into the way of the Weres. Of uninhibited sensuality.

His groin tightened painfully, impatiently. He couldn't wait another moment. Grabbing her hips, he lifted her off him and then used one hand to guide his cock to her pussy. The head of his shaft skimmed over her ripened pink skin and found her taut entrance.

She cried out a sweet sound that motivated him even more. He longed to please her just as much as he longed to fulfill his own needs. Slowly she sunk down on his shaft, cushioning him in warmth. Her hot, slick pussy molded to his cock as if she were made for him and him alone.

If this was their last night together, he'd make it worthwhile. Hell, he'd make it so the enchanting witch would never be able to forget him.

Ambria bit into her bottom lip, thrilled Kaige was finally inside her. She held herself up by grasping onto his muscled chest. Her knees were so weak she feared she'd topple over. But he gripped her hips and kept her stable.

His cock curved into her walls, gliding in so snug, she felt the angle of his cock, the ridge of his head. She descended down on him completely, until he filled her pleading cunt.

"Ah, yes, Kaige," she moaned.

He stared up at her with a gentle, yet heated gaze. A look that told her he wanted to give her pleasure as much as he wanted to take his own. His emotions matched as he restrained the animal within him—the wolf. Ambria was sure a lesser man would burst under the pressure but not these two.

Behind her, Gambel poured more oil on her ass and then slowly slid his long finger past her rigid entrance and into her taut, sensitive channel. Even though she knew this was where the foreplay was leading, the action still shocked her.

"Gambel." She swerved her head and, surprisingly, met his lips.

He kissed her tenderly, his lips scorching her with their teasing touch. One hand braced her jaw as his finger eased in a little farther, gliding past sensitive nerves that only Kaige had discovered thus far. "Do you want me to fuck your pretty little ass, Ambria?" His voice was raw, his lips never leaving hers.

"Yes," she said, mindlessly. Her pussy squeezed tight around Kaige's cock as anticipation stiffened her body. "I want you both inside me."

Unrefined lust thickened around her and she didn't have to ask to know that they desired the same thing. Mystifying. She never thought she'd want two lovers at once but they'd keyed her up so thoroughly that she could think of nothing else.

Kaige's grip glided from her breasts and settled on her waist. Gambel removed his finger while Kaige lured her down until her beaded nipples scraped his chest. Drawling words streamed from his mouth and it took Ambria a moment to realize he was speaking to Gambel in Were.

"What did you say?" Her boldness weakened for a moment and she looked up at him for positive reinforcement.

"I told him to be good to you." Kaige's nostrils flared and his eyes narrowed as he reached farther down and molded his hands to her ass, spreading her cheeks for Gambel.

"Oh." From the huskiness of his voice, she was sure that was the tame version. Her heart pounded a rapid beat and her eagerness returned. Wanting to stay grounded, she sifted her fingers into Kaige's dreads and held on. She had to hold on, afraid what was about to happen would be too much for her to handle.

Two men. Two strong, feral Weres. All for her.

She nestled her forehead into Kaige's neck and inhaled his calming scent. Underneath the intense desire, she sensed something more. Something encompassing. To ease the vulnerable side of her, she decided it was love. Unconditional love that would keep them together through any trial, through any misunderstanding.

All her thoughts dissolved when Gambel poured another dose of warm oil on her bottom. The liquid dribbled down to where she connected with Kaige and down farther, onto him, judging from how Kaige's pulse thumped faster against her face.

He lifted his hips and his cock lodged deeper into her pussy. The slight movement set off smoldering warmth that surged up into her womb. She nuzzled her nose further into his beating pulse and a breathy moan gushed from deep in her throat.

Gambel rubbed two fingers against her anus then slipped both into her taut entrance. Her nerve endings sparked and tickled at the feel of him loosening her, preparing her. She easily stretched for him.

She was more than ready for him. "Now." Her mind grew fuzzy again and she rocked her hips, grinding down on Kaige then arching up toward Gambel. "Fuck me now."

*Push me farther than I've ever gone.*

Kaige groaned and gripped her ass tighter. "Hold still, lover. Be patient."

Gambel removed his fingers and leaned over her. So close. His heavy cock rested against her ass as he poured more oil, lubricating them both. Ambria dared to turn her head and look back at him...and at her compromising position.

Exposed and sandwiched between two gorgeous men, she'd never felt more beautiful, more desired.

Gambel met her gaze and held it as he guided his cock toward her anus. The dark sensuality in his golden eyes sent a new wave of heat up her belly and she let out a whimper.

"Are you ready for me, Ambria?" He didn't wait for an answer. Gently, he inched in, past her entrance. Just a pinch of pain before his engorged head slipped through.

Instant pressure built in her pussy. Sparks splintered up her belly and down her thighs.

She turned back into Kaige's embrace. Another throaty moan escaped her throat as Gambel's shaft slid in slowly, side by side with Kaige. They jam-packed her body with their powerful cocks, stretching her beyond what she thought was possible. But pain was far from her mind. No, her body had never felt more sated, more full.

"Oh, sweet love." Kaige released her ass and ran his hands up her back to brace her jaw. He tilted her head up and molded his lips to hers. His tongue thrust into her mouth, sweeping it along hers. His intoxicating taste only added to the pleasure.



Gambel grabbed her hips and inched even farther in. Lights flashed behind her eyes as her tight channel slowly welcomed him in. A string of murmuring words drifted from him, into the night air, and Ambria wished she had full understanding of the Were language.

