



MATING
CALL

IMMORTAL COUNCIL

COURTNEY BREAZILE

His voice calls to her in a place where she cannot deny it. It excites her so she doesn't want to deny it. She will deny it all to save her principles. He wants her, his wolf won't leave her. He will give her what she needs, whether she likes it or not.

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ISBN: 978-1-55487-654-9

Cover art by Angela Waters

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MATING CALL
THE IMMORTAL COUNCIL BOOK 4

BY

COURTNEY BREAZILE

DEDICATION

To my number one motivator and sounding board, Casady thanks for always supporting and listening.

CHAPTER ONE

“What do you mean they won’t leave? Tell them to leave, I have no desire to see them and they have no right to demand anything of me. My brother may be obsessed with following dogs and fish around, but I certainly am not.” Lillian spoke with a perfected calm self-assurance that was typical of the elfin population. No emotional inflection to her words, simply stated and forgotten. She continued to pluck at the grapes she held in her hand, popping them into her mouth and savoring each sweet burst as if there was nothing more important.

The guard didn’t leave. “But, Lillian, I assure you, we have tried. They are refusing to leave until they have spoken with you.”

He, too, spoke with unemotional calm, but his, Lillian knew, was different than her own. “This is my brother’s doing. Why am I left to deal with the windfall of his insanity?” Lillian sent the man away, resigned to have to see the unwelcomed visitors. But first, she would call her brother. He

should be here to deal with this, not her. He had left her alone, unbalanced and completely without anchor. Her brother had always been there to help keep her centered, calm and unemotional. Since he took off after that damn fish, she had been finding it increasingly difficult to project the calm façade she once so easily produced.

Of course, it didn't help that she should be resting right now, it was late afternoon and most immortals tended to stick to the dark for their business. It was safer that way, less chance of human notice. She had been up before the guard knocked on her door, awakened by a familiar dream that always left her with raw, frazzled nerves.

A baby's cries cut short, her body empty and her heart broken. They were intense feelings and her dreams had produced them over and over with increasing frequency.

She searched through her drawers for the infuriating phone Lucas had left her for emergencies while he was away. She hit the one and only number programmed in and waited with a tapping foot for the no good species lover to answer.

"Yes, Lillian," came the exasperated reply

"Lucas, I require your assistance at home."

Lillian was impressed with the simple calm in her voice as she spoke those words, when what she

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really wanted to do was yell and scream and demand he come back home.

“You know I’m in the middle of something, Lillian, what is it now?”

Lillian nearly huffed at him for his indifferent attitude, as if she’d been calling for no good reason at all. Well okay, maybe a couple times she had called him when it wasn’t completely necessary, but now was not such an occasion. “There are two werewolves outside the colony walls, demanding to see me.”

“So, what do you need me for? Either you want to see them or you don’t.”

“I don’t know why they are here. It can’t be safe for me to let them in, not without you here as well.”

“Lillian, you are about as far from helpless as an immortal can get. You no more need me there than I need you here. They are asking for you, you deal with it. Make them love you, then find out their intentions.”

She wished it was that easy. “It’s just not right, Lucas, without you here, we are off balance.” *I am off balance.*

“I’m sorry for that, Lillian, but not enough to return. My presence is not necessary for my laws to stand, and if there was an emergency, I would be there, you know that. I’m doing what I must, to balance my soul.”

“But— Oh! How dare he hang up on me,” Lillian stomped her foot and threw the phone, allowing the show of emotion only because she was alone. She’d never been as good at hiding her emotions as the other Animal Elves. For her, it had been a constant struggle, and with that, a lesser ability to access her magical gifts. Lucas’s presence had lent to her ability to calm and control, and quite often made it unnecessary for her to use her gifts at all. But even without him here, she would be just fine. She had more than enough practice avoiding harm and she would do so again today, without Lucas’s help.

Lillian took a calming breath, then flashed herself in front of the gated entrance to the colony where the two weres stood, refusing to leave. She recognized them immediately and almost flashed herself right back out of there. They were two of the five whom she had imprisoned recently, Jack and Staci. They were the parents of the young were she had imprisoned as well, Henry.

Lillian had no desire to speak with these weres who no doubt wished to see her dead for their imprisonment, even though they, and the abominations, had gotten off free and clear because of her traitorous brother.

The weres weren’t angry, Lillian could tell by the color of their eyes. Completely brown eyes on a werewolf meant calm. If they started to turn

yellow, she would immediately flash away. The female, Staci, took a step forward, but one of Lillian's guards held a menacing gun between them. It wouldn't kill the keeper, but it would hurt and no creature wished for pain. Staci didn't step any closer, but her eyes were pleading as she looked at Lillian.

"Please, we need your help or they will kill him." Tears rolled down Staci's cheeks.

Lillian could hear the baying of Staci's wolf counterpart, invisible to a human's and most immortal's eyes and ears. A werewolf was made up of two separate but impossibly connected beings, the keeper and the wolf counterpart. The keeper was the human part, with some extra abilities such as super human strength, hearing and smell, as well as other gifts on occasion. The wolf counterpart was just that, a wolf. Only it was invisible except in moonlight, and as the moon grew fuller, the wolf became more tangible until on the full moon, the keeper and its counterpart merged and became a werewolf. Then they would run and hunt and play until dawn, then split and go on waiting for the next full moon. Of course, if they were made angry enough, they could merge as well, without the aid of the moon, but this was something most tried quite hard to avoid. It was the younger more inexperienced that always seemed to have trouble with this.

Because she was an Animal Elf, Lillian was able to see and hear the wolf almost as well as she would see and hear a regular wolf. It wasn't something she liked to admit and so, as she listened to the pained cry of the forlorn animal, she didn't even flinch or look in its direction. Even though for her it was a horrible thing to listen to an animal in such distress. Every instinct in her screamed out to help the poor animal in any way possible. It is what her powers were made for.

The terrible sorrow continued and her emotions stirred in response, she quickly steeled herself against them. "Who and what are you speaking of?" she demanded with just a hint of strain evident in her voice.

"Henry, my son, he will be killed soon because none have been able to reach him. He refuses to split and even in wolf form, our alpha is unable to communicate with him."

Lillian remembered the young were. He had dark brown fur and huge accusing yellow eyes. It had been a frightening thing, so big and so animalistic. She remembered he had seemed completely lost to instinct after she imprisoned him. He had watched her carefully whenever she was near, looking at her as if he wanted to rip her to pieces. "I can't imagine why you would be here. If your son is in trouble, shouldn't you be with him?" she asked simply.

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“We’ve tried everything. There is nothing left we can do and Tarquin is going to kill him if he’s still like this by the full moon. That’s less than a week away,” she said, desperation clear in her voice.

“We think perhaps you could reach him. You can heal and communicate with animals after all,” Jack said, putting his hands comfortingly on his mate’s shoulders.

The gesture was sweet and Lillian felt a moment’s longing for such contact from another. She quickly buried it deep. Elves were not prone to such physical contact outside of one’s mate or young children.

“Would you be willing to at least see him? Try to fix the problem that, after all, *you* created,” Staci accused, her brown eyes yellowing slightly. Lillian’s guards closed in around her.

Lillian didn’t feel bad about what she had done. She was justified in her belief that Zyra and Tarquin should have been executed along with their half-breed abomination of a daughter, Alexia. This couple and their son had just been unfortunate bystanders to her apprehension of the others. However, she held no regret for this and so didn’t feel she owed them anything. She did inexplicably want to help the young were though, and so she would. “I will see him, where is he?”

Relief blanketed both Jack and Staci’s features.

Lillian saw both their wolves settle back on their haunches in a relaxed pose.

“He is being held in a cage at the Alpha’s house. He cannot be let out or we fear he will hurt someone,” Staci confessed.

“I will go to him and see if there is any chance I can be of assistance. I will require one of you to accompany me.” Lillian was not about to flash herself into that house without a hostage—she wasn’t looking to die today.

“Of course, take me with you and Jack will drive back.” Staci stepped forward and the guards let her pass, but stepped in front of Jack when he moved to follow his mate. “It’s alright, Jack, I don’t believe she wishes me harm...now,” Staci said as if that was going to reassure her were mate.

Lillian felt a little glow of satisfaction at the look of unease and anger in Jack’s eyes—she liked to be feared. It made it less likely that she would have to prove herself. “Alright then,” Lillian said, grabbing Staci’s arm and flashing them both to Zyra and Tarquin’s house.

“I really don’t like that,” Staci said, her footsteps weaving a bit as she stepped away.

“Where is he?” Lillian asked, looking around the familiar room. This is where they had apprehended the beasts. She felt around with her mind, finding every animal in the area, including

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counterpart wolves. There were four in the house, other than Staci, and a couple not far off in the woods. If this were an ambush, she was not unmatched, which was a comforting thought. She didn't sense any ill will toward her, yet, but she still wouldn't relax too much while here.

"I'm surprised she agreed to come," Zyra said quietly, having entered the room so quickly with her vampire speed that it was difficult to track if one wasn't paying attention.

Lillian really disliked those creatures. Her entire body went on alert. Suppressing every bit of emotion she could in preparation to use whatever power necessary if Zyra provoked her.

"But she did." Staci hurried off, apparently expecting Lillian to follow and Zyra said nothing more, simply stood and watched with her cold blue eyes.

Lillian didn't give Zyra the satisfaction of showing a care, even turned her back on her as she followed Staci down to a windowless basement. There was a giant cage there, no doubt reinforced with silver bars. Silver was deadly to a werewolf when merged, it did nothing to a keeper when split however, which made living a semi-normal life fairly easy for them—something that was important for all immortals. None wanted humans to find out about what was lurking in their world.

Lillian approached the cage, eyes locked onto

the angry animal within. Henry seemed larger than when she had seen him last and his bright yellow eyes tracked her like prey. Lillian could feel his hate and anger, seeming to intensify as she strode closer. Lillian knelt before the cage and watched.

Henry stood up from his crouched position and walked toward her slowly, his gaze darting from her to his mother.

"She is here to help," his mother said reassuringly, laying a hand on Lillian's shoulder.

Lillian stiffened away from the contact.

Henry growled furiously.

"I knew this was a mistake. Lillian, you can leave now." Tarquin spoke from the doorway and Henry responded with an increase in anger and intense growling. "She is obviously disturbing him. Staci, I'm sorry."

Lillian looked into the werewolf's eyes as Staci and Tarquin discussed her leaving or staying. He met her gaze fearlessly and without challenge. It was not angry, not toward her anyway.

"I think I should take him back to my colony," Lillian said, her eyes still locked with Henry's. He wanted to go with her. He didn't want to stay here with his pack.

"What?" Tarquin asked, cutting off whatever Staci had been about to say.

"I want to take him back to my colony. I think I

will have a better chance of reaching him with less...stress." Lillian looked away from Henry and met Tarquin's skeptical glare. She was surprised to find his wolf directly behind her, watching Henry carefully. She hadn't even sensed his approach as she had been so focused on Henry – dangerous for her and even more reason to get out of here.

Tarquin looked thoughtful and his wolf sniffed at her curiously. "You tell the truth. I will allow my pack member to be taken. I will be there after the full moon to ascertain his progress. If there is none, I will have to do what is necessary to protect all of us from exposure. I'm sure you can understand that."

"Of course." Lillian flashed into the cage and grabbed a hunk of the were's fur, then flashed out before any of the others could react. Lillian flashed them directly to her room, not that she had a plan for once they got there. She just knew another cell was not going to help Henry.

Henry's hair stood up on end and he growled low, searching the room with his yellow eyes and sniffing furiously at the air. He looked up at Lillian and stamped his foot, looked at her then down at the ground where she stood, up and back again. He growled low, then slunk off. She assumed he meant her to stay put while he investigated the room. He glanced back at her

every couple seconds as if to assure himself she had understood his message.

She could clearly sense his wariness. She didn't appreciate being told what to do, but the last thing she wanted was to provoke him. It was difficult to tell how much of him was animal right now and how much was human.

After he had circled the entire room, Henry walked slowly back to her. His body was tense and his gaze locked with hers, she could feel his mixed emotions – they were all instinctual and she wondered if he was going to ever come out of this merge.

Lillian knelt down as he approached. He was quite large for such a young were and she was sure he had gotten bigger since leaving her colony. She reached out a cautious hand as he approached. His dark brown fur was surprisingly soft and his body was hot. She moved her hand slow and gentle across his back up to his head. His eyelids drifted closed as she ran her fingers lightly over his ears. "Are you in there somewhere Henry?" she asked quietly.

His eyes popped open and he yipped, then stepped back and nodded his head.

She supposed that was a yes. "Well, are you going to come out?"

He crouched and growled low, menacing.

Lillian stood and looked down at the were that

had begun to pace. She felt his agitation and wondered at it. If he wanted to, he should be able to split at any time, as long as he wasn't overly angry or during a full moon. She couldn't feel anything human, which made it impossible for her to know what his human half was going through right now. She could sense everything about his animal half, if she tried. It required a large amount of concentration though, and in her emotional state, it was not going to be possible.

She felt the obvious irritation and figured that was enough to start. She needed him calm and under control if she was going to trust him in the colony. The other Animal Elves would sense his presence immediately. No doubt they were already discussing the presence of a werewolf among them.

"Are you calm? I won't have you threatening my people here, but I don't want to lock you up," Lillian spoke carefully, her gaze directed at his yellow, watchful eyes.

He stared back at her, as if he couldn't understand a word she was saying, but she didn't believe that.

Lillian took a deep breath and pushed down her emotions. She cleared her mind and body of all feeling and pulled out her ability. Staring into Henry's eyes, she saw past the blank look. She searched his mind and body with her mind,

feeling around for what was wrong.

She found no fear for himself, no stress over being taken from his family and nothing to indicate sickness. She pushed further, knowing there had to be something more. She felt deep, into the blackness of his instincts, which seemed to be ruling everything. A light was glowing in that darkness, a bright, blinding light, the center of what was controlling his every action right now. She pushed into the light to find what was there.

A guardian.

Lillian pulled out and stepped back, her hand flew up to catch the gasp that was escaping her mouth. "You can't be," she whispered. "I can't be. It wasn't real, it was never real." She was flooded with emotion, she was overcome with feelings she didn't want to feel and her body shook with the effort to contain them.

Her eyes slid closed and she sank to the floor, breathing deep, seeking control. Soon she felt warm fur against her bare arms and wrapping around her body, holding her as she trembled.

When she had gained a semblance of control, she opened her eyes and reached out a hand to the beautiful wolf lying across her lap, its head gently perched on her thigh, eyes closed and waiting. When she touched his fur, he opened his eyes and looked up at her.

"I don't think I want this," she told him as she

stroked his fur. "I don't have a choice though, do I? This is why I exist, why I can't ever seem to control myself like the others. I'm a holder. There hasn't been a holder in so long, the stories have been polluted to lore. I don't think anyone would believe me if I told them."

Henry whined softly in her lap, as if to offer sympathy.

"We won't tell anyone, not yet anyway. Maybe after we figure out how this all works." Lillian buried her head in the soft fur around his neck, the knowledge that she wasn't bound to keeping her emotions in check was freeing, and terrifying. The heat of the were was comforting, as it was supposed to be. He was her guardian and she was a holder. Her long white hair blanketed them and offered a kind of barrier from the reality she was supposed to live. She wanted to stay there like that forever, just her and Henry, no one would have to know that they were supposed to do more, or expect them to.

In elf lore, there were stories of holders. They were born when a time of great dissension and need approached. She would find her guardian, an animal that was committed and bound to her, guarding her from all harm while she suffered through the holding of her population's emotion. The holder would make it easier for the others, the army of selected, to go out and heal and fight as

necessary.

“Something big is on the horizon,” Lillian whispered into Henry’s fur. She gripped him tightly, drawing comfort from him, her guardian. Her thoughts floated to her brother and his seemingly insane belief in Paxton’s Council of Immortals. “I really hate to think my brother is right in his pursuit of species unity.”

Henry rumbled beneath her. She could feel his offense and regretted her comment. After all, she *was* going to be relying on him quite a lot in the future.

“Sorry,” she said simply and his rumbles stopped. “You obviously understand everything that is going on around you. So why is it that you are unable, or unwilling, to split?” Lillian lifted her head from his soft fur and looked at him questioningly.

He looked up at her and growled low, then darted his gaze about the room and sniffed at the air.

Lillian sent her senses out, feeling for the presence of anything. There was nothing out of the ordinary, not that she could feel. He was concerned about something, however, and there was obviously something preventing him from splitting.

Did someone know what he was, what she was? Was there someone out there trying to keep

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him from protecting her? Lillian fisted her hands in the were's soft fur. She wasn't letting him out of her sight and she needed more information, now.

CHAPTER TWO

There was only one Animal Elf who might know what she was facing. Only one who was old enough to remember a time when the holder and guardian were more than just myths and fairy tales to her people.

Payton was the oldest living Animal Elf Lillian knew of. She was centuries older than Lillian herself, who was older than many in her colony. Payton no longer lived within the colony walls, which made seeing her now almost easier. Lillian only had to wait until after dark so most of the humans would be at their own homes, then flash herself and Henry to just outside the small cottage.

Darkness was approaching, but so were the other elves. They had sensed a were in their midst, no doubt. Lillian sat on her bed, staring across the room at Henry who had taken up post by the door. He looked like he was asleep, head on paws and eyes closed, but she knew he wasn't. She

could feel his energy vibrating. He was taking in everything, ever watchful and aware. From what she understood, a were never slept, its human keeper did, but never the wolf counterpart. She wondered if that was affecting Henry's ability to split, if he hadn't slept since he merged—it had been a couple weeks with no sleep. Most immortals needed a small amount of rest every day, could go without for days on end, but not weeks, without exhaustion affecting their abilities.

His eyes popped open a second before she felt the approach of her guards. He unfolded from his crouch and stared at the door, silent and waiting with a deadly resolve. She couldn't let anyone in here with him, not while he was still so unstable. She flashed herself in front of her door and immediately felt the were's pang of anger over her disappearance. He let loose a terrible howl behind the door and pawed frantically at it. The door splintered with the second swipe and Lillian felt her body tense with anxiety and annoyance. She couldn't flash back into the room. Her mind clouded beyond using her abilities, she was anxious about the other elves showing up. She was upset by Henry's obvious distress, and of course, the new wonderful knowledge his presence has brought to light. All of that added up to her not being able to push it all down far enough to use her Animal Elf abilities, a problem

she had lived with all her life, and despised herself for.

Henry's muzzle pushed through the hole he had managed, desperate to get at her. If she hadn't known what he was to her, she would have been quite frightened by his violent actions. She pressed a hand to the hole, letting him smell her, and felt him relax just a bit. She blocked the destroyed door with her body and kept her hand at the hole so Henry could be reassured of her presence and safety.

"Stay where you are, Henry, while I deal with the visitors." She waited, thankful once again, for the flashing block she and Lucas had set on their private chambers. When the guards approached, led by Alaria, Lillian was waiting with a blank expression plastered to her face. It almost faltered when she saw Alaria at the head of the small group.

Alaria had always been a pain in Lillian's side. She was a cousin and she felt she deserved to be treated as a member of the governing body in this colony, even though with Lillian and Lucas there was no need for another female to help rule. Alaria had always held a grudge for that and never stopped trying to undermine what Lillian did. Now that Lillian really did have something to hide, it was no surprise that Alaria was in front of the line to catch her.

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Lillian cursed in her mind, but gave no outward indication of caring. Alaria's gaze scanned her from head to toe and the door behind with keen interest and a glimmer of suspicion.

"We sense the presence of a were and are concerned for your, and the colony's, safety." Alaria offered with not a single emphasis to indicate a feeling of any kind, concern or not.

"There is a were in my keeping. I don't intend to let him roam about until he is more stable and I am unconcerned with my safety with him," Lillian said simply.

Henry rubbed against the door, managing to make it groan in protest and catch the attention of the unwelcome company. Alaria's eyes twitched.

Lillian knew she was reaching out, sensing as much as she could about the were behind the door. What she would find though, Lillian wasn't sure. It was doubtful she would be able to tell he was a guardian, not without herself being the holder, but that was a chance Lillian did not want to take. "Is there anything else? I have business to attend to," Lillian said, allowing a trace amount of agitation to enter her words.

Alaria narrowed her eyes just the slightest bit and focused back on Lillian. "If you feel that were is stable, then of course, go about your business. I was just concerned about the other members of the colony. That is all."

As the group turned and walked away, Lillian fumed inside. She was sure Alaria was going to spread word around the colony that she was keeping a dangerous were in her chambers. If she could prove it, she would have Alaria banished for spreading dissension.

“Move back, I’m coming in.” Lillian walked back into her room when Henry moved out of the way. Henry growled at her and shook his head, then jumped back and yipped.

“If you are trying to chastise me, don’t. I will not tolerate you, or anyone else, telling me what to do.”

Henry’s yellow eyes narrowed and he stalked toward her menacingly.

Lillian would have backed up if she wasn’t already against the door. He was, after all, a very dangerous being. He continued forward and didn’t stop until he was directly in front of her.

His head at chest level, he looked up slightly and bared his teeth.

Lillian was frightened. Even though she was pretty sure he wouldn’t harm her, she couldn’t be positive.

Henry lifted one huge paw and pressed it to her belly, his claws extended. With one swift movement, he tore through her gown, not marking her skin, even the slightest bit, with the razor sharp weapons. His muzzle rooted through

the shredded cloth, then his jaws opened wide and encircled her small waist. He drew back slowly, his teeth grazing her skin, but so gently they didn't leave a scratch. When he was done, he stepped back and stared at her, his eyes accusing.

Lillian was trembling, fear and excitement mixed together in an unfathomable way. She wrapped her arms around herself to fight the physical reaction to feeling.

"I don't understand, but I'm sorry." She fell to her knees and looked up into his face. "It would be so much easier if you could talk to me. I feel your emotions, you're angry and you're betrayed and I don't know why." Lillian was desperate to know why. It was so intense and directed at her.

Henry moved forward and stuck his nose to her belly, once again growling low. His hot breath made her shiver and she struggled to read his emotions and understand. She closed her eyes and concentrated, but all she got were dark accusing feelings, betrayal and disappointment.

Lillian threw her hands up and pushed at Henry. "I don't get it and if you won't split and talk to me like a person, I'm going to just ignore your ridiculous feelings." Lillian flashed away, feeling smug about her ability and the terrible annoyance she could feel from Henry at her using it.

She hadn't gone far, to her dressing room on

the other side of a door, which Henry would no doubt be trying to break down in a moment. She was flustered and frustrated and she wanted to see Payton for answers, but not with her clothing shredded from a moody were. Whatever his deal was, he would have to get over it, or split and tell her. She had never been as good at inferring meaning from feelings as others. Probably because she had so often been inundated with her own feelings she hadn't honed her skills as the others had.

Before Lillian had even managed to undress, she heard Henry throw his paws up on the door that stood between them.