He eased out halfway and slid back in. Ambria whimpered against Kaige's kiss. The way her lover's cock seemed to swell inside her pussy had her eyes tearing up.

Bliss. It was the only word she could think of—the only word that managed to form in her lust-drugged mind. Tiny pinpricks of delight scattered across her midsection then down her weakened thighs. She broke from the kiss and bit into her lips. Her fingers clasped on tight to Kaige's locks.

He didn't seem to care as he drove his hips up, down, then up again, matching Gambel's movements. They moved together—an unspoken conspiracy to drive her mad with ecstasy.

Their bodies were moist with perspiration and oil. They glided together, synchronized. Each driving movement jostled her body, intensifying the building pressure. The scent of musky wild pheromones aroused her. Their lust embraced her.

She curled her toes as they packed tight and deep together. Her body tensed as a powerful wave of heat built high and higher. *Oh, wow.* Then it crested and splintered into a thousand bolts.

She cried out loud, her voice echoing throughout the forest as the sensation electrified her then gushed from her scalp to the tips of her toes. "Yes. Yes. Yes." Her eyes flooded with tears and her entire body shook.

There. The pinnacle. It was enough to make her sob with joy. She smiled deliriously against Kaige's skin as she savored the thrilling sensation as it crashed through her.

His embrace tightened around her as both Weres shuddered and filled her with their hot liquid. Naughty, throaty groans tickled her ears, pleasing her that they both enjoyed the passion.

A silent moment passed – aftershocks hummed through her – and she sighed with satisfaction.

Gambel eased out of her. His breathing slowed and he leaned over to kiss the center of her back. “You’ll always hold a place in my heart, Ambria. Thank you.” His hand swatted her ass playfully but she sensed his loneliness more than ever as he stood. He changed into wolf form and darted out into the shadows of the forest before she had a chance to respond.

“Gambel,” she called out and sat up on Kaige. But only a slight breeze in the air answered her. What would she have said, anyway, to make him feel better? Although she’d loved being shared by the two Weres, her heart solely belonged to Kaige. She couldn’t pretend otherwise.

“You were good for him,” Kaige murmured and squeezed her thigh. Still inside her, he rolled them over until she was beneath them. “And me... For a time.”

A mixture of emotions swirled from his mind as he looked down at her with guarded eyes. Other than his continued desire, none of his feelings were pleasant. A sense of dread punched her chest, leaving her breathless.

This wasn’t what she’d expected or hoped for after the experience they’d just shared.

“You don’t trust me, do you?” She laid her hands on his steely shoulders.

His hips shifted, allowing him to wedge himself deeper into her.

Though she was exhausted from the threesome, her body reacted to him. Tingling warmth prickled along her skin and she bit back a moan.

“If this is going to be our last night together...” He paused and lowered his gaze as if he didn’t have the strength to look her in the eye. “Then I don’t think we should waste time arguing.”

Her heart sliced open, raw and exposed. "Our last night? Kaige, you don't mean that." She wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. Surely he wasn't breaking off their relationship while he still had his hard cock inside her.

He slid his hand to her breast and massaged. "Let's not pretend this affair we're having is anything other than me paying you for sex." He met her gaze, anger blazed in his eyes while sorrow streamed from his body. "And I'd like my money's worth."

## **Chapter Nine**

The force with which she shoved him off her body surprised Ambria. Kaige fell to the ground beside her with an impressive thud.

Good. He deserved it. She may have made the mistake of seducing Kaige for the wrong reasons but she'd fallen in love with him as a result. She wouldn't allow him to treat her as if she were a whore.

"How dare you?" She scrambled to her feet but he grabbed her wrist and yanked her back down on top of him. Her palms planted flat against his chest.

"Where do you think you're going, Ambria?" He reached to his side and picked up her necklace that he'd taken off her earlier. His fist whitened as he gripped her treasured jewel in his hand. "So you kept this. Why? Couldn't find a buyer?"

"Give it to me. You're going to break it." She grasped his wrist and attempted to open his fist, her heart throbbing achingly all the while.

"Why do want it when it means nothing to you?" He jerked his hand back and a couple of the gems surrounding the onyx crumbled off.

"Kaige, please. It's all I have left of you. Please don't ruin it."

His jaw locked tight as he stared at her. "It's all you have left. So it's all true then?" His voice was deep and pained, matching his emotions.

Ambria blinked back the tears blurring her eyes and gave up trying to grab hold of her beloved necklace. "I'm so sorry," she whispered, the only words she could get out past her tight throat.

"You're sorry?" He shook his head. "Damn it. No, Ambria." Faster than she could take a breath, he rolled over on top of her again, pinning her to the grass with his brawny body, his eyes burning with fury.

She should've been frightened but all she could think to do was savor his closeness, knowing it might not last for much longer. With shaking hands, she braced his stubborn jaw and inhaled his feral scent. She'd never wanted to fight for anyone before, certainly not Ramsey when he left her so long ago.

But she wanted to fight for Kaige.

With renewed courage, she strained her neck up and brushed her lips across his terse, stubborn mouth. "I've fallen in love with you, Kaige."

"Another lie?" He arched an eyebrow but his lips softened some as she kissed him again.

She swallowed her pride and forgot the pain she knew damn well came with rejection. "No more lies. I love you, Kaige. I'll work to get you back every jewel, every gold piece you've ever given me if that's what it takes to win your heart. I'll do anything for you."

His lips loosened more and she sensed the war within him. Anger. Desire. Distrust. Love. Regret.

Love. She hung on to that emotion with hope.

She knew of his history with the Vampires, of how they'd enslaved him and used him for his blood. In the past few weeks, she'd broken through the wall he'd built to keep from being hurt like that again. His anger had dissolved when he was with her.

Until now.

Now she had to make up for what was lost. She sloped her body up higher and met his lips again. Her hands gripped his jaw and eased him down. She licked his bottom lip and pulled it between her lips, trying her best to be seductive.

"Ambria," he whispered and she felt his resolve weakening.

But not enough, apparently.

He broke the kiss and blew out a breath. "There's a creek just down the way. Why don't you go clean up?"

"Then what?"

"Then I'll take you home."

"With you. I won't go anywhere else."

He shoved off the ground and sat beside her, scrubbing a hand across his face. "Go wash up." His gaze flickered over her body and she felt the heat behind it, giving her new hope. "We'll talk when you're done."

\* \* \* \* \*

In the light of the three-quarter moon, Kaige watched Ambria from a distance as she splashed the creek water onto her face and body. He squatted at the top of the hill, partially hidden behind a tree, and stared at the beauty before him. The drops of water spilled over the swell of her breasts and down the feminine curve of her belly as she scooped the clear liquid up and over her.

His cock hardened at just the sight of her. He longed for her. Again.

Damn it all to hell.

He would forgive her. There was no point in pretending that she didn't own his soul. He was angry and irritated. His pride had taken a beating. His ego had been knocked off kilter. She'd seduced him and used him, sold almost every gift he'd ever given her for the benefit of her coven.

Knowing all that, he still loved the woman. He was forever in love with her, actually. Amazing. She'd easily maneuvered herself into his life and made it so he could think of no one else. Too easily, he'd fallen. Too hard.

The wind shifted and a peculiar scent stung Kaige's nose. He stiffened as the unusual foreign odor wafted with the breeze.

Vampires.

He sniffed the air again. A werewolf was with them. Not anyone from his pack but the scent was familiar.

Panic pulsed in his veins as he stood. They were close. Judging from the direction of the wind, they were closer to Ambria. Fuck. Every protective bone in his body wanted to run to her and remove her from any threat but he tried to remain calm.

She stepped out of the creek and onto the grassy bank. Obviously sensing his fear, she jerked her head up and met his gaze with wide, terrified eyes.

Kaige put his finger to his lips to silence her. A Vamp wouldn't be able to smell her, not like a wolf could, but it certainly would be able to see her. Or hear her. He only hoped the Were in their group didn't point them toward Ambria.

He just needed to get her out of the forest and into the safety of his home. It wasn't far from here, a mere dash down the mountain. Hopeful, he gestured for her to come to him, though it seemed she'd already decided that on her own. She crossed her arms over her breasts and began up the hill, her eyes large with fright.

Wanting to comfort her, he calmed his mood and thought of the night they would spend together in his room. Of how he planned to make her his mate. They'd spend the rest of their immortal lives together. She'd have his children.

His thoughts about his future with Ambria was halted, along with his ability to breathe, as three Vamps and a Were emerged from the shadows of the forest trees and into the clearing by the bank of the creek.

He recognized the Were immediately and somehow wasn't surprised to see Ramsey Trent head the group. The Vamps standing behind him switched their sharp gazes from Ambria to Kaige and back again, assessing them. The trio was of equal height, each above six feet, suited in fine velvet jackets, white linen shirts and tailored slacks. As if they were at dinner rather than hiking through a mountainous forest.

Kaige had never seen them before. The Vamps that had enslaved him lived in a country on the other side of the continent. These three looked somewhat more refined as the Vamps that had captured him had apparently been turned in a less civilized era, in a less prosperous part of the world.

He'd heard about how the Okantalor Vamps perceived themselves as being one of the more prestigious Vamp covens on this continent. Snooty Vamps. Ha. Kaige held back a snort. Didn't matter who they were as long as they got the hell out of Paqualette.

Kaige eyed Trent, wanting to find some answers.

A sneer formed across the Were's face, his expression both malicious and desperate at once. "There she is," he said, pointing to Ambria. "The immortal woman I was telling you about."

The immortal woman. The words echoed in Kaige's mind. Immortal. Ambria was immortal. *Oh, fuck.*

He ran down the hill to meet Ambria then stood in front of her, guarding her from the Vampires' curious stares. It didn't take a genius to figure out why they were interested in her.

Vamps drank from Weres because Weres wouldn't die, but the taste wasn't as satisfying as human blood. An immortal human, if that's what Ambria was, would surely cure that problem.

*Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.*

"There's no proof that she's immortal," he said quickly.

Ramsey snorted. "She hasn't aged in more than a century and she's not Were." He swiveled his head and nodded once to the Vamps, making his point.

Kaige turned around to face Ambria. Her brown eyes stared back at him in sheer horror and he wondered if she could sense the Vampires' emotions. Hell.

"Convince them, Ambria. You're not immortal. Tell them that."

She opened her mouth as if to argue but shook her head instead and said, "All right."

"Good." Kaige swung her in front of him but wrapped his arms around her, trying to cover her nakedness as much as possible. They didn't need another reason to desire her. "Go ahead, tell them."



Her body trembled against him but her words were steady. "Count Kollens is right." She used his title but the Vamps didn't so much as blink an eye. "There is no proof that I can't die easily. My body has never been tested. I've never been ill or seriously injured. I simply don't age in appearance, that's all."