"Damn-it, I'm dressing because you ruined my clothes. So just relax out there and next time you want to get angry with me, talk!" she shouted, and it felt good. She hadn't shouted since she was a small child, she just hoped no one else had heard it.

It worked though, Henry took to pacing back and forth on the other side of the door, she heard his claws clicking on the floor as he moved back and forth. Lillian took her time dressing. She chose a dark brown gown that matched her eyes and braided her hair in one long braid that hung past her waist. Her pointed ears stuck out and she adorned them with gold charms. She felt great when she opened the door. When Henry saw her

and leaped at her, she put up a warning hand. He stopped directly in front of her. "Ruin another dress and I will put a leash and muzzle on you."

Henry tilted his head to the side and let his tongue loll out of his mouth in a grin of sorts.

Lillian was skeptical, but searched his feelings and found nothing to indicate his apology wasn't real. "Okay then, we will go visit Payton, she should be able to tell us more about our... situation."

Henry sat back on his haunches and looked at her calmly.

Lillian grabbed a handful of his fur and flashed them to the woods outside the colony. She let go and he immediately ran off. She saw him dashing through the trees in the distance as she walked toward the cottage. He'd been locked in a cell for far too long and she could feel his joy at running freely, it was intoxicating. She wished she could feel so free and happy. When he caught a rabbit and gloried in the taste of fresh blood, she shuddered with the force of his excitement. He really was an animal. A small part of her inner core heated at that thought, his animalistic nature. She pushed the terribly exciting thoughts away and quickened her step. When she caught site of the small cottage, she paused and called Henry to her.

He loped to her side, but gave her a look that

clearly said he was not her pet.

“Well then walk on two legs if you want to be treated like a person,” she said quietly and walked forward.

He snorted and trotted beside her in imitation of a trained beast.

She almost wanted to laugh at him, but never in her life, that she could remember, had she ever laughed aloud. Not even during that time of happiness she had duped herself into, that had ended so tragically. She wasn't about to start now.

“I should have guessed you would be knocking on my door soon. What with the goings on around, it seems we are fast approaching a time when our holder and guardian will be needed.” Payton stood in the open door of her cottage, looking old in human years, which meant in elf years she had been around since the dawn of time. Her white hair had turned almost clear with age and her pale skin had lost all of its luminescence, something that allowed her to pass for human much easier, without glamour, than the rest of her kind could.

Lillian didn't give anything away, although inside she was surprised to hear it confirmed that she was the holder and Henry was her guardian. “Good evening, Payton. This is Henry.”

“Come on in, I guess you're here to find out what you are. Stupid elves have forgotten

everything. You are all lucky I decided to live this long, otherwise, you would be completely lost." Payton turned and flashed herself farther into her cottage to a large rocking chair.

Lillian walked in, Henry following. She settled herself on a small couch and Henry perched on the floor beside her like a sentry.

Payton was silent for a while, simply looking at them.

Lillian became quite uncomfortable under her scrutiny and was about to say something when she finally spoke.

"Your guardian has been hexed. I assume it was done by an Animal Elf because otherwise you would have easily sensed it."

Lillian gasped and turned quickly to look at Henry who had the audacity to roll his eyes at her as if to say, *No shit I was hexed, you should have known it right away.*

"You should be careful. It would seem you were not the first to realize what you are, or what he is. That is a dangerous situation. Come here, werewolf," Payton said.

Henry obeyed without hesitation.

Payton placed both hands over Henry's head and closed her eyes.

Lillian didn't like that Payton was doing *her* job, even more she didn't like that she felt as if it were her job. She had no claim over the were, but she

had said she would try and help him. She was helping him, in a way, having brought him to someone who was more capable than herself. She just wished she had been able to sense the problem, and she really wished she had been in the presence of mind to even try.

Lillian could feel the hum of magical energy as Payton worked. Her hands poised just above Henry's body moved slow and meticulous as they felt and searched for where the problem lay. She paused here and there, as if searching deeper, but then moved on. Lillian found herself leaning forward and gripping her hands anxiously in her lap as she watched and waited.

Henry sat completely still, eyes closed and muscles completely relaxed.

Lillian's gaze traveled the length of him. He was magnificent, his large form exuding power and strength, his head held high, showing confidence and regality. His brown fur was thick and she knew it was softer than it looked. His eyes opened as if sensing her perusal. Large and yellow they glowed in the dim light of the cottage. His lips parted on a silent snarl and his white teeth gleamed in the candlelight. He was a predator and he was more than capable of protecting what he chose. She knew he was choosing to protect her.

She couldn't explain the overwhelming sense of relief and rightness in that. To know there was a

being who would protect her and die before allowing harm to come to her. This was one being who would not assume she was plenty capable of taking care of herself. He would be archaic in his belief that she was to be protected and cherished. It was something she had barely even ever admitted to herself that she desired. It was completely against everything the elves stood for. She was sick of being an equal or above everyone else, assumed to be able to take care of herself in every way. She wanted someone to protect her, to see her as a female to be cherished.

Lillian snapped her gaze from Henry's. *Where the hell are these thoughts coming from?* She couldn't assume Henry wanted anything to do with her that wasn't an instinctual draw of guardian to holder. It was ridiculous and she needed to keep that in mind. He was a guardian, of course he would protect her, she was the holder. It didn't mean he wanted to, it just meant he would. Lillian pushed away the emotions these thoughts created. She would not feel them.

"Ah-ha," Payton whispered.

"You found it?" Lillian asked, emotionless as she held down everything.

"It's a complicated spell. I know it, luckily, so I should be able to reverse it. Whoever did this, has been prepared. This is a spell that's been out of use for a very long time."

“What does that mean?”

“It means you are in great danger, from someone in your colony most likely. This happened when he was imprisoned there so it was done while within your walls.”

Lillian sat back, fear threatening her composure.

Henry growled low and menacing, then walked to her and laid his head in her lap and licked her hand, offering comfort.

“Well then, let’s get this thing undone. I need him to be whole,” Lillian said, her fingers curling into the fur at the back of his neck.

Payton’s mouth lifted at the corner.

Lillian had a feeling Payton wasn’t fooled by her calm demeanor.

“I will, of course, do anything I can to assist you, Lillian. Watch yourself carefully when you return to the colony. Whoever did this, will be watching you, so do not reveal yourself before they are found out. Otherwise, they will step back, infect the flock from the inside and you will never be able to undo the damage they will cause. We are entering a time of coming together. You need support from all the elves, and that will start in your colony.”

Lillian nodded. She was in no hurry to ascend to the role of holder anyway. Leader of an army she was not, nor had she ever wanted to be.

“Good girl, you will know when the time is right, and he will help.”

Henry snorted agreement and looked at Payton expectantly. No doubt, he was ready to be done with merged for a while.

Lillian wondered what he would be like as a person. She had gotten kind of used to his company as a werewolf in their short time together. What was it going to be like to have an actual person there, watching her, talking to her and protecting her?

Payton motioned to Henry, then placed her hands over his body and mumbled words in their old language.

Lillian felt the room charge with energy and as Payton’s words became louder and faster, the entire room seemed to vibrate. Her words reached a crescendo and Henry howled a deafening howl, then fell to the floor, unconscious. The room became eerily quiet and still for a couple seconds, then Lillian reacted, lurching forward to the ground where Henry’s limp body lay.

Her hands ran the length of him, but she was so filled with worry, she couldn’t sense anything from him. “Henry,” she whispered, her voice strangled with fear.

“He is fine, Lillian. The spell is working. He will be fine after his body rests. When he awakens, he will be able to split as he wishes. I can’t say

how long he will sleep, could be an hour, could be a day or more.”

Lillian couldn't deny the flood of relief, but worry was still present, and would be, until he awakened and split. “Thank you so much, Payton. You have helped the entire elfin world with this.”

“I have only done my duty. It's why I have lived so long. The spells of our past have been all but forgotten. As payment for this, I will ask you to send me your daughter. I will teach her the old ways and then I will be able to die with ease of mind.”

Lillian looked at the old woman skeptically. *She's crazy.* Doubt about her ability to have reversed the hex on Henry surfaced. “I don't have a daughter, so you might want to choose someone else for that honored position. If you would like, I could choose someone worthy for you to train.”

“Oh no, I will await the arrival of your daughter. She is the one I have seen in my dreams for so long. She holds special gifts that will make her a prime candidate.”

Payton spoke with a self-assurance Lillian didn't have the heart to argue with so she just agreed and thanked her again before flashing herself and Henry back to her room.

She flashed them directly onto her bed so he would be comfortable as he rested. She looked down at his sleeping form and let herself feel. Her

body shook with the force of emotions she had been holding back. "That crazy old woman better not have harmed you."

Lillian lay down beside the warm body and allowed herself to be comforted. If he had been conscious, and certainly if he had been human, she never would have shown such weakness. She had been independent since she was a small child, especially being destined for ruling over a colony. Lucas and her had never been afforded some of the small comforts other children had. It was necessary. There was no one to be with her, no one to hold her hand while she struggled to make decisions regarding her colony. That was not the elf way.

The one time she had allowed herself to be comforted, held and coddled by another, she had received only hurt and rejection in the end. She wasn't willing to repeat that horrible experience a second time. She told herself on a regular basis that she was thankful for never experiencing the tingle of love when words were spoken around her. Never had her elf senses been pricked by another's voice, indicating a destined mate.

"Perhaps I'm not meant to be mated, no matter what that crazy woman thinks about my future daughter." Lillian settled into a frustrated kind of peace as she lay there against Henry's warm body and thought of who could possibly have been

trying to set her and Henry up for failure. Their mission as holder and guardian was one of protection and advancement of the elf species. Who could possibly wish them to fail at that? It didn't make sense, and it had to have been an Animal Elf—no other species would have had access to Henry in her prison.

That there was a traitor in her colony was obvious. What was not, was who it could possibly be and what their motivation was.

Lillian thought of her brother and debated calling him, but didn't want to bother him with this. It was her problem, this was personal against her. She was pretty sure and until she was ready to reveal what she was, she couldn't tell him what was going on.

Lillian forced all the thoughts and emotions from her mind and tried to sense Henry's wellbeing. Her hands hovered over his body and she took a deep breath. She felt nothing that wasn't normal, but she had to be absolutely sure. She ran her hands the entire length of his massive form, then did it again. Other than a racing mind, no doubt dreaming, he seemed fine. His heart rate wasn't even elevated.

She settled beside him, a bit more confident about Payton's healing ability. She stayed there with him all night, watching his chest rise and fall, every now and again, he whimpered and his legs

would twitch. She wondered what he dreamt about.

“Are you chasing rabbits in your dream? Or are you after bigger prey?” she asked, stroking the fur around his face. She had never been this up close and personal with a were, had never wanted to be. But now that she had the opportunity to unabashedly stare, she was pleasantly surprised to find his soft fur and protruding snout an attractive pairing.

Her gaze moved around his face and she remembered how he had so easily fit his mouth around her middle. She lifted one side of his lip, watching his eyes carefully for any sign of him waking. His teeth were huge and she knew if he had wanted to, he could have torn her gut out right in this room with as much ease as she cut butter.

She released his lip as a shiver of unease tore through her. What the hell was she thinking to welcome a beast like him in her life, and her bed! Sure, he was passed out now, but he wouldn't always be, and she knew he wouldn't let her leave him locked out. That was not the role of guardian to holder.

What are our roles really? Payton hadn't answered that question and Lillian didn't know of anyone else to ask. She didn't want to go back to talk with Payton, not yet anyway. There was one

place she knew she could look for the information, and if she was careful, no one would know what exactly she was after.

Lillian hated to leave him, but it didn't look as though Henry was going to wake up any time soon anyway. She gave him a quick pat on the head, then flashed to the colony's library. As she glided through the rows and rows of books and scrolls, some dating back farther than the Dead Sea scrolls, she walked with a slow purposefulness she hoped would discourage anyone from approaching her with mundane conversation.

She passed a group of young elves out on a school function. They couldn't be more than seven, but already they had the air and bearing of an adult. Complete control and precision of movement and speech. No emotional inflection to anything they did or said. Lillian envied their ease. Life had never been that easy for her, at least now she knew why.

Lillian made her way back to a section that held her race's history. Five shelves that reached across a seven-foot section of wall held every story and decision ever made or told about by the Animal Elves.

It took her hours to search through the things, twice she had to speak with, and deter, a well-meaning elf who offered to assist her in locating whatever it was she might wish to find.

“Just perusing for instances of interspecies mating we might have logged of other species. I would like to know what position was taken in the past,” she assured. It was a quite plausible explanation, too, considering the recent ruling, against her wishes, that a were and vamp could mate without unbalancing nature. If it hadn’t been for their half-breed daughter, Alexia, Lillian was sure she would have won that ruling.

Her throat closed up tight and her eyes burned with years of unshed tears. *How could they have bred successfully?* It was the question she had been asking herself since the existence of Alexia had been brought to her attention.

Lillian pushed those thoughts and feelings way down and continued her search with a focused determination.

Around dawn, she found what she had been looking for. She didn’t bother to leave through the lobby – she didn’t want to let anyone know what she had picked to take with her, and she no longer needed to put on an air of calm if she wasn’t sticking around. She flashed to her room, her gaze immediately searching out the lump of fur on her bed. She couldn’t deny the rush of relief to see him still there, unconscious and breathing.

If he had awoke while she was gone, he would have destroyed the doors to get out, to find her. That was something new, a being determined to

risk life and limb to get *to* her.

Lillian settled herself in a comfortable chair by a window. The early morning light was spilling into the room now and she enjoyed the feel of its heat on her skin. She closed her eyes and felt the sun's rays touch her face and neck. After a few moments, she heard a familiar tap-tap on the window. She opened it and let the animal in.

Athena was a Demon Owl, more commonly known as a Barn Owl. She had a huge white face with big black eyes that stared out at the world with sharp purpose, never seeming to miss a thing. She was a common visitor to Lillian's room, especially during the day.

She loved the thing, as much as she could love any living thing. Athena often was her only companion and Lillian had, many times, spoken with the creature about her trouble with others. She was welcome company as Lillian relaxed back once more and the owl perched happily on her shoulder.

"Don't worry about him, Athena, he is asleep," she assured when the owl ruffled her feathers, spotting the large were on the bed. Lillian hoped Henry didn't try and eat Athena. She would be severely disappointed if he succeeded.

The quick approach of others had Lillian on her feet and to her door in a split second. She looked back and assured herself Henry was still sleeping

Mating Call

soundly, then hurried out to meet the visitors in the hall as if she were just on her way to do something else. She didn't need anyone snooping around now, not with Henry so vulnerable.

She forced herself to slow her steps and calm her emotions to nothing as she approached them. Around a corner, she met a small group of guards, their eyes wide and lips held tight, frantic for an elf.

"What has happened?" Her voice was high with worry as she thought of her brother, out gallivanting around after that fish and all the possible ways harm could come to him.

They handed her a note, which she read with slowly building horror.

Congratulations!

One of your clan has been selected to be part of my scavenger hunt. The rules are simple. Get to your species representative before anyone else gets to theirs and your species representative will live. If you don't get there first, your species representative will be killed. Sorry there can be only one winner. The first clue will be delivered shortly. In the meantime, choose your scavenger hunt representative hunters. No more than three to a team

Happy Hunting!

When she was done, she confirmed there was indeed a missing elf and a call had come in from a

nearby colony of Water Elves reporting the same thing. It was a horrible cruel game. She remained calm, because that was her job and at the moment, it was more important than ever for her to lead her people as they thought she should.

“I will call my brother immediately to inform him of this.” She turned and walked with calm, smooth strides. As soon as she was out of sight, she flashed herself to her room and frantically looked for the cell phone.

Henry remained passed out while she made the call. Once that was done, she really did feel calm. Her brother would take care of this. She looked over at the werewolf in her bed. She had much bigger things to worry about.

CHAPTER THREE

It was a few hours after sunrise and Lillian was cuddled up next to Henry's warmth. He hadn't stirred and she was trying very hard not to be worried about it. If he was still like this by evening, she was going back to Payton for help.

In the meantime, she watched her colony members carefully with an assessing eye she hadn't given them in a long, obviously way too long, time. They were all worried about the missing elf and she had reassured them Lucas was taking care of it. None had questioned her further about it, just went on about their lives as if nothing else was of import to them. She envied their truly balanced, unemotional states.

There had been only one elf that hadn't turned away immediately and gone back to her own business. She eyed Lillian for a second or two longer than the rest and had looked deeper, assessing her every movement and word.

Alaria.

Could Alaria have betrayed me like this? Lillian wondered, hoping she was wrong, but knowing right now she couldn't afford not to seriously consider all threats.

She looked over at the forgotten tome on her chair, Athena perched and sleeping next to it, too afraid of Henry to come sleep by her as she usually would. She knew she should go pick it up and read about what her and Henry were going to be going through, but she just didn't have the energy now. She closed her eyes and let herself drift to sleep.

The dream was the same, and she woke in a cold sweat, shivering with the emotion and unshed tears burning her eyes. She looked down and was relieved to see Henry still sleeping soundly. She had never shown this to anyone, and she didn't plan to start now. With the increasing frequency of the dreams, she wondered how she was going to hide it from him. Certainly he wouldn't be sleeping this near to her on a regular basis.

Her head shot up as a knock sounded on her door. She closed her eyes and felt for the intruder's identity, it was Lucas. *Crap*. She forced her emotions to settle. He wouldn't leave without seeing her. Luckily, she had ordered that door fixed. He would not know anything was amiss, or

in here with her, unless he came in. Likely he wouldn't be searching around for stray animals in the area and wouldn't sense a werewolf sleeping in here.

Another knock sounded, louder this time.

Lillian flashed herself out to the hall. "What is it?"

Lucas spun around, his eyes widening a bit, obviously surprised she hadn't invited him inside. "Have there been any new developments on the missing elf?" he asked.

"Not that I know of, other than that very odd clue. I assumed you were taking care of it so I haven't put much thought into it. I'm rather busy at the moment."

Lucas gave his sister an assessing look.

She knew she was breathing hard from her disturbing dream and her face was likely less than serene. No doubt her hair was a mess as well. Never in her life had she let herself be seen so off.

"What is going on with you, Lillian?" he asked with suspicion in his voice as his gaze moved around her obviously disheveled appearance.

"What is with *you*, Lucas? Where is Jack?" She shot back, knowing his monkey was a companion he didn't forget, ever. He was obviously going through a change as well. *Gods is everything going to turn upside down?*

Lucas didn't respond, just flashed himself

away, he must have forgotten Jack somewhere.

Lillian flashed back into her room and although she wanted to go curl up with Henry while he was blissfully unconscious, she knew she needed to read through the tome. It would be best if once he was awake and able to communicate they knew what the hell they were in for with all of this.

Athena hooted a greeting as Lillian settled herself back in her chair. She stroked the bird lightly, then picked up the heavy tome.

Night was falling and the colony was stirring by the time Lillian finished. She leaned back in her chair and barely resisted the urge to rub her face in frustration. Athena hooted sympathetically before flying out into the twilight to hunt.

According to the legends she had found, a holder was born in every generation, but its guardian wasn't triggered except when a time of interspecies war was on the horizon. At that time, the guardian would seek out and find the holder and then would protect her until one or both were dead. Apparently, there was no hope of sending Henry off with a *Thanks but no thanks*.

Lillian looked over at Henry's still sleeping form and bit her lip. According to the legends, if the guardian died, the holder was doomed to fail her people. Lillian didn't even know who was fighting who, or what side of that she would be on, but did know she had no desire to bring

failure and destruction to anyone. She needed Henry alive and well to guard her.

Not that she was looking forward to her part in the fighting. As holder, she would take within her, the entirety of emotion and feeling from all her army. She would feel everything they should feel. If they were cut down in battle, she would feel the strike, the death if it came to that. She would be completely incapacitated and vulnerable, no doubt writhing in pain and suffering. But it was her part, and now that she knew it, she felt a peace she had not in all her life felt. She was more than this figurehead, more than what she tried so hard to present. She had emotions the others didn't. Or at least they were able to easily ignore, but there was a reason for this. Her entire life had been preparing her to take on the emotions of her army, to save her people.

It was something that passed from mother to daughter. She wondered if this was why Payton had requested her daughter be sent to her for training in the lore. It would make sense. Her daughter would be a holder and so she would have a vested interest in learning about their people's history.

Crazy old woman she may be, she had a point. Unless Henry failed to wake up from whatever voodoo she had put on him.

Lillian walked over to the bed and reached out

to sense his energy. Still the same, he was fine, just asleep. She crawled up on the bed and laid her body carefully behind him. She wrapped herself around his back, pressing into his heat and burying her face in his furry neck. Fear squeezed her heart and worked its way up her throat, choking her and pressing against the backs of her eyes.

She took a shuddering breath and inhaled the musky scent of werewolf. It was oddly comforting and she felt her body relax as she breathed deep, in and out. She closed her eyes and felt the tears recede, the lump in her throat loosen and her heart's ache lessen. What she was left with was a numbness she was used to, and something else that was unexplainable, something deeply disturbing. She pushed it down and pulled away from Henry's comforting warmth. She was not about to become dependent on anyone.

She was about to flash away, distract herself with colony business that had no doubt piled up in her office, when he twitched and whined. She spun around and held her breath as she watched him for signs of awakening. He rolled and a growl rumbled deep in his chest. She reached out a hand to calm him, but his eyelids burst open and glowing yellow eyes locked onto her.

He jerked and rolled, coming up on all fours on the bed. In this position, her head reached his knee

and she was staring up into the face of a snarling beast who held absolutely no recognition of her. His gaze narrowed on her and she stepped back, they tracked her and he hunched, readying himself to spring. She started to shake, a new fear taking over. He was dangerous, and she was alone with him while her emotions were running so wild she had no hope of flashing away.

He rumbled and curled his lip, revealing dripping teeth, his hair stood on end, making his massive form appear even more intimidating. She wanted to run, but knew it would only make him attack. She tried to calm herself enough to flash, but her heart was racing and her hands were clenched with the effort it was taking to stay still. "It's me Henry," she said with a shaky voice. "Lillian."

He gave no indication of hearing.

Oh what I wouldn't give to have the abilities I should have been born with. A normal Animal Elf would have had no trouble reading his emotions and flashing away from danger.

"Henry." She tried again and slowly extended a hand, hoping it wouldn't be bitten off. She cringed as he leaned forward and his hot breath brushed across her palm. A drip of saliva landed on her finger and she nearly lost it, but managed to scream only on the inside.

He snorted against her hand, as if her scent

were too terrible to keep in. Then backed away from her and hoped off the other side of the bed.

Lillian looked behind her, measuring the distance to the door and the likelihood of him not seeing her run for it. She knew her chances were slim. She took a sliding step back, trying to make no noise. She couldn't see him. He had huddled behind the bed. She took another sliding step, then another. She was almost close enough to risk making a dash for it. A sound behind the bed had her rethinking escape. She stopped, one foot poised behind her.

There it was again, a very human moan of pain.

Lillian rushed forward without thinking of the risk if she were wrong. She hurried around the foot of the bed. Henry was lying on the floor. Having split from his wolf, he was completely nude and Lillian couldn't stop her gaze from traveling around the massive form. He was much larger than he had been before this long merge. He must now be twice the size of the kid he had been last she saw him unmerged. He had the body of a full-grown male and her body reacted accordingly. A flush of heat spread over her and reminded her she was a very female creature who had not been intimate with a male in a very long time.

Another pained moan from his lips brought her back to reality and she chastised herself for taking

advantage of his obvious ill health. She knelt beside him and grabbed the blanket off her bed to offer him modesty, and focus her mind better. His wolf was lying close to his head, face pressed against Henry's face and whining slightly, licking his cheek every now and again. He looked at her with what she could only describe as pleading and she felt sick, knowing she had nothing to offer. Lillian covered his distracting nakedness with the blanket and kneeled beside him.

"If it were you I would have somewhat of a chance, but he is all man now. I can't heal men, only animals," she explained.

The wolf continued to look at her as if he expected her to fix it.

"Okay, I will give it a shot." She reached out her hands and felt for his energy, but got nothing. Humans were too complicated. It was the only reason she could think of as to why she was unable to sense or heal them. An animal was simple and so her powers were capable of discerning and manipulating.

Lillian pushed his shoulder length locks off his broad shoulder, her fingertips grazing his thick neck. He was a beautiful full-grown werewolf keeper. She ran her finger down his neck to his peck and pressed her hand over his heart. She may not be able to sense his energy, but she could tell his heart was beating strong. Her hand slipped

slightly lower, under the cover she had laid over him. "I am searching for injuries," she explained to the wolf who, she swore, rolled its eyes at her as if to say, *yeah, right whatever you have to tell yourself.*

Her fingers dipped down to the beginning of the rippled stomach she had clearly seen earlier. He moaned and she pulled her hand away guiltily. "Can you hear me, Henry?"

He groaned again in response.

She was encouraged. "Henry, are you hurt anywhere?"

His eyes opened this time and his tongue wet his lips. He looked from her to his wolf, then tried to sit up. He fell back down and grabbed his head. "Fuck, that hurts."

Lillian gasped and jumped away. "No," she whispered, shock rolling through her as she stared at Henry.

"Are you alright?" he asked, his concern for her seeming to override his pain enough to allow him to sit up fully.

"Y-you...you can't be. It's not possible you're a—" she swayed on her feet, blackness creeping into her field of vision and a lump in her throat that thankfully prevented the scream of denial she wanted to let loose.

"Lillian! Lillian, what is it? You look quite pale. Perhaps you should sit."

Tingling erupted through her body and

blackness overwhelmed her.

* * * *

Henry caught her body as it crumpled. Her tall slight form folding into a small package he easily wrapped his arms around. He didn't get off the floor, still weak and his stomach was threatening to expel whatever was in it. He settled back, enjoying the feel of his mate in his arms.

He smiled, thinking the word to himself. This was his mate, and now she knew it, too, although the blacking out reaction was not exactly what he had hoped for.

Henry looked down at his tanned arms against her pale, luminescent skin. It was a delightful contrast. He moved slightly, settling her more comfortably in his lap. As he moved, he became aware of his body. His arms were bulging, though he wasn't flexing, his chest was twice as wide as it had been. Pecs defined and stomach ripped with a defined six-pack he had always dreamed of having. He experimented, flexing different muscles that were newly acquired and loving the way they bulged. He was easily twice the size he had been before merging—werewolf puberty worked fast and came late. He was an adult in the human world, but had looked much younger until now. Such a satisfying change.

"I will have no trouble protecting you, my mate," he whispered next to her pointed ear.

Lillian shifted in his arms, a sleepy groan escaping her lips, her bottom shifting against his groin.

His gaze drifted down her long slender neck to the parted material of her draped-on gown. He could just see the curve of one creamy breast. He felt himself stir against her bottom and a wicked thought had his lips lifting in a grin. He pushed her forward a little and looked down between their bodies. *Yep, everything is bigger now.*

His wolf snorted beside him, obviously catching the drift of Henry's thoughts. Sometimes the link between a keeper and his counterpart was a pain. He was never alone in his own mind. Their thoughts were not completely linked, he had to think at his wolf for it to hear him, but sometimes if the thought was loud enough, the wolf would hear it anyway. Henry turned his focus away from Lillian and what his new body could do other than protect her. He looked over at his wolf and frowned, they had some major trouble ahead of them.

What do we know of the hex? He thought toward his wolf.

It was a very intricate thing, you were all but lost inside of me and if Lillian hadn't taken us to see that old woman, you may never have come back out.

Mating Call

Any idea who?

No, but if we get close to the same magic again, I am sure I will recognize its sour stench.

What else did I miss? Henry hated that he had lost so much time. He hadn't been conscious of anything while merged. He had been in a black hole, alone except for the reassuring thoughts of his wolf. He had felt her presence, too. When she came for him, he had known it. She was the only person he had felt through the darkness, his mate, she had called to him. But he hadn't been able to get out. He'd been trapped. Henry shivered. He never wanted to experience anything like that again.

There is something you need to know. His wolf thought toward him.

What is it?

She has had a child.

Henry's mouth dropped open and he looked from his wolf to Lillian. *You are sure?*

Positive, smell her. She has the scent of one who has given birth, and because she is the holder and we her guardian, I can feel the presence of her daughter, another holder whom we must guard and whom must be present to hold for the army.

Henry sniffed the air and closed his eyes, concentrating on the scent that was her. There it was, the soft sweet scent of a woman who had birthed. His jaw tightened and his fists clenched. He didn't expect her to be untouched. She wasn't

young, even for an immortal. But to think she had chosen a mate before him, given herself to the point of birthing, it was unsettling. If the male was not already dead, Henry was pretty sure he was going to want to rip his throat out.

His wolf stood and looked around nervously.

Henry took a deep breath and thought toward his wolf. *Don't worry, just thinking of what we might have to deal with if this other male decides to show up.*

His wolf growled in reply and settled down near the door.

Henry's anger fueled him and he was able to stand, lifting her smoothly, without swaying even a little. He laid her gently on the bed, then went in search of a phone. His parents were no doubt freaking out majorly at this point. Not that he expected the news he had for them was going to settle their minds much. He looked around, but there was no phone in site. He didn't relish the thought of digging through her possessions to find one.

Lillian bolted upright on the bed with a gasp, both hands lifted to cover her mouth. Her gaze swung around the room until it hit on him.

He became aware of his nakedness as her gaze traveled the length of him, eyes wide and hands still covering her open mouth. When they seemed to reach about belly button level, she closed them and flashed away.

“Oh hell no!” he roared, his wolf jumping up and howling. “Lillian!” he called, knowing his voice would reach a great distance to her because he was her mate. When she didn’t reappear right away, he strode to the door and pulled it open with enough force to splinter the wood around the hinges.

Lillian stood on the other side of the door, her hands still clutched over her mouth, her eyes still wide with shock.

Henry felt his heart squeeze as he assessed her obvious distress. He stepped forward and pulled her into his arms, knowing instinctively to stay quiet. His words would only remind her of what she was obviously having a difficult time coming to terms with. He had been surprised when he’d recognized her as his mate as well.

Henry held her tight, her soft body molding to his. Her waist length pale white hair draped over his arms, a soft blanket as he rubbed his hands up and down her back, awkwardly attempting to comfort her.

As she relaxed in his arms, his thoughts moved from comforting to claiming. He wanted to take her, mark her and claim her for his own. None would doubt who she belonged to, she was his. *But was she?* There was a big question there that needed answering.

Henry held her away from him, unashamed of

his nakedness. Her cheeks heated and she looked pointedly over his shoulder.

"I will go find you some clothing," she said quietly, stepping away, then turning and flashing away.

Henry rubbed his face, feeling the stubble of a beard. *Huh, never really had to worry about a five o'clock shadow before.* He turned back to the room, his wolf stood behind him, obviously not happy. *Don't worry, she will be back soon, or we will go look for her. I don't think she wants us wandering around the colony.*

Yes but what about the enemies she has here? Obviously there are some who would like to see her, and us, harmed.

Damn but his wolf had a point. There was an elf here to worry about. "Crap!" He turned, ready to march after her. She appeared before he had taken two steps, a bundle in her hands which she handed him quickly while avoiding looking at him.

"There is a washroom over there you can use to clean up." She pointed to a side door.

"Lillian."

She shivered noticeably, but didn't look at him.

"Lillian," he said again.

She closed her eyes, then opened them and glared.

Her eyes were brown and they swirled, as if

reflecting her inner turmoil. It was beautiful and he wondered what they would look like in the heat of passion. His body heated as he pictured it and his cock stiffened. He lowered the bundle to save her the embarrassment.

“Do not leave this room while I’m in there. Someone in this colony has a reason to hate you, and I won’t stand for you running around unprotected. My wolf will be in here, watching you. If you leave, Lillian, you better believe I will tear through this colony looking for you.”

As he watched, she became a frozen, emotionless elf. This was what he knew of them, except he could tell for her it was a struggle to pull it off. He hated that she was even trying. He wanted to feel her passion, hate, love, happiness, whatever it was, he wanted to see it, experience it with her as one did with his mate. She shut down, closed off and he almost regretted the threat, but wouldn’t take it back. He wanted her safe so he could have her thoroughly as his own.

“I will be here,” she assured him calmly, then walked, with such grace she seemed to float, over to a chair by the window and peered out at the dark sky. She picked up a book and stared at the page with a blank expression.

Henry wasn’t fooled, but he knew there was nothing but to risk it. He wasn’t afraid of searching for her. She would hate it when he

shouted around for his *mate* Lillian. Henry walked through the door she had indicated.

CHAPTER FOUR

Lillian was shaking internally with the effort it took to control herself and put up the front of non-emotion. She couldn't have flashed away at this point if she'd wanted to, so there was no worry there. Her emotions were in such a frenzy and she would like nothing more than to unleash them on that infuriating dog.

How dare he presume to order her around like that? She was *not* going to stand for that kind of treatment, and as soon as he was back out of the bathroom, she was going to tell him.

Lillian glanced away from the words on the page she wasn't reading and met the yellow eyes of the wolf. She wasn't calm enough to sense its feelings, but judging by the calm watchfulness in his gaze, she was pretty sure he was fairly happy, as long as she didn't move and no one tried to enter. He was stationed by the door and obviously would alert Henry to anything suspicious.

Lillian had a brief vision of Henry running from the bathroom, naked, and perhaps wet from the shower. It was a pleasant vision and served to distract her from the annoyance she felt toward him. Her mind and body relaxed, the calm cool façade became more of a reality and she settled a bit more comfortably into the chair. Her eyes tried to focus on the words as the sounds of water running in the bathroom brought about the vision of Henry's big, hard muscled body under a hot spray, using her sponge and soap.

Lillian's body heated in places that had been dormant for years. Not since...no she wouldn't think of *its* name.

Lillian narrowed her eyes on the page and forced herself to read. She read in an unfocused manner as her mind continued to spin and swirl. When Henry emerged, she was still on the same page, likely the same paragraph she had been on when he left. He was wearing a traditional elf garment. A flowing tunic and pants, they were Lucas's. Lucas and Henry were about the same height, but Henry's body was much larger, broader shoulders and hips. On him, the normally loose and floating material clung and stretched. It looked good, she admitted to herself.

Henry's gaze went straight to her when he emerged and she saw him take a deep breath, as if he had been holding it in the entire time he'd been

gone. He strode toward her.

“Did you expect I would leave, just to have you wreck through my colony in search of me?”

“Something like that.”

Lillian’s ears tingled at his words. The thought that this, *dog*, was her mate was enough to make her want to scream. Just because he was her mate, didn’t mean she had to accept him as such, she reminded herself in an attempt to calm her nerves. Lillian felt her emotions start to gear up for a fight as anger and frustration filled her. She kept it off her face though. “I will tell you this once, and only once, I am not yours to order around. Do *not* think I will take to being treated in such a manner.”

Henry closed the distance between them, stopping when he was only a few small steps away, towering over her. He leaned down, his brown eyes intense, making the smile on his face a thing of wickedness rather than joy.

“You are my mate and you are the holder I am to protect. You will do as I tell you or you will not like the way I ensure you do.”

Internally, Lillian shivered, cringed and roared. Externally, she gave no more indication than a slight opening of her mouth and sharp indrawn breath that his words had affected her at all. “I’m not interested in mating with you, Henry. I do not deny I’m the holder and you are my guardian, but that gives you no right to order me around.”

His smile was, wolfish, for lack of a better term, and it made her wrack her brain for something she might have missed. Some way he could in fact, *make* her listen and obey him.

“Oh, Lillian, do not worry. I’m not interested in mating with you, even if you are my mate. You have birthed and that makes our mated status all but null, unless I choose to accept you anyway, which I don’t. As far as being guardian goes, you will listen to what I tell you, otherwise, I will be unable to protect you or your daughter and the army will suffer. Don’t be stupid, Lillian. I know you can’t help being stubborn, but don’t be stupid.”

Lillian couldn’t breathe. Her chest was tight and her heart was pounding so loud she was sure he must have heard it. Her eyes were huge, she could feel them straining, and her hands gripped the tome in her lap so firm she felt the hard leather cover start to give.

“You don’t have to worry about guarding any but me. The child didn’t survive the birthing. She was a half-breed and therefore an abomination. The gods would not allow her to live.” Lillian blinked and fought the tears that had begun to prick at the backs of her eyes. She hated Henry for making her feel this, this overwhelming sadness and loss that was ever present in the back of her mind. It wasn’t fair for him to bring it up at a time

when she was already so raw she couldn't hope to bury the feelings. She would pay him back for this. She would never allow such an unfairness to go unanswered.

Henry straightened away from her, his brown eyes narrow.

No sign of yellow in them. He was obviously calm, for which she was thankful. She was near defenseless with her emotions as they were.

"Don't think to lie to me."

"I'm not lying." Lillian surged to her feet, letting the anger show on her face and in her body. She planted her hands on her hips and narrowed her eyes at him. He stepped toward her and she forced herself not to retreat, but watched his eyes carefully – any sign of yellow and she was making a run for it.

He approached her slowly, leaning forward, leading with his nose. His wolf walked around to her back and she felt its hot breath through the thin layers of her dress.

She stood very still as Henry sniffed her, trying not to look at him as horrific embarrassment rose within her. He sniffed lower, his face nearly making contact with her belly. When he seemed to be moving farther down, she pushed him away and stepped aside quickly, putting the chair between them.

"I don't think so dog. That is quite enough

sniffing for you. What, you think you can smell me lying? Well good luck, because I'm not lying. My – the child died after birth, directly after birth. I heard her cry out once, then she was silent." This time the tears spilled over and she didn't even care that Henry and his wolf were there, witnessing the unheard-of event. They had equal expressions of shock on their faces.

Henry's face softened slightly and he stepped forward.

Horror rose in Lillian. She did not want his, or anyone else's, comfort. She had been stupid to even try being with someone outside of her species, and her punishment had been equal to her crime.

"Lillian."

He spoke gently and anger rose in her. She did not want this, she did not want pity either. "No, Henry, just forget it okay. I don't want to talk about it, ever."

Henry looked like he was debating, but finally nodded and stepped back. "We have a lot to discuss."

Lillian took a deep, calming breath, settled her feelings to the point of almost having full use of her powers and took a seat in the chair, indicating another across the room for Henry.

Henry dragged the chair close and settled his large body in it. He was almost too big for it. The

chairs were made for her species, and they were all quite slender, male and female both.

"Tell me, what do you know of guardians and holders?" Lillian questioned.

"Not a lot. I didn't really care much about it before I discovered what I was, obviously. The legends are vague, speaking of the guardian's job simply as to guard the holder. The holder is to, well, hold. Hold the emotions of the army. It seems simple enough."

Henry's words were matter-of-fact, which she appreciated. But he obviously knew as little as she did about their situation, not comforting. "I don't know much more than that. I fear we are nearly blind here, and with such an important position, I don't see how that can be a good thing. Perhaps we need to seek council somewhere else. Payton, crazy she may be, seemed to know quite a lot about what is going on."

"Yes, we should find out as much as we can. I don't think we are in a hurry though, fortunately, a war has not been declared. We might have years ahead of us to prepare."

"Yes." Lillian looked outside. The sun was going to rise soon. It would be rude to visit with Payton now. "We will have to wait until night to visit her. She is likely to be sleeping through most of the day hours."

"Well then, how about we eat something. I'm

starved.”

“Of course, what a terrible hostess I have been. Please forgive me,” she said then flashed away. When she appeared in the kitchen, she allowed herself a satisfied smile. He was no doubt quite mad, but she didn’t care. She would be quick enough to avoid any serious repercussions for the defiant act, and it felt so good to know she had done as she pleased. She really didn’t want him to follow her around like a puppy and listening to his voice was driving her insane. How did others do it, to be mated and have your ears tingle incessantly with every word spoken by your mate? Lillian couldn’t imagine living like that.

Her hands stilled as she pulled food from the fridge. She was going to have to live with him, he was her guardian, if not her mate, and there would be no getting rid of him. Lillian leaned back against the counter and stared unseeing into the fridge. How would she survive it? Electrical impulses shot around her ears, tingling their way down to her...she didn’t even want to think about the place they headed to with every word he spoke. It was just not going to work, he had to go.

“Lillian!”

She heard the roar and it broke her out of her stupor with an intense erotic vibration through her ears.

“Lillian!”

He roared again and she heard the shuffle of feet, soon others would be checking to see what was going on. "Damn." She grabbed a couple things, not really caring what, and flashed herself to where she was pretty sure he was.

He was faster than she had expected, he had gotten halfway to the kitchen through the big mansion and was angrier than she thought he'd be, too. When she appeared before him, his eyes were almost completely yellow and she knew he had to be half-merged, his wolf was close by his side, glaring at her accusingly.

Henry closed the distance between them in one long stride and grabbed her arm roughly, his fingers biting into the soft flesh of her upper arm.

She refused to wince away, no matter that it hurt. She just looked calmly into his outraged face. She heard, more than felt, the approach of others. *This will not go over well.*

"Henry, let's go back to my room and eat. You said you were hungry and I was only trying to get you what you need. I'm sorry if I forgot you wouldn't like me to flash away. I assure you, I didn't do it on purpose." It killed her to say those words, to be so pleasing when she really just wanted to say, *screw you, I will do as I please.* But she couldn't risk anyone else witnessing this. They weren't allowed to flash around her mansion, but they would be here soon enough anyway. Likely

only the few personal staff she kept around, but still, they all liked to talk, especially about her and her brother.

Henry looked placated, his eyes reverting back to almost completely brown. The edges remained yellow, however, showing his anger was still close to the surface. "Let's go, together," he said and started to pull her back along the hallway. He didn't let go of her arm.

They didn't make it far before a group of four concerned and curious elves confronted them, lead by a member of her personal guard.

"The werewolf is not under control?" the guard asked, looking pointedly at Henry's hand wrapped around her arm.

Henry loosened his grip, but didn't remove it. "Well now, why would she, or anyone else, want to be controlling me? I'm here as a guest."

"Thank you, but we are fine, just grabbing a bite to eat before settling in for the day. Henry is still recovering from his...illness. He is very weak." She added the last for no reason other than she wanted to annoy him, and she was pretty sure it worked, judging by the snort his wolf gave. Lillian didn't wait for an answer. She didn't owe them even the explanation she had given them. She and Lucas were the rulers of this colony and therefore answered to none.

As they walked down the hall, she felt their

gazes tracking them, knew they were analyzing every movement, every touch. They would see their leader being led away by a lower life form, a dog, and they would no doubt tell others of this encounter. If they didn't reveal that he was guardian and she was keeper soon, then there was a very real chance the people here were going to be swayed and there was at least one among them that would be happy to do the swaying.

Henry held to her arm until they were safely in her room. When he let her go, she dropped the food on the table and sat back in her chair. With the table of food between them, she felt much safer.

Henry rummaged through the pickings, obviously not impressed.

Lillian had grabbed a head of lettuce, a container of strawberries, cheese and a loaf of French bread.

"Are you trying to starve me?" He growled.

"If you hadn't come barreling out of the room, yelling like a rabid dog, I might have had more time to find you a well-balanced meal. As it is, this is what you can eat." Lillian crossed her arms, not caring to hide her emotions. This was her room after all. She should be able to be herself here.

Henry smiled.

That made her even angrier.

Then he started in on the food.

A tap-tap-tapping at the window alerted her to Athena's arrival back home. She flew in when Lillian opened the window and landed on her shoulder. "Good morning, Athena." Lillian crooned, stroking the bird's feathers.

"Here, you need to eat, too." Henry handed her a cheese and lettuce sandwich, then sat back with one of his own. His was twice the size of hers, not that she was surprised, he was easily twice the size of her. She looked down at the wolf, seemingly asleep, between them. She felt out with her senses, he was content.

"We need to address the problem of *who* in this colony has it out for you," Henry said as he finished off his sandwich and started in on the strawberries.

"Yes, that would be a good thing to know," she mumbled around a bite. She found that if she relaxed enough, she didn't really feel the wonderful spread of delight at his every spoken word. Or maybe she just accepted and absorbed it without a fight? Either way, the more relaxed she was, the easier it was to handle and the pleasure her body was getting from it was delightful. As long as she didn't think about who was causing it.

Lillian went back to thinking about the betrayer among her people. She had an idea of who it could be, but she didn't really want to believe it, and she was probably wrong anyway. She wanted to be

wrong, but then again, she didn't want to believe that *anyone* in her colony could be against her.

"I just don't know where to begin finding out." She was surprised at how calm she felt about the whole situation. Her gaze drifted to Henry from under her lashes. She actually felt safer with him here and that was disturbing.

"We will think of something. The key is to not let on that we know anything, not what we are and definitely not that we know there was a hex put on me. We want whoever it is to reveal themselves, and they will if they feel comfortable. If they hide, we may never know who it is and it will be a very real danger we don't want or need."

"There is no way to explain you though. It is inconceivable that I would allow a perfectly healthy young werewolf to stay in my house, in my private chambers, no way. It is too ridiculous to even consider. They will all know something is very off."

"So we tell them something they will believe. I am your mate and therefore refuse to leave your side."

Lillian choked on the bite she was trying to swallow. She sputtered and coughed.

He popped a strawberry into his satisfied, smiling mouth.

"You're insane if you think I'm telling anyone that ridiculous story, and besides, you said you

wern't interested in mating me because I...because I'm not pure."

"I didn't say I changed my mind, but what will they know? It's the only way I can think to explain why I won't let you out of my sight, because believe me when I say this, Lillian, you will not be allowed out of my sight for more than is absolutely necessary."