One of the Vamps, the darker-haired one who stood somewhat straighter than the other two—probably the one in charge—grasped Ramsey's shoulder. "You said you were certain."

Ramsey jerked away and stomped his foot like a spoilt child. "I am certain. I'll test it myself, if I have to."

Kaige growled in warning. He'd fight to the death before he allowed Ramsey to touch her. And he sure as hell wouldn't allow her to be enslaved by these bloodsucking Vamps.

Ambria set her hand on his forearm to calm him. "Why are you doing this, Ramsey? What do they have over you?"

Ramsey barked out a devious laugh but the red-haired Vamp knocked him to the ground, shutting him up. "Let's simply drain her and see if she lives, Morten. If I have to have this imbecile as my blood slave for another day, I'll end up tearing his head off with my bare hands."

Ambria stilled in Kaige's arms. "Ramsey, you bastard. You told them I couldn't die so they'd take me in exchange for you."

Kaige tugged her closer as a new round of panic ran ragged through his body. The Vamps were considering this. There was no time to sit around and debate Ambria's mortality. Their gazes leveled on her, devouring her, wanting her.

"Hold on to me, Ambria," he whispered in her ear.

Not a moment could be spared. He ignored the fear of losing the only woman he'd ever loved—the only woman who'd ever dared to look past his hard shell and love him back—and set into action the only way he knew how to save her.

He lifted her quickly and threw her onto his back. Then he transformed and ran faster than he'd ever run in his life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ambria clung to Kaige's neck and didn't dare look back at their followers. She'd never seen a Vampire up close before but she'd heard how fast they were and how brutal they were in battle. The three with Ramsey had proven all the other rumors she'd heard. Behind their fine clothing and human appearance, there was no mercy in their emotions, no empathy for anyone in their presence. Only selfish desire and annoyance.

Damn Ramsey! She'd cry if she weren't so angry and terrified.

The Vamps wanted to drain her blood. To see if she was truly immortal. She wasn't sure what alternative was worse. To die today or to become their blood slave for any amount of time. Given the fierce determination and boiling rage flooding from Kaige, she was sure the Vamps would have a hell of a fight on their hands.

If they ever caught up.

Kaige bounded down the mountain, hurdling boulders and swerving past trees. The cold air whooshed against her face and whipped her hair around. But she held on tight to Kaige's fur, knowing the fall to the ground would be painful and possibly deadly, considering who nipped at their heels.

She could sense they were close. The Vamps and Ramsey. Ramsey's hunger to capture her was potent. She sensed that above anything else. He was desperate. In any other circumstance she might've felt sorry for him. But he wanted to put her in harm's way for his own benefit. He wanted to take away her freedom to free himself.

It was wrong. Evil.

Another werewolf appeared out of nowhere and ran alongside Kaige. Ambria recognized him as Ever, whom she'd met once or twice. The dark mahogany fur gave him away. Then Gambel, also in wolf form, joined at the right.

Blanca, smaller but faster than the other Weres, pulled in front of the pack.

All for her. To save her life.

But where would they go? They had to stop at some point.

She jostled as Kaige leaped to jump another boulder. Her grip slipped and she desperately clasped at his fur. They landed on the ground with a jarring thud and her legs fell off his side, hitting the dirt. But she held on.

Pain seared up her outer thigh and calf as she scraped along the forest floor. She winced as rocks bumped her and left throbbing bruises. She cried out as her thigh collided into something sharp, lodging itself deep into her flesh. But she couldn't let go. The Vamps were too close.

She felt Kaige's worry and wasn't surprised when he came to a complete stop, allowing her to collapse to the ground.

His pack members halted as well and turned around to bravely face the oncoming enemy. They created a shield in front of her and she hoped she'd get the chance to thank them for their kindness and for protecting her as if she were one of them. It was silly for her to get emotional at that moment but she'd never felt so welcome in her life.

And after all Kaige had just learned of her deception, he still stood by her side. He wasn't giving her up without a fight. Her heart swelled and at the same time her leg seared with a burning pain.

She looked down and saw that scrapes and deep cuts ran the full length of her thigh and calf. The sharp, piercing pain was a stick from a tree branch that punctured deep just above her knee. She was bleeding. A lot.

Her stomach roiled but she ignored the nausea. She couldn't remember ever injuring herself this badly. She hadn't wanted to test her mortality, hadn't wanted to know how easy it could be to die.

Her mind was in shock as she looked past Kaige's enormous wolf body at Ramsey and the Vamps. They stood only a dozen feet away. The white of their fangs seemed to glow in the moonlight. Their stance said they were prepared to fight, as did the aggression she sensed from them.

Kaige and the other pack members prepared as well, baring teeth and growling.

"Leave now," Kaige said in a deep threatening voice. "Leave now and you'll be forgiven. Try to harm the human and you'll start a war that I swear to you Paqualette will finish, starting with this battle."

The Vamp who seemed to be the leader, Morten, laughed wickedly. "You're a fool, Were. Your queen started a war when she turned into one of you and allowed your kind into this country. The treaty is broken. Hand over the woman and we'll forgive you." He chuckled again. "Maybe."

"The woman belongs to me. She won't be going anywhere."

Morten's gaze shifted and met Ambria's. The coldness behind his glossy eyes sent a shiver to her neck. "Her blood smells sweet." He cocked his head. "Are you healing, my pet?"

Ambria tried to swallow down the painful knot in her throat but her mouth was too dry. She felt lightheaded, as if she might faint. But curiosity had her glancing down at her wound.