His face was stone serious, almost elf-like in its calm. She knew he was telling the truth, he wouldn't let her out of his sight. He was her guardian and that made his mate instincts even more prominent. If he indeed had any mate instincts toward her, which she doubted. He had a loophole and he was happily taking it. She tried not to think too much about how that bothered her. She wished it was so easy for her to shut down the mate instincts. Unfortunately, it wasn't so, which meant that sitting here listening to him speak was sweet torture. "We will have to think of something else. We could say you are my guard dog."

"Oh-hell-no!" His eyes flashed yellow.

She bit her lip. That had slipped out without filtering through her thoughts first and she knew she should apologize, but just couldn't bring herself to. She owed him that, and more, for the hurt he had caused her earlier, and the torture of listening to his words buzz up and down her

body. "Well, do you have a better idea? There is some crazy man out there kidnapping immortals. It would seem reasonable for me to hire a specialist to keep me safer."

Not all that reasonable, but she couldn't think of anything better and somehow the idea of him as her guard dog just seemed too wonderful to pass up. The fact that he would hate it made it all the better in her mind. It was only fair for him to suffer as she was. His voice made her uncomfortable, she would make him uncomfortable. Balanced and fair, she took a relaxed breath and smiled, on the inside.

"What are you talking about, kidnapping immortals?"

Lillian explained about the odd note she had received and how Lucas and the Council of Immortals were taking care of it so she wasn't worried. Henry looked unimpressed by her obvious lack of caring, but didn't press her for more information.

"Well, we don't have to make any decisions now. Let's sleep on it today and then tonight we will do what must be done," Henry said with a yawn. Obviously still affected from his ordeal, he was tired and would require more than the usual amount of sleep to rejuvenate after so long without.

Thoughts of sleeping arrangements brought

about an aching longing for the comfort she had found curled around his furry body. Oh how she wished for that again, but there was no way she would be able to sleep like that with him aware of what was going on. Which left a big question, *where was he going to sleep?* "I'm sure Lucas won't mind you using his room. It's right down the hall," she said simply, no real hope he would take her up on the offer.

He gave her a look that left no doubt about what he thought of her helpful suggestion. Then his gaze swept over to her large bed.

"I'm sure I will be fine without rest today, go ahead and take the bed," Lillian offered.

"I sleep, you sleep. I don't trust you to not take off, and you will lay with me, otherwise, I won't get any rest for worrying about you."

"I don't think so. That is unreasonable and I think even *you* can see that. It's unfair of you to not trust me, but ask so much of me."

"Fair? I don't give a shit about fair, Lillian. I'm not one of your kind and I won't pretend to obey your rules."

"Then why should I give a shit about your feelings? Why shouldn't I just flash out of here right now?"

Henry flung the table from between them, his eyes blazing yellow and a deep growl rumbled from his chest.

Mating Call

Lillian was frozen, rooted to her seat, the half-eaten sandwich crushed in her terrified grip. She had pushed him too far and now he was going to hurt her, like the animal he was. He leaned over her, his hands resting on the arms of her chair, his hot breath blew across her face and she shivered. He smiled a self-satisfied smile.

“Lillian, you will do nothing of the sort because if you do, I will hunt you down and drag you back here in front of all your proper little people out there. I won’t rest until I have shown them that you are nothing more than a mate to a *dog*. You will sleep in that bed beside me and you will not flash away from me, ever, unless specifically instructed to do so.”

Anger boiled up inside of her. Where did he get off ordering her about like this? It was insane and she was pretty damn sure no were female let their mate treat them this way. The worst of it was, that something deep and basic inside of her wanted to kneel down and do as he instructed, do anything to please him. “Bite me, Henry. I will not sleep near you and I will not stop flashing.”

“Try it.” Brown eyes clashed with yellow.

Lillian felt her anger burn through her body and slide down with his words, along the lines of electrical impulses from her ears straight to her core. She shivered, but this time it wasn’t fear causing the reaction.

“Lillian.” He whispered, his lids drooping over his yellow eyes. He inhaled deeply.

She knew he was scenting her. His chest rumbled and his lids closed the rest of the way. Her body was betraying her, relishing his reactions and increasing its own traitorous wanting.

Her gaze slid down his broad chest and wondered what he would look like below the waist, if she could see it now. It was, thankfully, hidden behind his long tunic, but by the way he gripped the chair arms, she thought he most certainly was aroused. The thought brought a new rush of heated desire to her body and moisture seeped between her legs in an embarrassingly delightful sensation.

“Henry, please, I must...go,” she pleaded, hating herself for the weakness, but she couldn’t take this. She didn’t want to be with him as mate, and if he didn’t give her a break soon, she was going to throw herself shamelessly at him and not care until it was over, then she would really hate herself and him.

He took a deep breath, then removed one arm from the chair. He didn’t open his eyes as she scrambled from beneath him and raced to the sanctuary of the bathroom. She locked herself in—like that would stop him from getting at her—and crumpled to the floor, a shivering weeping mess

Mating Call

of emotion. Everything an elf was never supposed to be. She felt like a failure, a failure as an elf, a failure as a breeder, and now she had the opportunity to be a failure as a holder. Why was she so cursed? Where was the balance in her suffering?

* * * *

Henry hated himself, just a little. He had pushed her far harder than necessary. There was really no reason for it, other than his desire to crack her. He wanted to see that mask of non-emotion fall apart and reveal all that she really was. He wanted her to admit that she needed him to keep her safe. He wanted her to want to mate with him.

Great job, you scared her off with your tough guy routine. His wolf thought toward him.

Oh shut it, what else was I supposed to do? You practically took me over when she was talking, it was all I could do to keep from merging and then I caught the scent of her desire and... Oh man! I just about lost it. This is not a good situation. We are far too volatile like this.

Yeah! Which is exactly why you need to get on with the making up part.

Right, like it's just that easy. She wants nothing to do with us and until that changes, we are going to get nowhere. So get used to frustration, wolf, we live here now.

Henry heard the water start in the bathroom and as an image of her wet and soapy body flashed into his mind, he groaned, his already hard cock going ridged. He flung himself onto the bed and covered his face with an arm. This was such a bad idea, but to give her the space she wanted would be worse. Worrying about her would keep him up and agitated, that hadn't been an exaggeration. Of course, the telling her she had to sleep next to him, that was overboard and he knew, but he couldn't take it back now. It would only make her think she would be able to change his mind about things all the time.

He opened his eyes and stared up at Athena who was perched on the bedrail above him. The owl was looking in his wolf's direction, even though it wouldn't be able to see it without moonlight to render it solid. The animal would sense a dangerous predator in its midst, it would make it edgy and unable to rest. Henry almost felt bad for the thing, but if it really cared, it would leave. He wasn't forcing it to stay in here with him and his wolf.

Not like he was doing with Lillian. "Fuck!" He cursed, then grabbed a pillow and blanket off the bed and threw himself down in front of the door that led out of the room. He would give her some space, but this was it and she better not get used to him being so accommodating.

Mating Call

When she finally emerged from the bathroom, he was still awake, but feigned sleep to save them both uncomfortable conversation. He heard her crawl up onto her bed and then, just as he was about to slip into unconsciousness, he heard something so odd he thought for sure he was dreaming already.

“Come up here, wolf. Yeah, come up here and sleep with me on the comfortable bed.” Then silence was quickly followed by sweet dreamless sleep.

Henry slept half the day and when he awoke, Lillian was sitting calmly with a book in her hands, his wolf resting at her feet. She was dressed in a light pink gown that pooled around his wolf. Her hair was pulled away from her face, revealing her pointed ears. Her pale skin was shining in the sunlight that streamed through the window. She was positively beautiful and Henry’s chest swelled with pride to know she was his mate.

Of course, he couldn’t claim her yet, and he knew that it was useless to try while she was so against it. That was why he had said what he had. It was a valid loophole, but one his wolf refused to accept and so he was mated to her and he didn’t mind one bit. Even knowing she had a child, who was still alive as far as he could tell. Her scent held no death, a child who died soon after birth would

leave a sour scent upon its mother. She had none.

The only thing that bothered him about it was the father. Some bastard out there had taken what was rightfully his and then hurt her by stealing the child away and letting her believe it dead. He didn't know what kind of sick being would do such a thing, but he would find out and he would pay the bastard back what he deserved, death.

It was his right as Lillian's mate, and it was his duty as a being of the immortal world. Treating each other that way was senseless and cruel, everything that he had been taught was wrong.

Henry's thoughts went briefly to his parents. He still hadn't called them. He would have to do that as soon as possible. Surely Lillian had a phone around here somewhere, even if he hadn't been able to find it.

He sat up and sensed, more than saw, her stiffen with the realization that he was awake. He hated that she would react in such a way. "I will shower, then we can eat something."

"I'll get breakfast while you shower, if it's alright with you."

She spoke quietly and he would have felt like a world class ass to deny her, although that's exactly what he wanted to do. Letting her leave the room alone was the last thing he wanted to agree to, ever.

"That would be great. My wolf will tell me if

Mating Call

you are not quick about it.” He added the last as a warning. He didn’t care if he had to run out of the shower naked, protect her he would, even from herself. He walked to the bathroom as she flashed away.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lillian hadn't slept all day, but had rested and shamelessly, she had bribed the wolf to cuddle next to her, threatening it with bodily harm if it told Henry about it. The wolf had seemed agreeable so she'd lain by it, its soft heat lulling her to a half-asleep, half-awake state that was as restful as anything.

Through her resting, she'd come up with a perfect plan and it had put her at peace. She'd felt balance take root in her soul and serenity filled her mind. She just needed to get Henry to agree, which meant she needed to be on his good side. Unfortunately, that meant she would be acting like a totally annoying female. She would cater to him and care for him and do as he wished, but he was going to agree to her plan, or all of that would stop.

She quickly gathered a well-balanced meal for him. Cold chicken, fresh salad, bread and

grapes—he couldn't complain about this meal. She debated nuking the chicken, but decided against it, she was taking too much time as it was. If he wanted it warm, she would just flash out and heat it up for him, no problem.

She grimaced at herself. It felt so wrong, so unbalanced, to act this way with him. It was a good thing they weren't going to truly mate, otherwise she would either live like this always, or he would have to majorly change his deal. *Who am I kidding, he would have to change. There is no way I could do this for long.*

Lillian flashed back into the room just as Henry was coming out of the bathroom. He had a towel wrapped around his waist, his bare chest was still damp and his hair was wet around his shoulders. Her gaze locked onto a droplet of water as it slid from his shoulder, down past a dark nipple and lower, absorbing into the soft towel. Heat flushed through her body and her mouth went dry as she remembered the gorgeous cock that was hiding under that towel.

“Lillian?”

Lillian snapped her gaze back up to his face and bit down solid on her emotions to keep them from flooding her face with a deep blush. She couldn't believe where her thoughts had strayed to and so quickly. “I should have thought to grab you some more clothing. If you don't mind, I will just run

and grab you some real quick.”

“That would be great and I also need a phone. I need to let Tarquin and my parents know I have recovered.”

“Yes, I have a cell around here somewhere.” Lillian dug around for the phone. By the time, she found it Henry had eaten almost everything she had brought up. It was going to be hard to keep him satisfied, she realized. He was such a huge being and burned through a lot of energy between himself and the wolf. She shook her head, why was she caring? It wasn’t as if it were really her duty to care for him. Right now, she was just playing at it, to get what she wanted, a fair give and take.

She handed him the phone, then walked out of the room quickly to find him something to wear, all that skin and muscle of his was making her body heat and swirl. Making her thoughts drift about to dangerous territory.

She quickly went to Lucas’s rooms and found some clothing she hoped would fit. Henry’s body was so much different than any elf male. Lillian’s mind easily conjured a picture of Henry’s broad shoulders, large pecks with dark nipples that made her want to nibble. Heat swept through her as she relaxed her control and let herself feel. In the privacy of Lucas’s bedroom, she let the full impact of her desire for her mate, for Henry, wash

over her. It nearly took her to her knees. She bit her lip to keep from crying out as moisture seeped between her legs.

After she was once again in control of herself, she hurried back to her room before he decided to come looking for her. Likely he was already off the phone and wouldn't be happy if she delayed any longer. He was opening the door when she flashed into the room. As soon as she materialized behind him, he whirled around, his eyes yellow and his jaw clenched. Perhaps she had taken longer than she'd realized. "Sorry it took so long, I was hoping to find something a bit larger, but you will have to make do with these." She held out the clothing to him.

His eyes settled back to brown and he shut the door. As he approached her to take the clothing, he breathed deep and his eyes once again flared to yellow.

Lillian stepped away quickly, knowing what that change was all about—he could scent the remains of her desire, the pleasure she had allowed herself to feel for him in private. She knew her eyes were wide, not from fright, but shame for him to know that she so desired him.

He stared at her for a moment, eyes narrowing slightly, hands clenched around the fabric of the borrowed clothes. He opened his mouth, as if he were about to say something, then shut it and

walked to the bathroom.

She sagged with relief, falling into the nearby chair. This situation may be more than she was capable of handling. After gathering herself once again, she restrained her emotions and pushed all feeling aside. She sat straight and still in the chair, ready to tell him what she proposed.

Henry came out of the bathroom, his long hair dry now and floating around his shoulders, which were wide and pressing out at the seams of Lucas's borrowed tunic.

She was going to have to find him some better fitting clothes. This was almost as bad as having him naked. She could see every line of his body and what made it worse, was she knew exactly what each line looked like without clothes. The image was forever burned into her brain and it was excruciatingly pleasant. "I have thought of something that might work well, a plan of sorts to find the traitor in my colony."

Henry gave her a look clearly stating his doubt.

She almost stopped. He was going to hate the idea, but it was better than *his* lame idea. There was just no way any of the elves in her colony would buy that she needed him as protection. "I think that my idea is better suited to our situation and definitely more believable."

"Uh-huh, right. So what is it?" He sat across from her and leaned back in his chair, arms

crossed over his chest and looking completely closed off to anything she had to say, as if he were merely humoring her with listening at all.

It grated on her nerves. "You know what, never mind. It doesn't matter. You'll just tell me it's not as good as your idea, even though it is, stubborn male."

He shot forward in his seat, eyes bulging out in shock. "I'm stubborn? Are you kidding me? You are the elf here. It doesn't get much more stubborn than that."

"Elves are not stubborn. We believe what we believe and we, unlike so many others, adhere to our beliefs. We don't pick and choose when we want to follow our own rules."

"Oh yeah, is that why you mated with a different species? Is that why you have a half-breed daughter out there?"

Lillian was certain horror was written all over her face, judging by the way Henry cringed. She saw the pity in his eyes and forced calm over her features, burying the pain deep, the shame of what she had done. She'd been trying to make up for that mistake her entire life since.

"Lilly, I'm sorry I—"

"Don't, okay, just don't." She took a deep breath, then continued. "The problem I see with telling them you're guarding me is I'm not now, nor have I ever been, in need of a guard other than

the ones I have here. I don't believe any of my people, and especially not whoever is out to harm me, will accept you are here for that reason."

"I can understand that concern."

Lillian eyed him, searching for the sarcasm she hadn't been able to detect in his words. She saw nothing. "From time to time we have been known to assist animals when they have difficult times breeding."

Henry's eyes flared yellow for a second, reacting to her words.

Lillian hesitated, but he seemed under control so she continued. "It would be believable that you have come here to seek my assistance in renewing your uh...your...breeding abilities." Lillian knew she would have been blushing if she hadn't already been controlling herself so carefully. To think of this young and very obviously virile werewolf needing help breeding, oh God, she was hot just thinking of how she would like to help him with that.

As if he read her thoughts, his eyes flared yellow and his wolf practically purred at her feet. Then her words must have hit him because his eyes flared yellow for a different reason and he stood up from his chair, anger all over his face. He placed his large hands on either side of her and leaned in close to her face. He got so close, she could watch the yellow of his wolf pulse in and

out of his eyes as he struggled to keep in control.

“My breeding abilities will not be questioned. If you have doubts, I would be more than happy to demonstrate how very capable I am.”

Lillian didn't know why she did it. It was obviously a case of temporary insanity. He was already close to an edge and a werewolf was dangerous in any form, but this was a very dangerous form indeed. She didn't think of any of that though, just reached up and slapped him.

Her hand shook as it descended back to her lap. Henry hadn't even flinched, hadn't moved a hand or his head, not even his gaze had wavered. He towered over her, eyes locked on hers and glowing bright yellow now. Beside him, his wolf growled low, but he was looking at Henry, not her, as if he were warning Henry from retaliation.

They stayed like that, locked in a wordless battle. His gaze dared her to make a move toward escape or harm, hers glared back, daring him to retaliate for what was fairly deserved. He had insulted her, on many levels, not the least of which was by bringing up the fact that she would absolutely love to see and feel his body against her...in her. Her body temperature spiked again, but she tamped it down before he could notice, even this close, he couldn't be that good.

When they made the official announcement,

Lillian emphasized the absence of her brother as a reason for the extra precaution. Some accepted it without a care. A few looked confused and suspicious. One looked pissed, and one werewolf was smug beside her as he scanned the crowd.

“Alaria is my cousin and she has always been jealous of what I have. I don’t want to think she would ever do anything to harm me, but the way she looked when the announcement was made. Surely you noticed.”

Henry looked at her like she was daft. They were back in her room and night was full outside. They had made the announcement at sunset.

“What the hell are you talking about? They all stared blankly at us, then turned around and walked away without a word.”

“You seriously didn’t notice the way her eyes narrowed and her mouth turned down, she even balled her hands into fists. It was a near tantrum,” Lillian explained.

“Right,” Henry said, drawing out the word sarcastically. “Anyway, you will have to point her out to me so I will know who to kill.”

“We are not *killing* anyone,” she said firmly. “If it turns out she has done something to harm me, then she will be held accountable and her punishment will be equal to her crime.”

Henry made no response.

Lillian understood he didn’t, and wouldn’t,

agree. To him it was kill the enemy – werewolves were volatile like that, so much less civilized.

“So now I think we should talk about your daughter.”

Lillian coughed and sputtered the tea she had been drinking, managing to spray it, not only over herself, but Henry as well. She would have felt bad about that if he didn't deserve it for bringing up such a hateful topic.

“I would really rather not, okay? I'm sure you can understand what a hard topic it is for me to think about. I'm not sure what you think will be gained by its discussion, but I assure you it's naught.” Lillian was proud of the way her voice stayed steady.

“Your daughter lives and we must find her. As guardian of the holder, I'm aware of the presence of another holder. Your daughter is as you are because that is the way it works. She will need to be guarded the same as you when the time comes. This is why I know she lives, that and as your mate, I can smell the birthing on you and it's untainted by death. Your daughter lives, Lillian.” Henry was so calm, as if he were saying nothing more important than what he would like on his eggs.

Lillian's insides ruptured. Waves of grief, horror and hope flowed through her until she was strangled by them. She knew her breathing was

erratic, could feel the lack of oxygen getting to her brain, she knew her mouth was opening and closing silently, like a fish out of water, she knew this and yet she was helpless to control any of it.

Lillian closed her eyes, slammed them and her mouth shut. She held her breath for a moment, then took one long draw of air, then another and another, until she was certain she would neither pass out nor cry. If what he stated were true, then she knew one crystal balled bastard warlock who was going to die.

Lillian slowly opened her eyes. She was surprised by how close Henry was to her—he was kneeling at her feet, his face full of concern and only inches from her own. When he spoke, his voice was soft and full of caring that made her want to fall into his arms and gather comfort and strength from him, something she would never allow herself to do.

“I’m sorry I had to say it like that, Lillian, but you wouldn’t listen. I had to get it all out there at once.”

The rawness of her nerves coupled with the delight his words always brought made it impossible for her to hide the shudder of desire as it flowed from her ears straight down to her core. Her heart ached anew at the loss of her child and the newfound knowledge that she had grown up without her. Lillian felt the empty space in her

chest bleed fresh and at that moment, all she wanted was to feel and be filled.

Before she could talk herself out of it, she pressed her lips to his. Growls from him and his wolf surrounded her. Henry pulled back and grasped her face between his hot palms. His eyes were yellow with desire.

“Lilly, this won’t make you feel better.”

“Yes it will.” She turned her face and placed a kiss to his palm, flicking her tongue out to taste his skin. He dropped his hand, freeing her face, and she once again pressed her lips to his, this time sliding off her seat onto his lap. She deepened the kiss when he didn’t pull away, pushing her tongue into his mouth.

She felt him hesitate as their tongues touched, but not for long. His arms crushed her to him and his tongue met hers, thrust for thrust. The kiss was deep and hot and so much better than she remembered kissing could be. She felt the effect throughout her entire body. She concentrated on the feelings and the feel of his hard body under hers, blocking out everything and anything that was unpleasant. It didn’t belong here, in this moment between her and her mate. Her hands traveled up and down his back, twirling fingers in his long, silky hair.

When his mouth left her and traveled to the bare skin at her neck, she gasped and fisted her

hands in his hair, her body trembling with wanting everything he could give. His tongue trailed up her neck to her sensitive ear, she nearly lost control as wetness pooled between her thighs, proof she was ready and willing to receive him.

“Lillian, I want to take you. I want to have every inch of your delicious body.”

Lillian went from trembling to shaking as his words sent shockwaves straight to the center of her desire. She recognized the feeling, knew what was waiting for her just around the corner and she wanted it, wanted it more than she had ever wanted anything in her life. It was more important than breathing at that moment. The total mind numbing ultimate pleasure was exactly what she needed.

“Yes, Henry, take me there, give me what I need.” She lowered her head to his neck and nipped and licked at it while her hands moved between them, searching out his cock, hardened with desire for her. It was straining against the confines of his trousers and she tore at them frantically, wanting to feel the hot, slick skin against her palm.

When skin met skin, Henry moaned and tore at her clothing. She heard a rip but didn't care. Her palms ran up and down his hard length while his rested on her bare breasts, his fingers plucking at her nipples, rolling them gently, then pressing his

palms flat once again over her breasts, kneading them as his mouth inched closer. He trailed wet kisses from her neck to her breast and captured one sensitive bud between his lips.

A moan escaped her lips and she arched her back, giving him better access to her. His tongue, teeth and lips drove her crazy as they worked first one, then the other nipple. She was panting and completely out of control, and she didn't care.

All the while, she continued her ministrations to his cock. Loving every tiny drop she found waiting for her at the head. How he was resisting coming she couldn't understand, but she was thankful. He lifted his head from her and she mewed a little protest, she wanted to feel like that forever.

"Lillian, I..." He stopped.

She was about to ask him what when he continued, obviously saying something he hadn't intended to at first.

"I'm going to have you now."

More welcome words had never been uttered she was sure. "Yes, Henry, please." Lillian moved to push his tunic up, but he quickly discarded the garment himself, then his trousers. He stood before her, completely naked, completely aroused and more gorgeous than any creature she had ever seen. He was so big, so passionate and so close to taking her.