It still bled heavily. The red liquid ran off her leg and pooled on the fanned leaves that covered the ground.

"No," she said breathlessly, both thrilled and saddened at the same time. "I'm not healing."

"That doesn't mean anything," Ramsey barked out. "So she heals slower, so what? You can still feed off of her."

"Shut up, you fool," the blond-haired Vamp said and struck Ramsey in the head. Ramsey whined and cowered.

"You can't kill a human and you know that," Kaige said. "Word will spread. I'll make sure of it. You already have Weres as enemies. Do you really want humans against you as well?"

"Humans are weak," the third Vamp said, but silenced himself when the other two glared at him.

Kaige remained determined, Ambria sensed. "They may be weak but they're abundant," he said. "You're a civilized coven, I thought. Does your coven leader know you're here, even? Does the Okantalar High Council know you're here?"

A tense silence filled the air as the Vamps simply stared blankly for an uncomfortable amount of time. Kaige had obviously struck a chord. Ambria knew almost nothing of the Okantalar Vampires but she was glad that Kaige did.

"Why don't you let Dano here through to see the wound?" Morten gestured to the blond Vamp. "We'll leave peacefully if he sees that she isn't healing. I'm sure none of you want a battle with the fragile human so close."

"Ambria," Kaige began but kept his eyes on the Vamps. "What do you think of this?"

She took another look at how her leg oozed with blood and she had to swallow the bile rising to her throat. Half of the stick had jammed into her flesh and the sight was nauseating. She'd had superficial wounds before that had healed quickly. Nothing like this. Nothing so painful. It was the true test she'd both wanted and feared. Now that her question of mortality was being answered, her only wish was to have the god-awful wound stitched up and healing. But for the sake of the pack she remained calm.

A fight was the last thing she wanted for Kaige and the others who bravely protected her.

"Let him through," she said with all the strength she had left. Her head grew more lightheaded with every second passing.

Dano started toward her immediately but Kaige transformed into human form quickly and held out his arm to stop him.

"Put your fangs away first. If you so much as touch her, you'll have four wolves on you in a heartbeat. Understood?"

The Vamp nodded and Kaige let him pass. His long blond hair toppled to the forest floor as he kneeled beside her. Up close he was a beautiful man. If it weren't for the pale skin and dark shadows under his eyes, she wouldn't be able to tell he was anything but human.

He gave her a closed-mouth grin as he met her eyes then leisurely lowered his gaze down her body to her wound. He didn't seem to be affected in any way and his emotions were almost absent. Only slight disappointment shown through as he watched her blood drip to the ground.

"Yes, she does smell sweet." He stood to his feet and nodded to Kaige. "You'll want to get her to a physician before she bleeds herself dry." He turned to her and Ambria could've sworn he winked. "That would be a waste."

## **Chapter Ten**

Ambria struggled to open her eyes as Kaige carried her into his home. Wolves transformed into human form all around her. Their combined anxiety pressed at her temples, making her woozy but she could do nothing but lie limp in Kaige's arms.

"Push everything off the table," he ordered, sounding both concerned and furious. "Did Blanca leave to get the high priestess?"

"Yes, she left right away." Gambel's worry ripped through Ambria's sore body and a moan tore from her lips.

Why did it hurt so badly to feel his emotions? It was a sensation she'd never had to deal with and she wondered if her wound made her more susceptible. Her body was much weaker than normal.

She nuzzled her throbbing head into Kaige's warm chest, wishing the pain away. Was it her injury that made her weaker than normal? If she could just stop sensing the Weres' potent emotions, maybe she'd get some relief. But she didn't have the strength to order them away—or to speak at all, for that matter.

The sound of glass shattering and metal clanking on the ground told her the table had been cleared. But for what? Her mind was too pained and fuzzy to concentrate. And her leg burned from the abrasions and the stick that was still lodged in her flesh. It wasn't getting any better.

Kaige carefully placed her on the solid wood table and she cringed at the coldness that touched her back. "Ever, get a blanket, would you? She's trembling. Gambel, find some hot water and a cloth so I can dress this wound."

She felt the moment when the other men left the room. Her mind eased and directed toward Kaige alone. Behind his thrumming anxiety and guilt she sensed something calming and tender. So she focused on that.

And some of her pain faded. From her leg to her head, a slight numbing sensation settled upon her, wiping away the agony.

She closed her eyes and relished in the relief. "Thank you," she whispered to no one in particular.

"Ambria." Kaige's hands cradled her face. "I'm sorry I let this happen to you. Stay with me, love." He leaned in close and she absorbed more of his calming tenderness. His love.

Yes, that's what it was. He loved her.

Footsteps thudded against the hardwood floor, nearing her, as well as a mixture of stressed emotions. And the pain came back, like sharp knives piercing into her skin.

Her eyes flew open as she cried out. Tears blurred her vision.

"Ambria, what is it?" Kaige ran his hands over her frantically. "What can I do? I'll do anything."

She grasped at his palm and squeezed. "Tell them to leave." She choked out the words, desperation fueling her. "Please."

He looked at the men. "Ever. Gambel. Go out of here. I'll call you if I need you."

"But I..." Gambel let his words fade but Ambria felt his anguish, his need to help her. It sliced through her, causing the opposite effect. "All right. If that's what she wants." He tossed some shreds of cloth onto the table beside her and set down a basin of water, then followed Ever out the door.