Lillian scrambled out of the remains of her gown and waited for him there, splayed on the floor like an offering. He was the God of her pleasure right now and she was offering herself to him. He knelt before her, his gaze running up and down the length of her body. She wondered what he thought of her pale luminescent skin and thin hairless body. As he scrutinized her, she became quite self-conscious, her hands itching to cover herself from him.

“Perfect,” he whispered before dropping down on top of her and capturing her mouth in a long kiss that quickly returned her body to the state of readiness it had been in moments before. His knee crept between her legs, pushing them apart and his hand delved between her thighs. She melted around his fingers and his chest rumbled with approval. His thumb found her clit, circling it. She held onto his shoulders as he touched her, torturing her with pleasure. She spread her trembling thighs wider and moaned.

He kissed her, his tongue invading her mouth, hot and sweet, his earthy taste and smell filling her sense and driving her crazy with desire. This is what her mate smelt like when he was about to take her, this is what he tasted like as he touched her. Never in her life had she been so turned on, so ready to be fucked.

Lillian slid her tongue across his and felt his

chest vibrate with a groan. He shifted between her thighs, breaking their kiss as his cock replaced his fingers and he was suddenly there, inside of her, filling and completing her. His cock pumped in and out of her and she closed her eyes, concentrating on the feel of their bodies joined. Her back arched, pushing up to meet him, to pull his cock deeper. She wanted to feel every inch of him. The pleasure he was giving her was a gift she would never be able to repay, her body forever indebted to his for this one perfect moment.

“Look at me,” he commanded softly.

She opened her eyes. Her gaze locked with his intense yellow eyes. She felt that stare down into her soul, a place where she would never be able to forget him, never be able to get him out. Her soul was claiming him as mate, whether her mind agreed or not. That made two out of three because her body had accepted him from the moment he spoke. Her mind was a force though, and no matter how else he got into her, she knew he wasn't right, could never be right for her.

“Stop thinking, Lillian, just feel, just see,” he prompted.

As she let her mind take a backseat to everything else, her body thrummed with pleasure. She ran her hands down his back, cupping his ass and digging in her nails as he increased the rhythm, thrusting harder now, his

cock hitting the spot that made her pant.

“Oh fuck, Henry...” she moaned as she felt the pressure building, knowing she was on the edge of an exquisite orgasm.

Henry bent his head and pressed his mouth to her neck, his teeth grazing her skin in a sharp bite, not breaking the skin but she was sure to have a small mark. His tongue slid out and ran up to her ear. Taking the lobe between his teeth, she shivered.

“Oh God, Lilly, you’re so wet, so perfect. I want to feel you come, want to hear you scream as you come around my cock.”

Henry’s words made Lillian’s cunt clench and she gasped as she started to come. She opened her mouth and let the moans of pleasure free as Henry threw his head back and howled. He pumped into her furiously then stilled and roared as he came, hot and deep inside of her.

* * * *

Henry couldn’t believe how wonderful it felt just to hold her in his arms. She was asleep, judging by the soft even breathing. He felt complete like this, his mate safe in his arms, body exhausted from lovemaking. This was what his life should be. Of course, this was just a stopover in wonderland and he knew it. She wasn’t going to suddenly love and

accept him when she woke up. The best he could hope for was that she wouldn't hate him. He knew she was vulnerable, she was hurt and confused, and that was why she'd wanted him. He'd taken her anyway, as if he didn't give a shit about her feelings.

Not that he'd been showing any care for her feelings before. If he had, she would have pushed him away all the harder. No matter how he looked at it, he was sure it had been a mistake to fuck her, had known it at the time and almost said so, but damn he wanted her, needed her. She was his mate and if he didn't have her, he was going to kill someone. He tightened his hold on her until she made a sound of protest in her sleep.

This is going to be even harder now, you know that, right? Now that you know what it's like to be with her, it's going to be even more difficult not to. His wolf's thoughts filled his mind.

He glared at it. *How about you make yourself useful and drag a blanket off the bed.*

The wolf huffed as if offended, but did it anyway. *I won't have our mate freezing just because you're too lazy to get her a blanket.* His wolf stated as he dropped the blanket beside him.

Thanks. Henry thought back, then blocked his wolf's thoughts and concentrated on memorizing the feel of his mate pressed against him, the scent of their lovemaking hanging in the air and the

peaceful sounds of quiet night.

Henry's drowsing eyes popped wide. *Why is it so quiet?* Night is when the elves, like most immortals, were active. Why were there no sounds of them outside? The window was open even and he could hear nothing. "Go check it out," he whispered to his wolf.

The wolf hurried to the window and stuck his head out. *I don't see anyone down there. This is worrisome. You should wake her up. We should leave this place, find her daughter, then return and announce what we are. The waiting isn't going to work well for us if her people are being poisoned against her already.*

Henry knew his wolf was right. There was only one reason the elves were in hiding, they were afraid of him. They didn't trust what Lillian had told them. It wasn't safe to stay, but if they left, how would that help them find out who was against them?

Lillian was sure it was her cousin, so perhaps the answer was there. They could publicly announce that Alaria was to be in charge for a couple days while they go to aid in the search for missing immortals. It will be impossible for Alaria to spout her evilness from a public position like that without notice, and someone will be willing to share that information with them—Lillian must have at least one ally among her people.

By the time her daughter was found and

Mating Call

brought here for safe keeping, they would hopefully be returning to an answer to the question of traitor and it would be safe to reveal themselves. It wasn't a great plan, but it would get Lillian away from whoever wished her harm and any plan that kept her safe was a good enough plan for him.

CHAPTER SIX

“Take me to where you birthed, it will be a good place to start looking.”

Lillian was still unsure of the plan and announcing that Alaria was going to be in charge while she was gone had taken all her willpower to do convincingly. She was still agitated about it. “I don’t like this idea.”

“I know, but you admitted you couldn’t think of anything better so guess what, this is what we’re doing. Now flash away, darling.” Henry stood with hands on hips, the first rays of morning sunlight breaking through the trees. He was beautiful.

Damn her, she couldn’t stop thinking about the best sex she had ever had. Why did it have to be with him? It wasn’t even the fact that he was a werewolf. She had slept with other species before, but he was her mate and she did not want to want him. It was unacceptable to want to mate with

him, a stupid dog.

She took a deep breath, calming herself so she would hopefully be able to flash them, then grabbed his arm and thought about the place she had birthed her daughter, a place she hadn't allowed herself to picture in twenty-five years. She flashed them with a glamour that would disguise them among the woods she hoped were still there, just in case a human was about.

The tiny cabin was obviously uninhabited. From the looks of it, a good wind would blow the whole thing over. Obviously there were no humans about to see them. She dropped the glamour and stepped away from Henry.

It looked nothing like the sweet place she had spent that wonderful time in. The time of her pregnancy when she had been full of hope and love, it was the same place and emotion swirled through her as she thought about the most vile thing that had been done in there. "He stole her from me," she whispered. Not realizing she had spoken aloud, she was surprised by Henry's firm response.

"We will find them and I *will* kill him."

Lillian wondered if she should tell him no, that killing wasn't the answer, but she wanted blood revenge. Darell had taken a life from her. She would take his life from him. Balanced and fair.

"I will go in and look around, see if I can get a

clear scent of one of them.” Henry looked at her with concern in his eyes.

She hated that, it meant she was showing weakness. “Please do, you have a better nose than me I’m sure.” She was stiff, matter of fact and emotionless, giving nothing away.

Henry walked with sure steps up the crumbling stairs and through the doorway. Where the door was she couldn’t tell, but she could remember it well. It had been a beautiful bright red with a semicircle window at the top. She had opened and closed it hundreds of times during those months.

Lillian hated herself for it, hated the weakness she was showing, but couldn’t make herself go in there. The memories were too vivid, even after these twenty-five years. She turned away in disgust and walked into the surrounding woods until she found a soft bed of moss to rest on. She leaned against a tree and closed her eyes, feeling through her surroundings. She told herself she was looking for dangerous animals, but what she was really looking for she found back at the cabin.

Henry’s wolf was there, concentrating on the smells within. There was a large amount of determination in the wolf, a fair amount of anger and just a hint of sadness. No not sadness it was...sympathy.

Lillian’s eyes popped open and so did her mouth. *He feels sorry for me.* She couldn’t believe it.

Others didn't feel sorry for her. She was strong and sure and she was an elf. The absolute incredulity of the situation clogged her mind and she lost track of everything going on around her.

She thought of the last time someone had sympathized with her. Darell had found her weeping in the desert over the broken body of a coyote. Lillian had tried to save the poor creature. It was, after all, what she was made for. But seeing it there, its wounds open and bleeding, its cries of pain and the fear of death in its eyes, she had become so emotional, she was unable to draw her powers forward. She had failed and she had wept.

When Darell came upon her and offered her sympathy of words and comfort of body, she had taken it all with desperation. She had been free of the bindings of her elf life for that short blissful period living with him in the desert. When she had become pregnant after only a short period, two years or so, they had found this cabin so they could be in a more peaceful and secluded environment. They had been the happiest days of her long life.

Darell was a warlock, which meant he drew power from his environment, used nature to cast spells and do magic. Warlocks had crystal balls where their power was concentrated, making sex with one an experience that left a woman weak and begging for more. Lillian had been greedy for

it after the first time and ignored everything else that was going on, never questioning his intentions. Warlocks were not a group oriented immortal breed and so Lillian hadn't thought it odd that he wanted to be with her, away from all others and there was never any mention of his family.

A warlock grew up with his male relatives, the fathers raising the sons. A female born, a witch, was raised by the other witches. A witch and a warlock were so very incompatible that, although they often enough got together for sex and breeding, they could never live together as a married couple. Which, because of their easy breeding abilities, unlike most other immortal creatures, Lillian supposed was a blessing.

The world overrun by witches and warlocks was not a world she wished to live in. A witch and a warlock who tried to live together for more than the time it took to get the sex out of their systems would too soon end up killing each other. Tempers were too high and uneasily controlled, not to mention the incredible competitive streak they had with each other.

The witches tended to live in sorority type housing, if the sorority house was in hell. Crazy bitches, every one Lillian had ever met. The warlocks were loners, often traveling alone or in pairs. Again, the competitive streaks were too

intense to allow for much male bonding. Lillian wasn't sure how the witches managed to get around it all and live together successfully, but they seemed to do fine.

Lillian nearly choked as she realized her very own daughter was half one of them, half a despicable witch! Would she cast spells, such witch magic as that, and would her skin turn green with each spell cast as the witch's skin did? A witch's power was based in her skin, making them sensitive to touch and feeling of any kind, as if that were an excuse for their whoring about. Her daughter would never fit in with the elves, would never be accepted, another abomination to nature, born of her very own body.

Lillian forced her thoughts away from the possible problems with her daughter and thought again of the time she had spent with the father. Darell had been beautiful and kind and so very sweet, up until those horrid lies had been told through his lips. He'd told her the child was deceased, that he would bury it and leave her because he couldn't stand to lose another child because of their unholy union.

She had believed it, every word. Had taken it in and knew her punishment for desiring another species had been the loss of a child she had grown to love as it grew within her.

Lillian forced to mind a question she didn't

want to look at. Had Darell been a wizard and not a warlock? The distinction was slight, but oh so very important. A wizard was born a warlock, but he moved beyond what a warlock will use for power and what he will do with his magic.

A wizard calls to the dark, to unnatural and evil forces for power that he will then use to destroy and harm. A warlock may not be the most trusted of immortals, but they are nothing like a wizard. A warlock has purple eyes, like his sister the witch, and black hair. A wizard's eyes are black, the dark magic lives within them. Not everyone knew there even *was* a difference between a warlock and a wizard. It wasn't something the witches and warlocks liked to let on about. They tended to try and take care of the rogues on their own, probably the only thing the males and females of the species agreed upon, other than sex.

Lillian was sure Darell's eyes were purple, she could remember how beautiful she had thought they were, how she had wished her child would have those purple eyes, instead of her own brown. Darell hadn't been of the dark, but he certainly hadn't been what she'd thought either.

Lillian snapped out of her depressive thoughts when Henry spoke and the familiar tingle of his voice moved along her ears. When she focused, he was still a way's away, calling quietly to her. His wolf got to her first and she had plenty of time to

calm herself and erase her expression before Henry was within sight. She would make it clear to him that his sympathy was neither desired nor necessary.

"I hope you got something to go on." She made no move to get up and he settled in beside her before answering.

"I'm sorry, Lillian, but no, I didn't get even a faint scent. The trail is far too old. We'll have to try something else. I know if we got close, like in the same city, I would be able to find her just from instinct. I'll be drawn to her as a part of you, the holder I'm bound to guard. We just need a direction. Where did you meet this...what is he?"

"Darell is a warlock I met in Nevada."

Henry's eyes widened. "You got involved with a warlock! Gods help us if he gave her up to his sisters. You know warlocks never raise their daughters, it's the witches who get female offspring, and those bitches are crazy hateful things."

Lillian's jaw clenched, but she managed to keep her voice flat. "I know how they do things, Henry. But it doesn't matter, wherever she is, we will find her and she *will* be coming home with her mother."

"Okay then, let's head to Nevada." Henry stood, ready for her to flash them away.

"We can try, but I doubt they would still be

there. I can't imagine he would be dumb enough to have gone back to where I met him if he were trying to hide from me."

"What other option do we have?"

"You're right, but we can't be seen so you will have to stay close to me. I can glamour us if you're close enough. At least its day and we don't have to worry about anyone seeing him. So close to the full moon, there would be no hiding him from stupid human eyes." She stood.

"Okay then." Henry stepped closer and put a hand on each of her arms.

The touch was too familiar and too welcome. Lillian shrugged it off, then centered herself and flashed them away, one hand around Henry's wrist. She needed to keep herself calm and cold to get through this ordeal, but Henry made it so difficult.

* * * *

Ever bit her lip to keep from cursing or killing the idiot who thought he knew her job better than she did. It was something she ran into on a daily basis and was the biggest pain in her ass. She was a *girl*, how could she possibly know anything about anything? These big dumbass bikers walked into the shop and asked to speak to her *old man* about this or that. She smiled politely and told them

there was no man, young or old, just *her* in *her* bike shop.

"I'm sorry, but I know what that piece of crap bike of yours is worth and four grand it definitely is not. I will give you two and that's being kind." Ever held out her tiny palm and waited while the man wrestled with his he-man desire to haggle with her some more. She was, after all, just a girl.

He took her hand and gave it a firm shake. "Fine, two grand but don't expect me to recommend you to anyone."

"Of course not, you wouldn't want anyone to know a girl bargained well with you." She spoke with saccharine sweetness and smiled as the man's fat face turned red with embarrassment and anger.

He didn't say another word as she counted out his cash and he handed over the key and title to the bike, then he turned and walked out in a hurry, most likely never to return. Luckily, repeat business wasn't something she relied on anyway. Ever rubbed a hand through her short silver hair, pixie cut and gelled into a spiky disarray around her head.

She certainly looked the part, with her tall thin body dressed in leather pants and a black tank top, showing just enough of her ample breasts to be provocative without being cheap. Her eyes, one purple and one brown, were always darkened by

makeup and she played up rather than hid their mismatched glory. She had bicker babe written all over her. Of course that didn't change a damn thing when a biker walked through the door and wanted to deal with a man about a man's problem with his bike.

"Ever, I think that bike is going to be worth at least five grand once we fix it all up." Ever's partner and roommate, Suzie, walked in from the back with a greasy wrench in her hand, long blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail and stuck through the back of a baseball cap. She was wearing coveralls, but even through them you could tell she was a curvy woman. Two women ran this shop and that was why the men who came in for service turned and ran, after asking both girls out for a *ride* of course.

"Good, stupid asshole got more than he deserved for it anyway," Ever responded then went behind the front counter to order the parts they would need. Her forever-painted green fingernails flew across the keyboard as Suzie listed the parts. If Suzie hadn't been in the room, Ever would have used her handy magical tricks to do the ordering for her, which is why she had to keep her fingernails painted green. Whenever she used magic, they turned green anyway, a sort of telltale sign that she was different. It wasn't something she wanted anyone to notice.

One thing her father had taught her before he died was that humans were dangerous and you never wanted one to find out about the immortal world or others would come after you and the punishment for such foolishness was death. It was a well-kept secret, and all immortals intended it to stay that way...or so he had told her.

As they always did, thoughts of her father notched up her anger. She was still furious with him, as if it had been his choice, to die and leave her alone, a lone immortal among humans. He had been killed by his own kind, a very good reason for her to never try and find them. Killed because they had found out he'd been harboring a daughter, something the females of his kind found unacceptable. When he had gone off to meet with them, he had sent her to a safe house, with instructions clearly stating that if he did not meet her there within the week, he was dead and she was to go to Reno Nevada and wait. Wait for what she had no idea, but she was here, waiting, and had been for nearly six years.

She often wondered how long it would take before the humans around took notice she wasn't aging, how long before she was forced to move. Where she would go and what she would do, she had no idea and the thought terrified her.

* * * *

They had been wandering around Reno for hours, draped in a glamour that made them look like a touristy couple, complete with big sun hats and fanny packs. They blended well with the others milling about in and out of the casinos. When they expanded their search beyond the few tourist areas, they changed the glamour to appear a bit more local.

By hour five, Lillian was wound as tight as a spring. It didn't matter that she had forbidden Henry from speaking two hours before, she was still way too aware of her mate's presence beside her, all too close because of the need to keep a glamour around them both. "I don't think I can do this much longer, Henry, I need to get away from you."

"Gee, how sweet your words are." Henry dripped sarcasm.

To Lillian's ears they were the hottest words ever spoken, in the sexiest voice ever used. Her entire body tingled, her nipples hardened and her cunt ached. "I just can't, Henry. Do you have any idea what you are doing to me? I don't want to want you, but since my body has decided to betray me and think you're its mate, I'm in pain with such desire. I have to leave, you keep searching, but I have to go." They were in an empty park and Lillian knew she was safe to flash

away. She hesitated a moment though, a look on Henry's face giving her pause.

"Do you have any idea what will happen if you leave, Lillian? I won't be able to look for your daughter because I will be looking for you and then when I find you, I will do whatever is necessary to assure you are never able to flash away from me again." He moved closer as he spoke.

His entire body now pressed against her, his hot breath blowing into her ear where he whispered his threat.

"It pains me to see you suffering though. I will be more than happy to take care of it for you."

His hand slid from waist to breast, squeezing lightly, but she was so tender, so sensitive and ready for him, it was as if he had gripped her with all his strength and she couldn't stop the cry of pleased pain that flew from her lips. "Henry..." she moaned when his thumb brushed lightly across her nipple.

"Let me ease your ache, Lillian, you know I can. It doesn't have to mean anything, just pleasure for the both of us. My wolf wants you, your body wants me, let us satisfy them." His hand moved lower, brushing across her belly, heading toward her wet cunt.

"Back off, Henry, and keep your hands to yourself." She pushed him away, not knowing

where the strength of will to say no came from. "I don't want you for a mate and I know for damn certain you don't want me. Now let's find my daughter already so I can get away from you. We are more than our instincts, Henry, more than the parts that thinks we're mates."

Henry opened his mouth as if he had something to say, but shut it and gave her a curt nod instead. "Okay, let's keep walking up this way a bit longer, then head around west. If we don't find anything by nightfall, we might as well give up. Searching the entire country, and farther, for her just isn't realistic."

Lillian's heart ached at the words, a welcome distraction from the other ache she had been feeling. She wanted to find her daughter, no matter what it took, but how could she? She had no leads and it didn't seem like they were about to find one here.

They walked for another hour through the city with no luck and Lillian was starting to think they should find a place to stay for the night. Henry's wolf was going to be quite visible in the nearly full moonlight and her glamour wasn't strong enough to cover them all, not in the distressed mood she was in right now.

Henry stopped suddenly, his face turning into the wind. His wolf did the same, a low whine coming from his throat.

“What is it?” Lillian whispered, her breath suddenly short, her chest tight and throat constricting. She dared to hope they had found something, anything, to indicate her daughter would be found.

“I smell immortals.”

“My daughter?”

“I don’t think so, this smells like...warlock.”

“Warlock or wizard?”

“Is there a difference?”

“Yes, and a very important one, too, but if you can’t smell the difference, we won’t know unless we run into it. Just remember, black eyes bad, okay?” A rumble of laughter from Henry’s chest surprised Lillian. A half-smile lifted the corner of his mouth and enticed her.

“Black eyes bad, huh? Okay I will remember that, for now. You can explain it all later I suppose. I hope it’s Darell so I can rip him apart.”

Anticipatory anger and rage flooded Lillian at the thought. Her hands mimicked claws and she thought of ripping into Darell’s flesh, causing him twenty-five years worth of pain and anguish. He would suffer for what he had done. She would be able to let it go once the debt of her pain had been paid.

“Well let’s track him and find out.” Henry started walking in the direction he had scented the warlock.

The scent took them into an area of the city that was lined with shops and fast food restaurants. The smell of greasy meat wafted through doors as they passed and Lillian clearly felt the growing hunger in Henry's wolf. A hungry werewolf was a cranky dangerous one. Food was needed, now.

"Let's grab a quick bite, Henry. I don't need your nose distracted by nauseating beef patties. Honestly, I don't know how humans can consume such horrid stuff as this, but it's better than nothing, so let's go."

"I won't stop for food, Lillian, I'm not a weakling."

"I didn't say you were, I am simply feeling what your wolf is. I'm not fond of having a hungry werewolf to deal with," Lillian whispered so as not to alarm any of the passersby.

"I can control my cravings, Lillian, although not as well as you can." His gaze traveled down to her obviously excited nipples.

"Fine, do as you wish. If we don't find him soon, we will have to stop. You know I won't be able to hide your wolf well enough."

"You won't have to."

"Why?"

"He's in there." Henry pointed to a large building across the street.

"The Atlantis, you are sure?"

"Oh yes, he is in there." Henry took off across

the street.

Lillian had to hurry to keep up and keep the glamour around him. A man suddenly going from a middle-aged white guy to a hunky twenty something would be very noticeable, even to the densest of humans. "What exactly do you plan to do, Henry? We don't even know who this guy is or what he is doing here."

"My plan, Lillian, is to find out the answers to those very questions."

His reasonable response threw her off and she couldn't think of another thing to say until they were entering the air-conditioned building.

"If Darell is here, he is mine to make suffer, Henry. It's my right to punish him for what he did to me. I will make things right and balanced between us, not you."

Henry looked at her with intensity in his eyes, their brown depths brimming with yellow, showing just how emotionally involved he already was. For him to step back and let her have Darell was going to take some serious self-control on his part, not something any werewolf was generally capable of.

"Fine," he stated, then pushed through the next set of doors to the lobby. Once inside, he sniffed the air, gaining more than one look of curiosity from people passing through. "He is high up, likely in one of the rooms. We'll get a room here as

well, to make it easier to search. Likely he is working on immortal time and will be coming out to play once the sun goes down, which looks to be in about a half hour at most."