Ambria let out a sigh of relief. She hadn't liked hurting Gambel but with the two Weres gone, her pain lessened. How odd that an injury would do this to her. Apparently, the Were plague had only turned her into a human empath and extended her life. She was just as frail as the next person.

At least now she knew she could die. The longtime question had been answered. She just hoped she wouldn't breathe her last breath today. Not when she wanted more time with Kaige.



He stared at her thigh, a curious expression on his face. He quickly grabbed a cloth and moved to hold it over the wound. But he stopped short and his mouth took in a rush of air.

"The stick pushed itself out," he said and met her gaze. "Like it would an immortal. But you're still bleeding. I'm afraid you can't lose any more blood, love."

"I'll try not to." She conjured a smile, trying to calm his guilt. "It's not your fault, Kaige."

His tenderness poured over her. "I don't know what I would've done if they captured you. I suffered as a Vamp's blood slave and I couldn't let that happen to you."

"You didn't. You protected me." She stroked her fingers along his calloused palm, then grasped his hand and brought it to her lips.

His love wrapped around her, covering her in warmth, numbing the rest of her pain.

Her weak heart beat a little bit faster and her rapid breathing slowed, as if someone was removing a heavy foot pressed to her chest.

"You're helping me, Kaige." She wanted to tell him how, that his love was what was making her feel better but she was afraid he'd deny it. His rejection had hurt so terribly bad earlier. She wouldn't be able to handle it a second time. "I'm sorry I sold your gifts. I truly am. I'll get them all—"

He brushed his knuckle down her cheek. "Shush, Ambria. I'll buy you more. I'll give you the world. Just concentrate on healing, all right?" The gray of his eyes flickered with a silvery light and he offered her a cautious grin. "I don't want to lose you."

Goose bumps prickled her skin as his words sunk in. "I don't want to lose you either." Her voice was stronger, she realized.

She was stronger.

His gaze dropped to where he held the cloth to her wound. He lifted it and let out a hushed sound of surprise. "You're healing." He met her eyes again. "Fast. The bleeding has stopped."

"It's your love." The words slipped out of her mouth but it was too late to take them back. "Emotions affect me in many ways. I know it seems strange but I think your love is helping me heal." She paused, hoping he'd speak up but he didn't. "You love me, don't you? Or am I sensing something else?"

He stared at her for a long moment, his jaw tensed, his eyes unreadable. If she didn't feel adoration pouring from him, she'd think he didn't like her at all. At least the anger that had vibrated from him since the day she'd met him was now gone. She hoped she had something to do with its absence.

"I love you, you know," she said as boldly as possible. "I didn't know what love was until I met you."

Still, he said nothing. Instead he leaned over, dipped a cloth into the water basin and wrung it out. With a gentle touch, he wiped her forehead, her cheeks and her lips.

He swept the cloth down her neck. Over her breast. Her skin tingled and heated.

"Kaige, why aren't you answering me?"

"Shhh. Don't fret, Ambria." He refreshed the cloth and slid it over her thigh, cleaning off the drying blood.

Afraid that his touch would hurt her wound, she jerked up to a sitting position but what appeared underneath the blood as he wiped her clean shocked her beyond words. There were no cuts. No abrasions. No marks. Nothing. It was as if she'd never been injured.

Relief flooded through her. And through Kaige as well.

He blew out a breath and his shoulders dropped. "I'd never been so worried in my life. How do you feel? Your color's returned."

"I feel fine." She felt amazing, more energized by the moment.

"I'm glad." He grabbed a fresh cloth and continued to wash her, touching her everywhere. When he reached between her legs, he sat on the table beside her and stared into her eyes.

Ambria was thankful the table was sturdy as the cloth gently rubbed against her clit, sending shivers up her body. She held on to his neck and kissed his lips.

He cocked his head and a grin curved his lips. "You know I'm not used to this love idea. I've never had a woman tell me that before."

Ambria held back a smile. "That's hard to believe."

He chuckled and smoothed the cloth over her stomach, stopping at her breast. "Some women seem to think I'm unapproachable."

"I can't imagine why."

He cupped her breast and squeezed gently. "Would it be awful to admit that I'm glad you used me?"

She sighed from his touch. "It would be odd."

"But it forced you to spend time with me, to see me like no other woman has."

"And to fall in love with you," she prodded, hoping he'd tell her what she felt in waves from his body. He loved her.

There was no doubt in her mind. Now if only he would admit it.

His smile widened. "You can sense how I feel, Ambria."

"True, but I want to hear it."

He slid off the table and eased her onto her back, forcing her legs to hang off the edge. She went willingly, happy to be healthy and hopeful to have Kaige's heart. And his body. Possibly for eternity.

She allowed her gaze to roam over the body in question. His delicious cock was hard and thick as it arched up toward his muscled abdomen. He leaned over her, grabbing the sides of the table on each side of her. But he still said nothing. To teach him a lesson, she kept her knees locked together.

"I love," he began and her heart sped up. But he paused to grip her knees and wedge her legs open. His gaze never left hers. "I love...to tease you."

"That's not funny, Kaige."

"I love," he lowered until his lips were so close to her pussy that she could feel his hot breath, "to please you." Two fingers spread her folds open and his warm tongue licked at her sensitive clit.

The thrilling sensation splintered up her belly and she clenched her hands at her sides. "Not funny at all," she managed to say.

He chuckled and Ambria thought about pushing him away. But she was too focused on the glorious fact that he wasn't pushing *her* away. After all that had happened, all that he'd learned of the seduction, he still loved her. Whether he admitted it or not.