Lillian did as he told her, not because she wished to obey him, but because she didn't see any other option. They needed a room for the night, his wolf had to stay out of the moonlight and if there was a warlock in this hotel, it was their best lead to her daughter yet. "Okay just let me do the talking with the humans."

"Whatever you want, Lillian, I don't care for interacting with them directly anyway."

Lillian reserved the room and managed to calm herself enough to hold the glamour at the same time she smoothed the minds of the desk clerk and bellboy over the lack of baggage they were bringing with them. The less questions the better.

Inside the elevator, Henry pushed the buttons for every single floor. "I want to sniff around each floor so we can be sure where he is."

"Less talking, more sniffing," she snapped at him, then turned her gaze away and clenched her jaw. It was infuriating to be around him, so helpful, so protective and so gods-be-damned ear tingling. She just wanted to get away from him, even for a few moments so she could breathe easier.

The elevator ride offered no distraction from

him. Each time the doors opened, he pressed a strong hand against the doorframe to keep it wide and sniffed for a moment, his eyelids closing, his dark lashes brushing against his cheeks and his lips parted just the slightest bit, allowing the air in to taste and smell. Her own mouth would open and her tongue would slip out to touch her lips, wishing they were his. Then he would speak, *nothing*, that one word would be enough to make her insides fire up with desire as tingles of delight washed from her ears all the way to her toes. Each time she felt wetness seep from her cunt.

There were a lot of floors and they didn't hit one that smelled strong of warlock until they were almost to the top. Lillian was falling apart on the inside, her nipples aching and her panties wet, cunt supple and ready for him. She wanted to throw him down right there in the elevator and have her way with him, but she wouldn't. He was a werewolf, a filthy animal, and she was one of the most majestic of creatures, born to be a leader of not only the Animal Elves, but so much more—she had always felt it. *Holder*, the word filled her mind and she slammed back to reality. She was the holder, she *was* born to be a leader of more than her Animal Elves, another reason she should mate with something more than a werewolf.

“Follow me, Lillian. If it's Darell, he's all yours, but until we know for sure who he is and what he

is here for, I want you behind me and safe. I will not let you take unnecessary risks.”

“Fine.” She knew she would flash herself into the bastard’s face as soon as she had the chance, if she could keep herself calm enough. As they walked slowly forward, Lillian cleared her mind, pushed down on every feeling she was having, mostly desire for the dog, and took a deep breath to center herself. She would need to be calm and centered if she was going to be able to stay in control of the situation when they found him. She would flash herself inside his room if necessary, take him down before he even had a chance to react to their presence. Calm, she needed calm.

“Lillian, I—”

“No! No talking Henry, I’m trying to stay centered, your voice makes me lose it, especially right now. I need you to not say anything, okay?”

Henry nodded, his brown eyes showing a flash of yellow. Desire in reaction to her words? He liked what he did to her, no doubt felt powerful with his little trick voice. Talk about unbalanced, Lillian thought. There was no balance between herself and Henry, and that was a problem that would need to be soon addressed.

Henry stopped outside a door and motioned with his head. This was it. She stepped forward as he knocked.

CHAPTER SEVEN

There was no answer and Lillian was not going to risk losing the guy. She flashed to the other side of the door. It took Henry all of four seconds to merge and break through the door. The room was empty. "Fuck!" Lillian shouted, her anger boiling over to the point that there was no glamour covering either of them, or the ruined door, not that she cared.

Henry was mad and all that was directed at her. His big yellow wolf eyes glared at her and he stalked forward slowly, after assuring there really was no one else in the room or bathroom. He sprang, he pounced and he knocked her flat on her back. Luckily it was onto the soft bed.

Her heart beat wildly even though she was fairly certain he wouldn't harm her, couldn't if he truly did think she was his mate. He didn't accept her as such, but still the not being able to kill would hopefully stay intact, especially going

along with the whole holder and guardian thing. “Henry, I’m sorry, I really am, but you know I couldn’t risk him getting away.”

Henry growled in response, showing his sharp teeth, saliva dripping off his incisors. His mouth opened wide and he placed it over her throat, the tips of all his teeth pressed gently into her skin, not breaking the surface, only indenting. He stayed like that for a couple heartbeats, then moved back and his yellow gaze met hers.

The message was clear—she had screwed up, she was his and she would listen or pay the price. He was an animal. If she had been able to use her power, she was certain she would have found pure instinct within him. The human part was nowhere active when he was truly angry and that was dangerous.

Lillian lowered her gaze, hating the fact that she was submitting to him, but didn’t know what else to do. She didn’t want to die here and now just because of a little pride.

Henry didn’t move from his perch over her, but split and his wolf jumped away and left him there, hovering over her in all his naked, angry glory.

Lillian couldn’t keep her gaze from scanning his entire body and when it reached below his waist, she was shocked to see him fully erect. Her own body responded with heat and lust, anticipating the claiming his human side would

do that his wolf was unable to. His threat from earlier echoed in her mind. *I will make it so you are never able to flash away from me again.* If he claimed her, marked her for his own as mate, she would be bound to him, flashing away from him would be nearly impossible because of the pain it would knowingly cause him. The thought both terrified and excited her.

She knew the moment the scent of her arousal hit him. His head snapped back and he howled an animalistic roar from his very human mouth. Lillian's entire body felt it, tingling in reaction to her mate's call and turning her into an animal to match.

Hands flew of their own accord, touching every inch of skin they could find, digging into the hard muscle of his ass and pulling lightly on his hard cock. Her head lifted, lips searching out his with a thirst like none other. When they met, they exploded in ravishing hunger, each taking everything the other had to offer. This wasn't about gentle, it wasn't about love. This was need, desire and claiming. This was hard, raw and instinctual. This was a werewolf claiming his mate, suffusing her with his scent and touching her soul, binding them together irrevocably.

Henry's hands grabbed the soft material of her gown and ripped it down the front, parting it to her waist in one movement. A quick second rip

parted it the rest of the way and then his knees were there, forcing her legs to open for him. One hand gripped her behind the knee and lifted her leg up and out, exposing every inch of her dripping cunt to him. His other hand gripped her breast in a punishing caress while he entered her with the force of all his fear, all his instinct and all his need.

Lillian cried out against his lips as he took her without a tender touch, heat swirling through her body in an equally violent rush. A storm of desire blazed through her and with each pound of Henry's cock into her body, lightning shot through her until she was shaking without end. Trembling and begging for more with her hands, pressing against his ass, nails digging through his skin to share the pain, transfer the lightning and ride the storm of ecstasy with him.

When the storm broke on a thousand bolts of lightning, she screamed out his name, tears springing to her eyes, overwhelmed by the beauty of what they had just done, the raw beauty of the mating, claiming and being claimed. She knew now there was no going back, no getting out of this. They were mates, in every sense of the word.

"You are mine, Lillian," Henry whispered against her ear, making it tingle with delight at his voice.

"I know," she whispered back, allowing the

acceptance and resignation to be heard in her voice. His still hard cock deep inside her where he had filled her full of his scent, and her traitorous cunt had accepted it, milking every drop from his cock.

“So I can expect you to act accordingly and stop fucking around like you can get out of this?”

“Yes.”

“Good, we will be getting along much better then. Now that you understand I’m the one in charge here.”

Now that was one thing Lillian was *not* going to agree to. She pushed him away, only succeeding because he allowed it. He was by far the stronger one physically. “This is not a mating of two weres, Henry, I’m not overwhelmed by instincts to cower and agree to my mate. Sorry, you mated an elf and you will accept that and all that goes with it. An elf marriage is balanced and fair, and so ours will be. You are not in charge, but neither am I.” The last was added with a grudge. She had always desired a position of power, even though it was an un-elf like thing to desire.

“Agreed,” Henry said, easier than she had imagined it would be.

“What the *hell* is going on here?” A man’s voice called loudly from the hall.

Lillian reacted fast, glamouring herself and Henry into a fully dressed middle-aged couple

and the broken door into merely an open one.

“What the —” the man said and swayed on his feet before swaying his way down the hall without another word.

Lillian almost felt bad for the guy as he would probably have an unstable mind regarding this situation for the rest of his life. Oh well, human lives were short anyway. Once gone, she glamoured the door to appear shut and dropped the glamour from herself and Henry. “You ruined my dress and your own clothes as well.”

“It was for a good cause,” he said with a wicked grin.

“Well we can’t exactly go looking for my daughter without any clothes on. I will flash back to...” The narrowing of Henry’s eyes made her pause. Damn this mating thing. She really did hate the idea of causing him worry. “Henry, I will go back to the colony and grab us some clothes.”

“Not without me you won’t. The colony isn’t safe, remember? I do believe there is a reason we left without telling anyone what was really going on.”

“I want you to know I think you’re being ridiculous and what if the warlock returns while I’m away? We might miss our chance. Can’t you just wait here, trust me to fetch us some clothing?” Henry’s eyes narrowed at her and she couldn’t guess what was going on in his head. Would he

trust her, even a little? She supposed he had no real reason to, but she had no real reason to trust him either. "If this is going to work, Henry, I need you to trust me as much as I'm willing to trust you. *I need* balance in this mating."

"Balance I can give you, trust I can give you. Letting you run off into danger alone, that I cannot give you. That is what *I* need you to understand, Lillian. Every instinct screams out to lock you safely away until this is all over. I won't, I know that you would hate me for that, but please, Lillian, don't ask me to stand aside while you run off."

"Henry...I don't think anyone has ever thought me in need of protecting, its sweet and annoying all at the same time."

Henry's lips curved up in a delicious smile.

Lillian reached out a hand and pressed a finger to his bottom lip, tracing the lines, then dropping to his chin. "You have a really sweet smile, you know that."

Henry leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers in a brief, but no less passionate for the fact, kiss. "And you have the most beautiful body I have ever seen, such smooth skin, luminescent and lovely." His hands caressed her from neck to waist, then moved into her hair. "Such a lovely color, so different from my own. I wonder what our children will look like."

Henry's words brought their plight back into focus and Lillian leaned away from him. "We need to be searching for her."

"Okay, go fetch the clothing, but hurry back. I will be exposed without your glamour until you return."

Lillian let her joy show on her face for a brief second, joy at his trust, and then flashed to her closet. Her hands were on a pale lavender gown when a voice stopped her, a voice from *her* room.

"How do they know? She was never supposed to find out about Ever."

It was Alaria, and judging by the pause, she was on the phone with someone.

"Find her and bring her here before they find her. She's my only chance in proving Lillian is unfit to lead. Lillian must be executed for crimes against her people."

Lillian shoved the gown against her mouth to keep from crying out at the betrayal she was hearing. But now she knew three things—Alaria was the one who they needed to watch out for, she was working with someone in Reno and her daughter, Ever, was in Reno as well. Somewhere in all that horrible news, she found the strength she needed to stamp out her emotions enough to flash. She flashed to Lucas' closet, grabbed a tunic and pants, then flashed back to the hotel room, throwing up a glamour as soon as she

materialized.

Henry was seated cross legged on the bed, gaze focused on the broken door. His wolf was seated in front of the door, staring out as well. She pitied any who tried to enter, human or immortal. When she appeared, both Henry and his wolf swung their heads around to her. Apparently her face showed none of the horror she was burying inside because Henry's face showed relief at her return, thankfulness for the clothing and nothing else.

"A couple humans walked by while you were gone, but apparently the sight of naked me on the bed was enough to deter them from investigating the broken door." He reached out for the bundle in her hand. "I closed up the drapes to keep the moonlight out. We won't be leaving the hotel until morning now."

"I know who the warlock is, well not *who* he is, but why he's here. He's working with Alaria, they are after Ever, my daughter, and intend to have me executed and use her as holder for their own goal, whatever that is."

"Darell?"

"No way. If it was Darell he would know where Ever is."

"So what now?"

"We have to find her before they do. Henry we can't let them take my daughter from me, not again." Emotion choked her and the glamour

around them flickered as she struggled to gain control. She lost when Henry embraced her, tears sprang out of her eyes and she trembled in his comforting arms.

“We will find her first, Lillian, don’t worry.

“I won’t lose her a second time, Henry, I would rather die, I *will* die if I lose her again.” Henry’s arms were strong around her and she slowly gained strength from them. As she settled her feelings, she managed enough glamour to keep the stupid humans fooled as they passed. When she once again felt as if her feelings were buried deep enough, she pulled away from Henry and wiped the dreaded tears from her cheeks.

“Okay, get dressed. We have got to get out here and find her,” Henry said firmly as he pulled the tunic over his head.

“You can’t go out there, Henry. Tomorrow is the full moon, your wolf will be as solid as you and me!”

“I think we’ve been going about this wrong, Lillian. There is no reason for you to glamour me. Just glamour yourself and my wolf, I look as normal as any other guy out on the street.”

Lillian eyed Henry skeptically. His dark brown hair and eyes were normal human, his body was exceptionally fine human, never had she seen a human look as good as he did, but still it was a human body. There was nothing outwardly

different about him, as long as his eyes didn't turn yellow. It was so different from her own looks. She was so tall and her hair was a stark white, no human would have anything like it, her skin was luminescent, her ears were incredibly pointed and her brown eyes swirled a bit. There was nothing about her that said human and they would certainly see that without needing a second glance. She envied him a little, his ability to walk around so unnoticed by prying human eyes. Of course, if she were a normal elf, it wouldn't be such an issue for her, but it took more work for her to throw on a glamour than it did most elves.

"I suppose you're right, as long as you keep calm and your eyes stay brown, we are good. I will glamour myself and the wolf, but he has to stay near me then."

"That won't be a problem. He always wants to be near you anyway."

Henry's comment made her stomach flutter. She liked being loved, even if it was by a wolf. "I'm used to being liked by animals it—," Lillian stopped mid-word, her mind flooded suddenly with a wonderful idea.

"What is it, Lillian?" Henry's voice was filled with concern, matched by the low growl from his wolf who was suddenly pacing around the room like a caged animal at the zoo.

Lillian smiled into Henry's eyes, allowing all

her hope to show. "I know how to find her, Henry, if she is indeed here. She is half-Animal Elf, which means she will have a connection to the animals around here. They should be able to tell me where she is. We have just got to start questioning them."

"Sounds easy enough." Henry's gaze drifted down to Lillian's still naked breasts. "But I would suggest dressing first. Glamour or no, I will still be able to see your naked skin and it *will* become a problem very quickly."

Lillian's gaze fell to Henry's crotch, which was thankfully hidden by his long tunic. "We wouldn't want that now would we? Perhaps you will put on some pants?"

Once they were both dressed and heading back down in the elevator, the room was destroyed and left clear for all to see without her glamour. Lillian almost felt bad, but then she remembered who was staying in that room—some bastard warlock who was after daughter, working with that betraying bitch, Alaria. Then she didn't feel bad at all about the shredded door.

"I don't think this outfit is going to avoid attention, Lillian. It's nothing like what a normal human man would wear."

Lillian assessed the dark brown silk tunic and pants—they fit a little tighter than they would on Lucas, but still decent, and the color looked wonderful on Henry. "I don't see a problem."

Mating Call

“Yes well, you are not human, love.”

That *L* word floated between them in the elevator and neither spoke or breathed the rest of the way down to the lobby. It wasn't as if he had said he loved her, but it was there, and now they were both thinking about it. The awkward silence ate away at Lillian until it was almost more than she could handle to keep the glamour going. She forced the thoughts away, concentrating on the importance of the task at hand—her daughter was out there, being stalked by a warlock, and they had to find her first.

* * * *

Henry knew he was doing it all wrong, knew he was probably driving her farther and farther away with every move. He was helpless to stop though and it was her fault. He'd gone crazy when she'd flashed into that room. There'd been no other option after that. He'd been compelled beyond control to claim her and so he had. The fact that she had enjoyed and accepted it didn't change anything. He was still sure it had been too much, too soon.

She was so difficult for him to read and her silence now was making him think he had just screwed any chance he had been building toward with the slip of that one word. He had called her

love and now there was tension so thick he was choking on it.

Great job, Henry, glad you're trying to drive our mate away. His wolf thought toward him.

Oh shut up, I don't need you to be sarcastic. How about being helpful here? What is she feeling right now? Can you read her at all? Henry knew he was reaching for straws, desperate for reassurance, but it was worth asking. His wolf could read humans and other keepers well.

No. Except the obvious tenseness, I get nothing from her, sorry.

Henry watched her from the corner of his eye. She was solid and stiff, completely elf, and he hated it. He hated that she kept it all from him. It was his job as her mate to make her feel good. It was his duty as guardian to watch over her when she took on the feelings of her army. Would she *ever* trust him to do either? "Lillian." Henry reached out a hand and laid it on her shoulder.

She jumped away as if burned. "Henry, please, I'm trying to keep my mind focused on the mission. All that matters right now is finding Ever."

Henry dropped his still suspended hand, anger filling him to the point he knew his eyes had to be turning, just a little. "Right, that's all that matters." Apparently, it wasn't love, but appreciation that she had been showing him earlier. She wasn't

about to accept him as mate and guardian, not now, maybe not ever.

Henry led the way out of the hotel, stalking quickly and ignoring the curious glances from those around him. He must look ridiculous to them, but they probably assumed he was in some kind of show. Humans tended to make sense of what they saw, mold it into their idea of how the world worked. It kept them sane and luckily for immortals, it kept them from guessing the truth.

Once out on the street, he waited. Lillian was going to have to put her skills to work, finding and communicating with animals. He was pretty sure she didn't *talk* to them, so how she planned to use them, he didn't know. "So what do we do first?"

"I just need a moment to concentrate. I will feel for the largest concentration of happy animals in the area. That should indicate an Animal Elf's presence."

"Okay." Henry wasn't sure it made sense, but he was willing to go along with it. Finding Ever safe was going to be a make it or break it for them. He was sure Lillian wouldn't survive losing her daughter again, which meant he would lose Lillian forever. A werewolf who loses his mate is a sad sad thing—usually it leads to suicide or such an extreme loss of reality that it's mercifully killed by its Alpha.

Henry followed Lillian through the city. She would stop every once in a while and sometimes they would change directions, other times they would keep to the same path. She didn't speak and nothing about her demeanor indicated good or bad news. He didn't ask, just followed her and tried not to imagine his life without her in it.

It wasn't that they had been together for long or were even really together now, but she was his mate. There was no bond stronger than that, and to lose it was something he knew he wasn't prepared for. He couldn't imagine a life without her, even though he hadn't yet lived a life *with* her.

His gaze traveled up and down her slim back. Her hair hung loose, a cascade of white, it was soft, he knew, and it smelled of sunshine. Her narrow hips swayed slightly back and forth as she walked and his hands clenched, remembering the feel of them, grasping them firm as he had claimed her hard.

Henry's cock stiffened and his pants tightened, he forced his thoughts away from their mating. It wasn't where his thoughts should be at the moment anyway. She was in danger out here and he was supposed to be protecting her.

Henry shifted his attention to their surroundings, surprised and dismayed to find they were now entering a somewhat wooded area toward the outskirts of the city. He'd been too

distracted to note how far they had walked and danger could have been lurking anywhere along the way. Not something one was supposed to allow when traveling with your mate. His senses needed to be spread wide and assessing. There was no excuse for anything coming near without him knowing about it.

Lillian stopped suddenly, her head turning to the left, eyes wide and mouth open just the slightest touch.

Henry recognized the slight changes in her, something he would have missed in an elf before. She was expressing only slightly, but it was there. Translating it was harder. It could be a positive or negative, or just mere shock. "Lillian, what is it?" he asked when she made no move.

"Ever, I can feel her. She is so near and she is happy."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Ever bit her lip to keep the smile back and hid her face by looking closely as she painted her fingernails green.

“Oh come on, Ever, you can’t fool me, what happened today to put that giant smile on your face? You don’t think I wouldn’t have noticed the change?” Suzie said from her perch atop the kitchen counter. She was in charge of dinner this evening and so she absently stirred a pot of sauce while grilling Ever about her obvious happiness.

“Oh, Suzie, it’s nothing, really. Can’t I just be in a good mood?”

“Ha! You haven’t been in a good mood since we met. You’re just lucky I have enough sense to love you anyway.”

“Good sense would have had you running in the other direction, good sense you have never had,” Ever teased and Suzie threw an oven mitt at her. The mitt ricocheted off her head and knocked

the open nail polish over on the table.

With a flick of her finger, Ever righted the bottle and made the spill disappear. Little tricks like that came in handy and she used them more and more often around Suzie. Almost as if she *wanted* to get caught. It would be so nice to not have to hide in her own home. But something held her back from confession and she knew exactly what that was.

Her darling father. She had promised never to endanger herself, or others, by letting *any* human know about their existence. So she hadn't and to do so felt like a betrayal. So Suzie had no idea and the time would soon come for confess or leave. Ever couldn't imagine doing either.

"So are you going to tell me or what?" Suzie prompted from behind, surprising Ever with her nearness.

"Umm...the cat wants in," she said a moment before the telltale meow pierced through the door.

"How do you always know he is about to do that? Your ears must be super sensitive or mine suck from all those loud bikes I slave away on for you," Suzie teased.

Another ability she was cursed to hide. Those damn animals just wouldn't stay away and she could so easily reach out and see what they were after. Her father said it came from her mother's side of the family. A side she knew even less about than her father's.

Thoughts of her mother left her strangely empty, as they always did. It was as if there was a big emotional vacuum where thoughts of her mother were held. It was a cold place, a place Ever often went to when she needed the extra strength to get through a situation without emotional involvement. It came in quite handy when she was dealing with customers who wanted to haggle. She never went to that place when dealing with Suzie though. She gave her whole self, well as much as possible, to Suzie. "I ran into someone today who knew my father," Ever confessed quietly.

"What!"

"Yeah, this guy came into the shop after you left, said he knew my father years ago. Wants to meet up with me for lunch tomorrow and talk about him, reminisce I guess."

Suzie planted a kiss on the top of her head, then went back in the kitchen, banging around as she drained pasta. "Wow! That is weird. Your dad has been dead for what? Six years? And this guy just shows up out of nowhere. What do you think that's all about?"

"I don't know, but I intend to find out. I won't miss an opportunity to find out more about my father and I feel safe enough. He's going to meet me at the shop."

"How did he even find you to begin with?"

"I don't know." Ever did know, the man was a warlock, just as her father had been. She had known it the moment the man entered the shop—immortals couldn't fool each other about what they were, a good thing usually. Tracking her would have been easy for him if he knew to look in Reno. Her scent and magical trails would be all over the city like residue, another witch or warlock would pick up on it easy enough.

Wraith was his name and he was not only going to tell her about her father, he had promised to pick up her teaching where her father had left off, if she wanted, and she did. Ever wouldn't turn down an opportunity to learn more about her abilities, not in a million years. Of course, she didn't completely trust the guy, not yet. She would see a little more of what he was about before committing to anything.

"Dinner is served," Suzie proclaimed and with a flourish as she set the pot of pasta on their small table. "Hot and meaty, just the way you like it."

"Thank you, it smells delicious." Ever stood to help Suzie finish setting the table. She laid out the plates and napkins, all perfectly matched and perfectly square on the table. She had always been a bit of a neat freak, liked things to be just so. Luckily Suzie had never seemed to mind, not like her father had.

She never was able to figure out why her need

for perfection bothered him so, and he never outwardly mentioned it. It was just in the way he watched her when she arranged things to be perfectly straight and in even rows, how she threw out extras rather than have a mismatched pair. He watched with a hooded expression, but made no comment. Every once in a while she would catch him in the act of deliberate mess making, then she would draw on every bit of strength to not fix what he had done, as if it were his way of testing her. Seeing how deep her insanity ran.

He loved her, she knew that. But he was gone and had left her to fend for herself in a world full of humans, so perhaps trusting another immortal, trusting Wraith, wasn't a bad idea. Her father had instructed her to trust none of them, that the immortals were eager to use and abuse each other. She didn't doubt it, never had, but what other option did she have but to use one of her own to gain as well? She needed to learn and she needed to learn now.

As she ate, she pondered the possibility that Wraith was what her father had been talking about when he said to wait in Reno. Perhaps Wraith was the one who was meant to find her. She had always secretly harbored the hope that it would be her mother, an Animal Elf that would find her. Of course, she knew that was a stupid childhood dream. Her mother had left them, left

because Ever was born of another species, and so why would she come back now?

"Well there is the Ever I have grown to know and love," Suzie commented, mimicking Ever's scowl on her own face.

"Oh sorry, just thinking, you know how that always brings me down."

"Oh yes, a terrible thing, thinking. Well since you devoured your dinner while you were brooding, how about some desert? I picked up some peach pie today and whip cream if you would rather have desert in the bedroom."

Ever's mind switched gears quickly and thoughts of taking Suzie to bed made her fingertips tingle as they always seemed to when she was aroused. "I like the sound of that. Let's just clean this mess up first so we don't wake up to the smell of leftovers in the morning."

"And you wouldn't be my Ever if you didn't think about that first." Suzie dropped a quick kiss on Ever's mouth, then started clearing the table.

Ever picked up her plate and as she turned from the table, her entire being was assaulted by an undeniable knowledge. There was a werewolf out there and it was looking for her.

This was not good. Werewolves were extremely dangerous creatures. *Is it a full moon?* She rushed to look out the window. All she could see was clear sky, the moon was behind the trees

somewhere. Ever closed her eyes and felt out for the animal, looking for ill intent.

“Ever? What’s wrong?”

Ever turned to face Suzie and was pretty sure the werewolf out there was not here to harm her, but what would it do to Suzie? How would it react to a human who was involved with an immortal?

It will kill her. Ever was sure of it, just as she had always feared. “I’m going to go for a walk.”

“A walk?” Suzie looked from Ever to the darkness outside, confusion on her face. “Well let me get some shoes on and I’ll go with you.”

“No!” Ever bit her lip, this was not going to go over well. “I just want to be alone for a few minutes okay? Just clear my head about some things.”

Suzie’s face softened and she reached out a gentle hand, caressing Ever’s cheek. “You all mixed up about your father now that this guy showed up?”

Ever latched on to the excuse Suzie had provided. “Yeah, I just want to clear my head, like I said. I won’t be long.” Ever hated lying, especially to Suzie, who was the most honest person she knew. Ever reached out and tucked a lock of Suzie’s long blonde hair behind her ear, then pressed her lips to hers. She felt like she was saying goodbye.

Ever turned quickly and left the house before

the tears that were burning the backs of her eyes fell. Finding strength from that familiar empty place inside of her, her mother's place, she fought the tears back and strode forward with confidence. Heading right for the werewolf she sensed.

* * * *

"I can feel her, my daughter is drawing nearer," Lillian whispered. She knew her excitement was apparent in the widening of her eyes and shallowness of her breaths. She didn't care, her daughter was close, and coming closer.

"We will wait for her here I think, show we aren't trying to harm her by letting her come to us."

Lillian knew his reasoning was sound, but had no desire to sit still. She wanted to run to her daughter, embrace the child she had so long been denied. She wanted to know what it was like to look into the face of her flesh-born child. Would she look like an Animal Elf or a witch? She tried not to think of the last with disdain. She would love the child no matter what. She already did, more than she ever thought it possible to care for another being and she had never even met her.

"Let's just move forward slowly." Lillian took two steps more before freezing, her chest constricted and a silent cry flew from her open

mouth. She could feel her daughter, so close. Then she was there, standing in front of Lillian, an apparition of such perfection. She was a balance, a perfect mix of herself and Darell, neither witch nor elf, but something perfectly in between.

Her hair was very short, but Lillian could tell it was white as her own. Her ears were pointed and elfin, but the rest of her facial features were more witch than elf. Less straight hard lines, more soft round ones. She was as tall and thin as Lillian, but her breasts were larger.

Neither said a thing as they inspected one another. Lillian saw Ever's gaze running up and down, assessing, the same as her own was. Lillian stepped closer, hesitant. She saw that Ever's eyes were mismatched, one Animal Elf brown and one witch purple, both beautiful.

"I sensed the werewolf, but not you. What are you?"

"I'm an Animal Elf, and I'm your mother, Ever."

Ever took a step back, her face going blank.

It was so incredibly elf-like Lillian wanted to squeal with delight. She knew it wasn't right, but she really wanted her daughter to be more elf than witch. Those witches were crazy and Lillian had never liked a single one she had met.

"First the warlock, Wraith, comes and tells me he has information about my father and wants to

teach me how to use my powers. Then you show up, claiming to be my mother! What next? Is this werewolf my brother? Or perhaps a long lost cousin?" Ever's voice held a hint of hysteria.

Lillian wanted to reach out to comfort her, but figured that would send her over the edge. Obviously, this was an unexpected event. She just hoped it wasn't completely unwelcome.

"I don't know for sure, but I expect that this Wraith is the man working with my cousin, Alaria, who apparently is looking for a way to kill me. Why he didn't tell Alaria he had already found you, I have no idea. But I wouldn't trust him, Ever, he cannot be looking to help you, not truly."

Ever took another step back, her eyes wide, probably trying to register and analyze all of what Lillian had just told her. She looked ready to bolt, not that Lillian blamed her. This was a lot of information, for anyone. Lillian looked at Henry, hoping he might have some way of helping here.

"I think perhaps we should all go back to the hotel and discuss this whole situation privately," Henry suggested.

"How did you find me and why?" Ever asked as she took another step away from Lillian and Henry.

"I came to bring you home, Ever, back to my colony where we can be as intended, mother and

daughter. Just as we should have been if your father hadn't stolen you from me."

"Why, why after so long do you care? My father told me about you and your kind. How hateful you are of anything different, anything new and not perfect." Ever's words held the hate of a small child for an absent parent.

Lillian felt the grief and sorrow down to her bones. "Ever, you don't know, your father is—"

"Dead, my father is dead and has been for quite a while. He died to protect me from other immortals, immortals like you who can't accept anything that is different."

Lillian hated to see her daughter in such pain, wished with her entire being there was something she could do to help her. Then it hit her, she could take away all of it. Lillian opened herself up, stopped keeping anything back and just breathed clear. Her body warmed instantly and a soft hum began deep in her belly. The hum grew until it was white hot with energy. Then it sucked every bad feeling from Ever. Every hurt, every bit of anger, every confusion, took it all in and settled it deep, where Lillian could feel it, as a living thing inside of her. She was holding, holding for her daughter and it felt so right.

Ever's face went from confused to peaceful and back to confused. "What the hell did you just do to me?" She spoke, but her words held no inflection,

no anger or fury or grief. There was none.

Lillian had taken it all in, was holding it safe so it couldn't harm her daughter. "I'm simply taking away the pain, like a good mother should. Ever, I insist we sit down and talk things through, there is so much you don't understand."

Ever looked back the way she had come.

"Perhaps we can talk at your place if you don't want to go to the hotel with us?" Henry suggested.

"No! Uh, let's go to the hotel. I would like to talk with you as well, Lillian."

"Who is at your place? Is that warlock there now?" Lillian asked with more anger and judgment than she had intended.

"No, it's no one. I just don't want to meet there. We should discuss things in neutral territory and perhaps in the morning."

"No, morning is too late, Ever. You're in danger. If we found you, if Wraith found you already, Alaria could show up at any time for you."

"And this Alaria wants to kill me?"

"Not exactly, no. Just come with us and I'll tell you everything, I swear, Ever, I want nothing more than to talk with you, my daughter. Explain everything so you can understand."

Ever looked confused, but there was not much emotion behind it, thanks to Lillian's holding of

most of it. So she nodded agreement after a moment.

“Good, can you flash?”

“Flash?” Ever asked, obviously confused.

“Teleport, we call it flashing,” Lillian explained.

“No. But you can!”

Lillian smiled. The obvious approval from her daughter was wondrous. “Yes, all Animal Elves can. Well, all full Animal Elves can,” Lillian corrected, amazed there was such a thing to think about.

“Lillian, you can flash me back first, I will make sure everything is alright, then you can flash back and grab Ever,” Henry suggested.

“Okay, wait right here, Ever, I’ll be only a moment.” Lillian grabbed Henry’s arm, nothing happened. “Crap! I can’t flash when I’m holding.” She would have to let the emotions go back to Ever. But then would she be as agreeable? Lillian turned to Ever. “I have to let go of your emotions and hurt. I can’t flash while holding them, okay?”

“Yeah, I would really rather not have them taken away I think, doesn’t seem fair at all.”

Lillian smiled at her daughter, such an elf statement that was. “No, it isn’t is it. Holding is meant for...well never mind that right now. I will let go and flash Henry away, then be back in a moment.” When Lillian let go of Ever’s emotions, she felt the warmth and the tingle again, then a

snap as the emotion escaped her hold and flew back to their owner.

Ever looked almost as lost and conflicted as she had when Lillian had taken the emotions in the first place, Lillian wanted to take them again, spare her daughter the pain of this all, but Ever was right. It wasn't fair to take the emotions away, not for so selfish a reason.

Lillian calmed herself, which was quite difficult considering the situation, but she managed after a moment, then flashed herself and Henry back into Wraith's room. She figured it was a safe bet for materializing unnoticed.

The room was empty, but it was obvious there had been others in it, the splintered door had been cleaned up and replaced with a plastic curtain. Lillian felt a little responsible for that missing door and would have to make amends for it before they left Reno. She would make them even.

"I'm not sure if we should stay here, there is no telling when the humans may return to fix that," Henry said as he prowled around, sniffing here and there.

"Smell anything?"

"No, it doesn't seem as though he returned, but that doesn't mean he won't."

"If he does, then he will have a different room given to him anyway. I'm going to fetch Ever and then we can decide where we want to have our

chat." Lillian could tell Henry didn't like the idea. Her going off without him no doubt grated on his every instinct, but he nodded stiffly and told her to hurry back.

She flashed away quickly, back to the exact same spot she had left. Ever wasn't there. Lillian whirled around, her chest tightening with panic and fear. What if Wraith had arrived here while they were gone, or Alaria! What if Ever was even now being harmed or being convinced to help them work against her? Lillian couldn't calm herself as these thoughts filled her mind. She couldn't flash back to Henry, couldn't even move forward. Her body began to shake and the vibrations were what finally pulled her out of her downward spiral.

She forced herself to take a deep breath, then another. Soon she was able to think clearly, clearly enough to realize she was hearing voices. Not close enough to tell what was being said, but close enough to recognize one of those voices as her daughter. The other was female and she couldn't be positive, but she was pretty sure it was human.

What the hell is Ever doing with a human? As she crept closer, fully expecting to find her daughter in the middle of getting rid of the bothersome creature, she began to think of what she knew about Ever.

She was raised by her father, away from the

witches and was living in a highly populated city. All that added up to a whole lot of human interaction, a very dangerous thing for an immortal.

Thank God I found her before some other immortal did. Another may have killed her simply for being too close to the humans and by most laws, it would be justified.

“It’s nothing, really. Just go back to the house, Suzie, and I’ll be there in a bit. I’m really fine, just want some alone time.” Ever spoke with a gentle prodding tone.

Lillian guessed this was someone she cared for, which was going to make this whole thing that much harder.

“Alright, I will leave you to your moping, just remember. Me and that whip cream won’t stay fresh and ready all night.”

Lillian was close enough to see now and she watched as a very pretty blonde human kissed Ever gently on the lips, then headed off in the opposite direction.

She’s a lesbian. Well, Lillian could accept that, what she couldn’t accept was that it was a human she was dallying with. That was not acceptable. She just prayed Ever hadn’t done anything stupid, like tell the woman what she really was, a *wilf*? Lillian wasn’t sure she liked that term, but *elch* wasn’t much better.

“Okay, Lillian, let’s go.” Ever said, turning to face her, her features smooth and expressionless.

Lillian loved it. She was obviously trying to hide what she was feeling and thinking, and that was a wonderful elf trait. “Yes well, I didn’t want to interrupt you and your...”

“She is none of your business,” Ever said as she stepped toward Lillian.

Lillian didn’t ask any more questions, just grasped her daughter gently and flashed them both back to Wraith’s room and the anxiously waiting Henry.

CHAPTER NINE

Ever swayed when they materialized, plopping down on the bed quickly. “That was... interesting.”

“What the hell took you so long!” Henry roared as soon as he was assured Lillian was unharmed.

“I’m back. Now let’s get out of this room before Wraith decides to show up.” Lillian pushed past a glaring Henry and out the door. “Which room is ours again?”

“One floor down,” Henry growled, then took the lead.

Lillian was glad he wasn’t going to push for information. Her daughter’s obvious relationship with a human was dangerous and the fewer to know about it the better. It posed a very serious problem to getting her to leave the human world and join the colony, not to mention the obvious fact that if the woman knew what Ever was, she was a liability that no immortal could ignore.

"He's a bit grumpy, isn't he? I guess I shouldn't be surprised. My dad always said werewolves were horrible creatures," Ever whispered behind Lillian. "Is he your bodyguard? Can you control him because he is a simple animal?"

"He's my mate," Lillian stated simply and followed Henry into the elevator.

Ever's jaw was hanging open and her eyes were wide, she didn't move any further. "A werewolf? You are mated to a werewolf! Where the fuck was this acceptance when you were fucking with a warlock and gave birth to a half-breed?"

"Ever, you're drawing attention, please, get in the elevator." Lillian could feel Henry's wolf getting angry, not liking that its mate was getting yelled at, even if it was by her own daughter. Humans were stirring in the nearby rooms as well, she could hear them. Lillian threw a glamour around them all, disguising them to appear as maids working here, just in case.

Ever's eyes brightened with anger.

Lillian noticed how delightfully different they were. One brown like her own, one witch bitch purple, somehow it worked in her pretty face. Her hands clenched and unclenched, her green fingernails reflecting the light from the ceiling. She seemed to gain control of herself finally, and quite suddenly, her hands relaxed and her face smoothed out to a serene expression.

"It doesn't matter anyway, Lillian. I'm only here to speak with you about Wraith and his possible motives, nothing more." Ever strode into the elevator, head held high and eyes averted.

Lillian wanted to say something, she wanted to say lots of somethings, but she knew it wasn't a good time. When they were safely in their own room, she would divulge much to her. She needed Ever to know what was really going on. She needed Ever to be on her side. The doors opened and the group stepped out, easily avoiding notice by the humans in the hall waiting for the elevator. Glamoured to look like they worked here, the human guests paid them no mind at all. Henry led the way and once inside their room, Lillian dropped the glamour and clasped her hands behind her, not sure where to start.

Ever walked over to the balcony doors and stared out at the bright city lights.

Henry took himself to the corner.

Lillian appreciated his staying out of it. She knew it must be hard for him to not try and take control of the situation.

"I can't do that," Ever stated quietly.

"Can't do what?" Lillian asked, stepping closer. She stopped when Ever whirled around and faced her with hurt-filled eyes.

"I can't do whatever the hell you just did with the making us look different thing. I can't do that.

I can't *flash* or whatever you call it. My fingernails turn green when I cast spells, which is why I keep them painted green. I live among humans, trying to pretend I'm not what I am because I know there is no place for me among the immortals. I have no father, I have no mother and I am desperate to know. To know what I am, what I could be and where I came from. Desperate enough even to sit here and listen to you, a woman I have hated all my life." Ever fell back into a chair.

Lillian perched delicately on the arm of a loveseat. "I'm not sure you can't, perhaps you just need to be taught. It isn't something an elf knows instinctively from birth, it's more like learning to walk or swim. You may have an idea how to do it, but you need to be shown the right way to move your body. I imagine your father wasn't pushing you to get in touch with your elfin side."

"No, not at all."

Annoyance and anger began to build in Lillian. She tamped it down. Now was not the time to argue about the idiocy of Darell. "Ever, I would like to take you back to the colony. You can live there safely, away from humans, and witches."

"Among a race of immortals who will hate me for what I am? No thank you. I think I'll pass on that. Just tell me what you searched me out for. It can't be because you finally decided I should move in with you. You said something about a

cousin Alaria?"

"Yes, Alaria is trying to take over my colony. I don't know what her plan is, but it involves you somehow or else she just plans to kill you off as well so there will be no holder. I can't begin to fathom why she would want to put her own people in jeopardy by killing holders, but she does, or is, or whatever. My point is, Ever, is that I need you safe, I need you with me so Henry can protect us both." Fear and hope and such strong longing filled Lillian and she knew she wasn't hiding it as well as she should. She just hoped her intensity wasn't going to scare Ever away.

"I have no need of protection. I have no reason to believe a word you said and I have no idea what a holder is. Lillian, I appreciate that you sought me out. Maybe we can talk again some time, but this all sounds very much like your problem."

"Wraith sought you out on Alaria's orders. You have plans to see him again?"

Ever leaned forward in her chair. "Perhaps."

"I would advise against that. You aren't safe with him or any other warlock or witch. You need to be among the elves, protected."

"I'm not an elf." Ever stood, her hands fisted and trembling, "You made sure of that when you left me behind like trash." The words were quiet but powerful and magic filled the air, bursting

light bulbs all around the room. "I'm going now."

"Let me flash you back, make sure —"

"No, I will take a cab and if I want to see you again, I will contact you in the morning. It is all just too much for one day, I need time to think."

"Understandable and I'm sure you will make the right decision. Our colony's survival depends on us."

"I don't have a colony." Ever walked from the room without another word. Once she was gone, Lillian collapsed onto the couch, her body shaking with sobs. This was all her fault and she knew it. If she had been able to accept Darell, he wouldn't have felt it necessary to hide her, to lie and say she was dead. Lillian could have raised her daughter, if she had given any indication that she would accept another species with open arms.

Henry's warm arms wrapped around Lillian and she drew comfort from him, her mate. She turned in his arms and pressed her lips to his. She wanted, needed him and the comfort his body could provide.

Henry responded immediately, pulling her closer and running his hands up and down her body, exciting every nerve ending. He knew what she needed and he was more than willing to give it to her.

* * * *

Ever's mind wouldn't settle, she felt as if she were being torn in a thousand different directions. The hate her father had instilled in her, the hurt she had always held for her mother, the desolation of a lonely existence and desire to belong. All of it was pushing and poking for a place up front, and she didn't know which way to go so she blocked it all, pushed it down into that spot where she always held her bad feelings.

When the cab turned onto her road, she reached beside her and felt only empty seat. *Crap, no purse!* Luckily, this was a situation she was always prepared for. She rubbed her fingers together on her right hand and suddenly she was holding just enough money to pay the driver, one great thing about being half-witch, although she did try not to use that kind of magic very often, it just didn't feel right. Tonight, as with many other nights, she used it and was thankful for it. It was, she supposed, who she was born to be anyway.

Born to be, that was a joke wasn't it? The only thing she had been born to be was alone, obviously. For now she had Suzie, her sweet Suzie, but even that would have to end and sooner than Ever wanted to think about.

She was pulled from her self-pitying thoughts as soon as she saw her house. She felt horror. Something deep within her could sense it. As if

she had hit a wall of death, destruction and loss, her entire being was suddenly focused on one certainty—there was a dead body inside her house, violently killed and very human.

“Suzie,” Ever whispered. She threw her money to the driver and rushed out of the cab. The front door was closed and Ever hesitated, so afraid. She gathered a cloak of determination around her and pushed the door open.

Blood was spattered across the living room, deep crimson gore against the cheery color scheme Suzie had picked. Not a single piece of furniture was overturned, not a single disturbed rug on the floor. Everything was eerily as it should be, just covered in Suzie’s all too human blood.

Ever walked into the room slowly. Suzie was slumped over on the couch, the book she’d been reading lay at her feet, her throat had been cut wide open in one swift, silent attack. Suzie hadn’t had any warning she was about to be attacked, hadn’t had a chance to defend herself or explain herself. She had been found and killed because of the possibility she knew something, anything, about the immortals. Ever had done this, she had sentenced her lover to death.

“Ahhhhh!” she screamed, falling to her knees behind the couch, closing her eyes against the horrible scene and the evidence of what she had, in her selfishness, done.

She didn't know how long she lay there, curled in on herself, awash in agony and grief. It was still dark when she realized she was no longer alone. She couldn't make herself care however. She hoped it was the same thing that had killed Suzie, come back to kill her as well. It would be so much easier that way. Whoever it was, crouched down behind her nearly silent, her elf ears picked up on the sounds easily. She didn't move, couldn't care.

A gentle hand touched her back and she shuddered. Tears slipped from her eyes, green tears thanks to her witch half. A witch's tears held much magic. An upset witch was a very dangerous thing. As her tears hit the ground, their magic dissipated into the air, unused it escaped back into the universe.

"Ever, are you alright?"

Ever rolled over and looked up into Wraith's concerned face, his purple eyes were full of caring. It wasn't what she had expected. "You aren't here to kill me, too?"

Wraith pulled her up to a sitting position with gentle hands. "Kill you, too? I didn't kill your girlfriend, Ever. But I think I know who did. I'm so sorry, Ever, this is all my fault. I thought I could keep her away. I thought you would be safe for another day until I could explain it all to you."

"Lillian did this?" Ever refused to acknowledge the deep hurt that thought caused. How could her

mother have done this thing to her?

“It wasn’t your mother, it was her cousin—”

“Alaria!” Ever finished for him, kicking herself for not listening to what her mother had been trying to tell her.

“You know about her?”

“Kind of, I spoke with Lillian tonight. She tried to tell me, but I didn’t really listen, I...” A new wave of despair washed over her, cutting off her words. She could have prevented this, the kill was fresh when she arrived, if she had put her own feelings aside and just listened to what her mother had been trying to tell her.

“Your mother! That must be why Alaria didn’t stick around. She must have gone after Lillian. I’m not sure how much you know or understand, Ever, but your mother and you are holders. It’s a very important thing for any elf to be. If Alaria can kill your mother and gain your favor, she will be able to control the outcome of the war.”

“What war?”