Kaige saw the smile slip from her face and wanted nothing more than to bring it back. He'd almost lost her. To the goddamn Vamps. Then to a wound of his own doing.

He'd hurt her, could have killed her by dragging her along the forest floor. In his panic to keep her from being captured by the Vamps, he'd been too careless. Being enslaved by the Vamps was a hell he wouldn't wish on anyone, especially the woman who owned his soul.

He slid his hand over her thigh again, checking one more time. She had healed. Whether he believed the miracle was of his doing didn't matter. But if his love could keep her alive and safe from here to eternity, then he'd love her every damn day of his life.

Now to tell her that.

He opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. The emotion was new to him, the words even more foreign. But he couldn't deny them, nor did he want to. Not now.

She stared up at him, watching him closely, probably reading him like a book. He couldn't help but grin at her ability. For a man who had trouble showing his emotions, she was the perfect woman for him. All he needed to do was think it and she'd know it.

For whatever reason, she wanted to hear the words.

Fine.

He took her hands and pulled her up until she sat before him, his hips between her thighs. Her sensual brown eyes glistened in the low lamplight as she watched him closely, waiting. He cupped her face in his palms and kissed her sweet lips.

Then forced the three simple words out. "I love you."

She swallowed and grasped his forearms. "I know." A naughty smile tilted her lips and Kaige questioned his sanity once more.

An empath for a mate? Was he completely mad?

Before he could think another thought, she surprised him by running her hand down his abdomen, slowly, seductively. She bit into her lip and purred, as if she enjoyed touching him as much as he enjoyed feeling her hands on him.

With a teasing stroke, her hand skimmed lower and lower. He hissed in a breath as she gripped his hard shaft.

"I love you, too, Kaige Kollens." She spread her legs farther apart and lightly massaged his swollen cock. "Now come here."

Unable to resist the temptation, he inched closer, allowing her to draw him near. How could he resist her? Why would he want to?

"Was there ever a better seductress than you?" His cock throbbed as she rubbed the tip of his head against her moist pussy. The wet velvet against his sensitive shaft made him dizzy as all blood in his body drained to the contact point.

"Only for you, Count," she whispered. "Kiss me."

He met her hot mouth, molded it to his own, in a needy desperation. A lifeline. Her lips were soft and pliable and *his*. Her tongue licked and explored and he responded

with eagerness, probably more forceful than he should have been but he couldn't stop now.

He'd never felt more unarmed against her power over him.

Nothing existed but the need to possess her. The wolf in him strained and cried out for more, not wanting to be left out. He groaned from the raw sensation burning him from the inside out. His human side loved her but his wolf side needed her.

To mate for life. To claim her. To make her his in the eyes of his pack.

She wrapped her legs around his hips and whimpered against his lips. "Please, fuck me, Kaige."

"I will, lover. Outside, in front of my pack."

Her eyes widened. "I like Gambel, I really do, but I only want you this time."

"Trust me, love. You'll only get me. From now on."

## **Chapter Eleven**

The sky above the thick tree line was a beautiful shade of amber, telling Ambria that the sun was rising. That as well as the pack of wolves who were transforming outside Kaige's home. Seven of them gathered around, watching her closely as Kaige guided her, naked and exposed, to a patch of plush grass.

She braved their stares, knowing that nudity was normal for them. And was beginning to feel normal for her.

She so desperately wanted to be one of them. Not in physical sense. She knew she'd never be a full Were, transforming with them into wolves in the light of the moon. And she was okay with that. So, it seemed, Kaige didn't mind either.

Yet she longed to have them as her family, just as she'd had Lorzener's coven as her family for so many years.

The difference would be she'd have Kaige by her side, as her mate. And she would no longer be hiding from the world but rather living life to its fullest. She hoped anyway. Deep down, she knew this was her destiny and she'd do anything to have it.

With Kaige's hands rested on her hips, she faced the pack.

Faced Gambel.

His golden eyes were wide and alert as he started toward her. "You're healed?"

She smiled up at him, soaking in his relief. "I'm fine. Better than fine."

He took another step forward but Kaige's hands wrapped around her, shielding her from the other man's view. In a wash, Ambria felt Kaige's jealousy and his need to possess her swamp over her.

Gambel must have sensed it as well. He stopped mid-stride and took a step back. His grin twisted wickedly as he looked over her shoulder at Kaige. "What the hell are

you waiting for? If you're going to claim her then do it." He winked at her, disguising his solemn mood. "Or I will."

As if she'd give her heart to anyone but Kaige. As if she had that choice.

"Not in this lifetime, friend," Kaige said gently but Ambria could sense the testosterone churning and the thick, raw emotions pouring from each Were. "Step away from her."

Ambria's breath gushed from her lungs at how they glared at one another, as if declaring a challenge. But, surely, the longtime friends wouldn't fight over her.

Finally Gambel lowered his head and dropped back to join the rest of the pack. "You're the better Were," he murmured as he walked away.

Kaige didn't respond. His silence was answer enough.

And his actions.

His grip tightened on her waist and he drew her down until she kneeled on the grass with him behind her. "Ambria." His breath was warm against her shoulder. His hands slid along her stomach, up to caress her breasts.

The Weres still watched. Gambel. Ever. Xavier. Arianne... Everyone but Blanca.

She'd met and befriended them all at one point. She knew them, cared for them. They'd all accepted her as Kaige's lover. And now it seemed they accepted what was happening in front of them. Which was good because she couldn't stop Kaige even if she wanted to. Determination vibrated from him.

"You're mine, Ambria."

Her mind grew fuzzy as one of his hands slipped over her mound. His fingers spread her folds then one eased into her moist pussy. "Oh, my." Her knees wobbled but she kept her balance. It was happening. The ritual was simple but still she couldn't keep her heart from thumping against her chest.

He slid his finger out, now wet with her juices, and raked it over her clit. She closed her eyes, ignoring any inhibitions, and enjoyed the feel of him fondling her, loving her.



His hard cock angled up between the juncture of her thighs and curved into her pussy, slick and tight. Up and in, filling and stretching.

But not deep enough. Just a tease.

She spread her knees more, allowing him to slide in farther, grazing her G-spot. Heat coiled in her womb and she bit into her lip. The soft grass tickled her inner thighs and the rising sun kissed her skin.

“Ambria.” His voice was deep and rough, as if he was holding back from fucking her hard. “You’re mine and I’m yours.”

She moaned at his short, slow movements which were pushing her higher and higher.

He stilled, stopping the pressure from building. “Tell me you’re mine.”

She didn’t hesitate. “Kaige, I’m yours. Forever, I’m yours.”

“And?” He eased out, then in again. Slow and tormenting, leaving her on the pinnacle of release.

“Kaige, and you’re mine. Please.”

He let out a husky chuckle then drove into her, his cock sweeping in at an angle that had her gasping for breath. He thrust again, gliding easily into her slick channel. His fingers, still on her clit, circled just a bit harder and his other hand massaged her breast. Her insides wound tight. Coiled and ready to burst.

Kaige’s love wrapped around her yet she could feel the other Weres wanting to hold her too. Each one of them reached out with their minds and encompassed her with their desire and their passion. They accepted her in Kaige’s arms, as Kaige’s mate, and they wanted to see her satisfied.

Her heart filled with something she’d never felt before. Approval. Sanction. Her mind was open to them and their thoughts were pure and friendly. And, of course, lustful.

She opened her eyes and smiled as she met each of their passionate gazes. She felt their urging for her to orgasm, to reach a pinnacle. And she was.

Her body pulsed with Kaige's deep, filling thrusts. He rammed against her inner walls, jostling her breasts with each jolting movement. Heat skittered along her skin and surged down her belly to her inner thighs. A cry stuck in her throat as a sweet wave began where his cock drove into her. It crested high and higher until she couldn't hold it up any longer. Nor did she want to. She released the orgasm and it crashed through her. Splendid and freeing. Her cry broke free out into the silent morning air as Kaige came along with her. He held her close as his body shuddered.

The Weres surrounding her soaked the lovemaking in, she sensed. Not only did they accept the mating, they rejoiced in it. And Ambria not only felt bonded to Kaige, but to his pack as well.

Her heart swelled and her body relaxed as they stretched their bodies out onto the grass. Kaige held her in his arms and brushed his lips across hers. "Do you have any idea how happy you've made me?"

Ambria laughed. "Do you want me to answer that?"

He shook his head and smiled. "An empath. What am I thinking?"

"You're thinking that—"

"Ambria!" A woman's scream pierced the air and Ambria and Kaige jumped to their feet. All eyes turned into the direction of the distressed call.

"What the hell?" Ever and Gambel ran down the road toward the woman.

Ambria squinted her eyes and her stomach turned at what she saw. "Lorzener. Oh, no. She's hurt."

"Where's Blanca?" Kaige stiffened. "Blanca was supposed to be with her."

Anxiety flooded the air, pressing against Ambria's temples as they both ran to meet Lorzener and the rest of the pack.

The Priestess had scratches but didn't seem to be bleeding too badly. "They took her." Her eyes were reddened as if she'd been crying. "They took your wolf."

"Blanca?" Kaige asked, his fists tight at his side. "Did the Vamps take Blanca?"

Lorzener nodded her head. "I tried to fight them. I tried to use magic to stop them, but they were too strong. They wanted her."

The Vamps. Ambria's stomach churned again. Her face flushed and she felt lightheaded.

"No," Kaige said through clenched teeth. "She's used. They wouldn't take her again. Shit. Unless they just want to anger us and sell her to the highest bidder."

"I should have been the one to go." Ambria could barely whisper. "They gave up too easily."

"Don't say that." Kaige drew her into his arms. "Blanca can survive this. You wouldn't have been able to."

*Maybe so but this wouldn't have happened if Ramsey hadn't recognized me.*

"She can't survive a second time," Gambel said, his voice rising. "What are we going to do about this? This is war, Kaige."

"I know it's war, damn it. Trust me. But we need to think clearly. Blanca needs to be found as soon as possible and brought to safety before any violence breaks out. Gambel, Ever, will you form a rescue team?"

"Of course," they both said.

Kaige nodded once. "After we get her back, and we will, the Vamps will be sorry they ever fucked with Paqualette and this pack." Kaige wrapped his arm around Ambria's waist and his anger quickly dissolved to what could only be love. "And my mate."

## About the Author

Lia Slater thinks the world would be a better place if everyone read romance novels. There's so much to learn from the storylines. Love. Loyalty. Confidence. Passion. Desire. Conflicts would be resolved with happy endings. And, of course, the sex would be mind-boggling.

Lia is well on her way to helping the world become a better place by writing steamy romance with heart-pounding emotion.

Lia welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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