“The war that is on the horizon. There is no other reason for a holder to be united with her guardian.”

“Guardian?”

“I assume that would be the young werewolf your mother has been keeping company with lately.”

“Henry, he is her mate.”

“Her mate...interesting.”

“So she is in danger.” Ever stood quickly, all her grief replaced with purpose. “We have to warn her, help her.” Wraith stood as well and Ever was reminded of what else her mother had tried telling her. Ever took a step back, bumping into the couch.

Wraith’s face softened and when he spoke, his words were sincere, “I understand your hesitance, Ever, but you can trust me.”

“Said the spider to the fly,” Ever commented with sarcasm.

“I didn’t know what you were when I agreed to find you for her. I admit I knew she had no good intentions, but I didn’t care for the plight of any elf, only what she offered in return. When I met you, I realized you are a holder. I will not be held responsible for harm coming to a holder. I may be somewhat of a mercenary by profession, but I have no interest in being responsible for the complete destruction of immortal society.”

“That sounds ominous. If this were a movie I do believe *cue scary music* would be written in the script right here.” Ever wasn’t sure where her calm sarcasm came from, but she felt full of purpose and it focused her. She would grieve her love’s death, but only after she evened the insult. Alaria would die, there was no other option to right this wrong. “Let’s go to my mother.”

"I have a bike outside." Wraith's gaze drifted around the blood-spattered room. "I don't recommend returning here or to your human life at all. If there is anything you want, grab it now."

"I..." Ever looked around, knowing he was right. She couldn't come back here or go to her shop. She was done in the human world. Ever packed a small backpack of belongings while Wraith waited outside for her.

Standing over Suzie's death-cooled body, she laid her hand on her soft, blonde head and vowed to avenge this death. "I will make things right, Suzie. I will deal out death for death, rest peacefully, my love, and know that I am sorry."

She left the house, knowing she would never return, and wondered what the humans would make of all this. Perhaps they would think she did it and was on the run. Maybe they would assume she was taken hostage or killed and hidden. It would be one among many unsolved mysteries for the Reno police department.

"Okay, tell me where to go," Wraith said as he started the bike and patted the seat behind him.

"You can follow me," Ever threw over her shoulder as she walked to her own silver and blue Harley. It was always satisfying to not be a helpless female. The look on Wraith's face clearly stated he was shocked, impressed and probably a little turned on as she flew past him.

Mating Call

He was quickly beside her, but didn't try and get in front. She glanced his way and saw he had a determined look on his face. To him, this was more than a job and he was willing to let her take charge of it. *We just might turn out to be friends, as long as he doesn't try and get in my pants.*

CHAPTER TEN

Lillian held her face up to the steaming water, letting it cleanse her. It wasn't working. She still felt like a complete failure and a bit guilty as well. It wasn't right, her having sex with Henry just so she could forget for a while what was going on. She needed to be dealing with the issues present in her colony, not her unfortunate attainment of a mate, which gave her guilt. Her feelings of failure, obviously, were a result of Ever. Ever had not been won over to her side and she wondered if she ever would be. Maybe it was her fault though, maybe if she hadn't given Darell the impression that she was ashamed of her relationship with him. Maybe if she had taken him to her colony instead of hiding out with him in Nevada. Just maybe...

Lillian slammed her hand against the shower wall and fought back the intense emotions. She could not make the past change, but she sure as

hell could make the future better. That resignation made her feel slightly more in control—determination was a thing an elf held strongly to. Her mind wandered back to Henry as her determination started to push aside the terrible depression.

After giving her another euphoric experience, Henry had held her close and stroked her hair as if to comfort her. It had been all too much. Lillian had pushed him roughly away and rushed to the bathroom. Thankfully, he hadn't followed. Lillian just couldn't take his kindness. She wasn't sure she would want it ever really. Elves didn't do that, they didn't cry on each other's shoulders and hold each other through hard times. They were strong, they were silent and they were independent, even after mating.

She had to keep focused and Henry was making it more difficult. She should have been running after Ever, meeting her at her house even. Letting her go off like that was ridiculous and she never would have done it if she hadn't wanted Henry so badly. He was just so damn enticing. All that hard muscle, big and so very manly, he was beautiful and everything she had secretly wanted in a lover. He made her feel so delicate and feminine, so in his control and yet he was gentle and kind. It was intoxicating and distracting and everything she shouldn't be dealing with right

now. It wasn't fair to her colony that she be so distracted and torn. All her focus should be on keeping them safe from whatever Alaria had planned.

Focus, Lillian reminded herself. She had to focus because this was about Ever and the colony, not herself and definitely not Henry's sex-god body. She focused again on the determination that filled her. She was going to do the right thing from here on out.

Lillian stepped from the shower and towed off. She had nothing with her so she combed through her hair with her fingers, then dressed in the clothes she had been wearing earlier. Thankfully Henry hadn't destroyed them this time.

"I ordered some food, I hope you like something here. I was kind of at a loss as to what you would want."

Lillian was surprised to find Henry halfway through what looked to be his second steak and a service cart in front of him covered in various pastas and salads. Her stomach grumbled and she forgot about everything she had been determined to say to him. She thanked him and snatched up a salad with strawberries and grilled chicken.

She was halfway through when her thoughts of guilt and duty returned. Ever was out there unprotected and Lillian had allowed it. It wasn't

right. Lillian knew she had the means to protect her daughter and yet she hadn't done it. She had just let her go, without argument. It wasn't like her. What had she been thinking?

She knew though, knew it was right and fair that Ever got to make her own decisions. She was not going to be forced into believing anything. There was no better way for Lillian to have dealt with it. So why did she feel so unsure about it all? Why were her instincts screaming at her for letting Ever walk out alone?

"Perhaps we should just go check and see if she made it home alright, just peek in? We won't let her know we're around," Lillian suggested as she speared another piece of sweet strawberry.

Henry was through his second steak and working on a massive amount of mashed potatoes. He paused and looked at her with an annoyingly knowing gaze. "I think that is a good idea. We will all rest easier knowing she is home and safe. But first you need to eat, I don't think you get nearly enough food, Lillian, and I can't allow you to not take care of yourself."

This was exactly the type of thing she didn't want, couldn't stand and thanks to him, she was reminded of all the things she had been fuming about in the shower. "Now you listen to me, Henry. I may have admitted to being your mate and I may have decided I accept the idea, but that

does *not* give you the right to tell me what to do, ever! Do you understand that? I don't want and I don't need you to watch over me and watch out for me. I can take care of myself. I am an equal to you, Henry, not someone you can rule over." Lillian realized she was stabbing her fork in his direction, punctuating her aggressive words. She let her hand fall into her lap and waited for Henry to speak.

"Do you realize you just said we are equal?" Henry grinned. "You think we are equals. Oh, Lillian, that must have been a hell of a thing to admit. Since you did, I will give you the benefit of a little information." Henry leaned forward, his brown eyes rimmed with yellow.

Lillian noticed. He may be speaking with calm, joking words, but he was intense on the inside and that is where it mattered.

"I am your guardian, and more importantly, I am your mate. I am a werewolf and I will take care of you whether you like it or not. I don't think you are less than me. I think you are the world I live and breathe in. I will keep you alive. I will keep you safe and if it doesn't make you happy, well I don't really give a shit because I will protect you for your own good. Deal with it, *mate*."

"You...you...oh screw you, Henry!" Lillian shouted and ran from the room, slamming the door behind her. Of course, she knew he would

come tearing after her and she didn't really want to try and deal with that. Her glamour was not standing up under her current distress anyway. Lillian went back into the room quickly, head held high.

Henry was standing, but hadn't yet moved toward the door.

His eyes were a bright yellow now and she knew he was close, so very close to merging. She knew she shouldn't push him, but she just couldn't seem to make that thought take over her brain that was so very mad at him. "Henry, I am going to calm down, and then I am going to flash myself out of here. I—"

An intense growl ripped through the room and a split second later, a werewolf was standing there. Fear rippled through her, closing her throat. The beast leaped toward her and she had a thought of *this is how it ends*, then everything was gone. Well everything wasn't gone, it was more that she was gone, flashed away, and not of her own accord.

* * * *

Ever walked swiftly down the hall toward the room she knew was Lillian and Henry's. Wraith was close behind. She had a bad feeling and couldn't explain it, but something was making her

steps increase to a near run and she didn't question it. Wraith followed her lead, hurrying behind her.

A cry ripped through the air as they rounded a corner and sighted the door, a horrible pained howl. Seconds later, a dark brown werewolf crashed through the door. Ever recognized Henry, her Animal Elf senses felt his desolation, his blind rage and killing instincts. *Is Henry in there somewhere?* "This is not good," she whispered to Wraith as she stepped slowly toward the growling animal. "Stay where you are while I try and reason with him."

Ever tried to ignore the sense that she was walking into a pit of hungry lions with a steak tied around her neck, but the thought wouldn't leave her completely. Henry was huge, he was vicious and he did not seem to be thinking clearly, but she had to get through to him. Only one thing would make him act like this, Lillian was in danger.

Ever's chest tightened and her hold on what Henry was feeling flickered as thoughts of her mother, just recently discovered, already being taken away. She shook her head and pushed those thoughts and feelings down in the pit of herself, the dark lonely place where she kept things unpleasant.

"Henry, it's me, Ever." She spoke with a calm quiet voice and approached with hands held out

in front of her, the universal signal for *I come in peace*.

His back was arched, his hair standing on end and his teeth were bared in a low growl. His eyes were glowing yellow and darting about, completely unfocused on Ever. There was no way he was going to recognize her as a non-threat if he didn't focus a bit.

"Henry, look at me." Her voice was soft, but firm and she hoped some part of her Animal Elf instincts would come into play here. *Tap into his animal and make him calm the fuck down.* "Go back in the room and split. We can help if we talk and know what is going on." He was looking at her now, but was he understanding her? She couldn't tell.

"Do you want me to incapacitate him?" Wraith whispered behind her, not quiet enough though.

Henry's gaze focused on him and a new growl rumbled from his chest. This one was more vicious and focused very much on Wraith.

Ever knew she had to stop this, and soon, or someone was going to get hurt. Humans were going to show up and end up dead. "Do what you have to," she said with teeth clenched. If she had known how to use her Animal Elf powers, this wouldn't be necessary, she was sure. *Damn-it all.* She cursed herself and her parents.

Wraith lifted a hand and locked gazes with

Henry.

She wasn't sure, but she was almost positive he whispered the word, *sleep*, then Henry fell to the floor. "What did you do?"

"He is asleep, not dead, don't worry. Now help me get him back in the room. Can you throw a glamour around the door to make it look whole and hide this beast?"

"No!" Ever said with a trace of hysteria in her voice as she struggled to lift the enormous were. He must weigh three hundred pounds, at least. If a human saw this, they would scream, then they would be killed and it would be her fault, all her fault. Wraith managed to pick up most of Henry's weight and she just pushed, not really helping much, but at least she was trying – it made her feel a bit better.

Once situated in the room, Wraith gave her a frustrated look. "Is there anything you *can* do?"

"Bite me, warlock, I grew up mostly with humans. What do you expect?"

"I expect that you know how to use the massive amount of power I can feel inside of you because if you can't, you are a danger to everyone around you."

"I—" Her reply was cut off by a whine from Henry. She kneeled down next to him and reached out her hand. To do what she wasn't sure, but it seemed like the thing to do. As it came close to

contact, she felt something and stopped. She hovered her hand over him and concentrated on her palm. It warmed and she felt a pulsing. She closed her eyes and felt the pulsing travel up her arm and into her body. It filled that cold hallow place inside of her. This was her Animal Elf place.

Ever pulled her hand back. She knew Henry was fine. What she needed was for him to split, that had to do with his human half, something she could not sense or control.

“What do we do now?”

“Hopefully he will split while sleeping. If not, then when he wakes up, we try to reason with him. For now, just worry about someone seeing that door. I don’t think the humans are going to just ignore that or the sleeping wolf in the room.”

“I think we need something better than hope right now. Lillian isn’t in here. Something happened and I’m betting Alaria is behind it.”

“Oh yes, I imagine that girl is behind a lot of stuff. Always was trouble.”

Ever and Wraith swung their heads around, stunned to find an ancient woman standing behind them in flowing white robes. Her hair was so white it was nearly clear and hung in one long braid to her feet. Her face was incredibly wrinkled, yet she was obviously an immortal, which had to mean she was, well, as old as dirt, Ever supposed. Her eyes were focused and bright,

brown eyes that swirled with intensity. She was an Animal Elf.

“Who are you?” Wraith demanded of her, but made no move to approach.

She had an air about her of power that came with such old age. It would be dangerous to underestimate her for her feeble appearance, Ever was sure.

“I am Payton, an elder of the Oregon colony of Animal Elves. I had hoped to stay mostly out of this fight, but I must protect my interests.” She waved a bony hand in Ever’s direction.

“What are you talking about, interests?” Ever asked carefully, not wanting to offend or provoke.

“Ever, you are Lillian’s daughter and you are to be my charge. If Alaria takes control of the colony, all will be lost. I am here to make sure that doesn’t happen.”

“I am what?” Ever asked through gritted teeth.

“You are Lillian’s daughter.”

“I know that, why would I be your charge?”

“You will come under my charge, your mother has already agreed to this. I will teach you, you need much coaching to become what I am, what you need to be.”

“And you are...what exactly?”

“I am nothing more than an old elf, but the knowledge I hold is great and mostly forgotten by the others. I will teach you, then I can pass on to

the other side and you will be able to spread the knowledge of our past greatness, make us what we once were. It will be important when the time of the war comes. The Animal Elves must stand in all their past glory, you will get them there. You will be a great general."

Ever knew her jaw was hanging open, but she couldn't help it. This old woman was either delusional or she was in for some serious life changes. Ever looked down at the werewolf starting to twitch beside her, thought of her wonderful and beautiful Suzie and revised that thought. She was in for more life changes. *Oh goody.*

"Don't worry, child, right now what we have to do is take care of this mess and find your mother, the rest can wait." Payton approached and hovered a hand over Henry's body. "You cast a good spell, Wraith, too bad you are a mercenary. We could use some more of your kind of talent on our side."

"I am on everyone's side," Wraith said with a smooth tone and practiced smile.

Ever rolled her eyes.

He just grinned at her.

"Is Henry going to split?" Ever heard a noise out in the hall and turned to see a human couple pass, seeming to not notice anything amiss with their door. Payton had glamoured it, she noticed

then, very helpful.

“Yes, but we may as well get him out of here now, just in case he wakes up angry first. Grab onto my robes.”

Ever hesitated a moment, but did as she was asked. Wraith looked like he was about to refuse, but Ever sent him a look that clearly said, *this is partly your fault, too*, and he grabbed on as well.

Payton flashed them all into a small cabin room. It was cramped, dark and smelled much like Payton. “This is your home? Are we in the colony now?”

“This is my home, but I don’t live in the colony, we are just outside the colony walls.”

Ever looked in the direction Payton had gestured, seeing only the wall of the cabin, but wondered about what lay beyond. What was the colony like and was Lillian in there now?

A howl shook the small space in the cabin and brought Ever’s full attention back around to Henry. He was up now, standing on all fours with his head raised and howling. The sound cut off suddenly and then there was a very naked Henry and a half-visible wolf. The moonlight that was filtering through diaphanous curtains was from a nearly full moon and was enough to render the wolf to a creepy ghostlike tangibility, Ever kept her gaze on the wolf, averted from Henry’s nakedness.

"Alaria took her!" Henry growled, an amazingly animal sound from his human lips. "And you!" He pointed to Wraith, stepping toward him with yellow eyes and teeth bared. "You are working with her."

"He is helping me," Ever quickly interceded. "He's not working with Alaria anymore. He is on our side, kind of."

Henry backed off Wraith, who looked unbothered by the threat. Henry didn't turn his back on the man, didn't seem to trust the change of sides.

Not that Ever blamed him, she had a hard time with it herself.

"Yes, yes. I had hoped you two would have been able to get this all figured out much faster than this," Payton grumbled.

"She could already be *dead!*" Henry growled.

"No, she is your mate, you would know if she were dead," Payton reminded her.

"She killed my...*friend*, Suzie. I will not allow her to kill my mother as well," Ever said with vehemence.

Henry was quiet for a moment, looked like he was concentrating. After a while, his face relaxed and his eyes closed. "She is alive, I can feel her. But Alaria has her. She won't survive long, I'm sure. But what was Suzie, when did this happen?"

"Suzie was human, I cared for her deeply.

Alaria entered our home while I was meeting with you and slit her throat. I will have revenge for that.”

“A very elfin feeling to have, Ever. Your mother will be proud and I am sure no one will argue with your right to exact revenge on her,” Payton stated.

“If she has harmed Lillian, I will take my rights with her as well. I will rip her to pieces for even thinking of harming her, I will—”

“As is your right as well, in the way of the werewolf, perhaps this is a situation where the Council of Immortals should be called in for exactly what type of punishment is necessary,” Payton suggested.

Both Ever and Henry disagreed loudly with this suggestion. Even though Ever didn’t know what this council was, she knew she would not like her revenge taken away from her by anyone, that wasn’t fair.

Payton silenced them both with a wave of her hand and a reminder of what they were up against still. “If Alaria didn’t kill her right off, then she must have a need for her. We must hope that need doesn’t end any time soon. You will easily find her. As her mate, you will sense her, as a were your senses heighten and you will find her quickly. Wraith and Ever will help you. Go now, out into the night, and find her before the sun

risers, I fear it will be too late then."

Henry looked from Ever to Wraith, "Can I trust you two?"

"That is my mother out there," Ever let her annoyance show in her words. How could he question such a thing of her?

"Well then go, go. There is no time to waste," Payton urged.

Payton was pushing them out so quickly, Ever almost didn't have time to notice Henry was still quite naked.

"I think Henry should put something on before we leave. I, for one, don't particularly want to walk around with him like that."

"No point, I am merging again. I will find her more easily that way. She is my mate and tomorrow is the full moon. There is nothing that could hide her from me." His eyes turned yellow as he spoke.

Ever took a step back. She was not getting between a were and his mate, no way. "Okay so we will follow your lead then," she said with a deceptively chipper voice.

Henry stepped out of the cabin, merging as he went. It was one of the most amazing things she had ever seen, but she had no time to process it. She would remember it later, she was sure. Ever followed him out and Wraith was close behind. Henry was fast on his four paws, flying off into

the night. Ever didn't have time to think, she just reacted and ran after him. It felt good to be able to use all her speed, not dumb it down to human level.

* * * *

Payton watched them go, allowing a smile to show on her lips. It was all going as it should, all as she had seen it. All as Paxton, the vampire leader of the Council of Immortals, was working to organize as well.

Payton settled herself in her chair and closed her eyes, she needed to rest now. It had taken so much of her strength to do what she had, but there had been no other way. Henry never would have made it in time if she hadn't fetched him, and the others, they would have to help. It would take all three to have a chance of saving Lillian. She didn't know if they would succeed, but if they didn't, she knew what would happen to the earth. She had foreseen it when she was nothing more than a child, had seen the utter destruction, the horror. The time was fast approaching and Lillian played an integral role in saving it all, as did Ever. She must be saved tonight. Payton's eyes flew open, someone was near. She knew it a second before he was there, in her house. "Vincent, how nice of you to visit."

"Of course, how could I stay away from my sister when she is so obviously close to death?"

"Not as close as you would like, I'm sure. I am still well enough to kick you out of here." Payton's gaze swept up and down her brother. He looked so like her it was difficult to tell them apart, the same aged skin, the same almost clear hair and bright brown eyes, still so full of life. Well, life was a relative term here. She held life in hers, his had always held death. He was her balance, the evil to her good. Always balance in the elf world, they couldn't survive without it.

"As I well know, I'm here to inquire after the girl. Have you found her yet?"

"Perhaps, if I have then her training has begun and you are destined to lose. If I haven't...well then I suppose it's anybody's game, isn't it?"

Vincent's eyes narrowed and he sniffed the air. "Keeping company with weres and warlocks it seems, and...something else." He sniffed again and looked thoughtful for a moment. As realization hit, his eyes widened and his jaw clenched. He had never been too good at hiding things from her, his emotions were an open book for her to read.

Subtle as the changes were, she easily saw them. "Yes, it is what you think."

"How dare you, Payton, she was mine to have, not yours. I won't allow this."

“It is not your choice now, is it? She found us, she is here and you will lose.”

“We will see about that.” He disappeared.

Payton dropped her head back and squeezed her eyes shut. If Ever wasn't careful, they were all going to be in trouble. If only she had been able to speak with her before Vincent found out she was here. Payton sent a prayer up to whoever might be listening, a prayer that Ever would stay safe from Vincent's influence. She knew it was too late to save her from Vincent's clutches, he would find her, he would take her. Payton didn't doubt it at all. If Ever could remember who she is, then she would make it out with all the skills and none of the taint, *if...*

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lillian's entire body ached, every part of her had been attacked, was constantly being attacked. Alaria had created the perfect cell to confine her, something she had no hopes of escaping.

It had happened so fast she'd been unable to react or think or do anything except blink. She had been braced for Henry's attack, had been ready for his teeth and fangs to rip her apart. Except that's not what happened. Alaria had been there, behind her, had in fact saved her from Henry's attack. Not that it would have been worse than the torture she was enduring now.

Alaria had flashed them both directly into this cell, then flashed out quickly to the other side. It was a small plexiglass box enhanced with some kind of spell Lillian didn't recognize, but assumed made it stronger than she could hope to break. It was hardly big enough for Lillian to lie down in diagonally, not that she could possibly get

comfortable enough to rest anyway. Not with the shocks of electricity that filled the box at random moments. Never more than a minute and a half apart, the shocks were just enough to unbalance her mind and keep her from being able to calm herself enough to flash out. The randomness made it worse as the unpredictability of the shocks lent another layer to the unbalancing of it all.

As her body reacted to yet another electric current running through it, she wondered at the wrongs she had committed to deserve this punishment. She knew life, knew the universe and knew that the big stuff was all about creating balance. This horror that marked the end of her life, what was it repayment for? What had she done so wrong that this is what she needed to experience to be able to leave the earth in harmony?

The pain stopped for a moment and she opened her eyes. Alaria hadn't been back since she had left her here and Lillian didn't know how long ago that was. Time was impossible to keep, every time a shock wracked her body, she lost all sense of what was happening or had happened. Her gaze shifted around the outside of her prison. It looked very similar to the area under her colony where she had kept prisoners in the past, a cave-like room with a steel bar wall and door leading out into a dark hall. Of course, her prison cells held

nothing like this torture device. This was something she would never have subjected another creature to.

She couldn't help but wonder if Alaria's plan was to leave her here to die, alone and confused. She hoped not. If nothing else, she would like to know what was behind these actions of Alaria's. At least Henry would have killed her quickly. Lillian's thoughts cut off as another shock swept through the cell. She fell back against the wall, letting herself go with it. Fighting only made it worse, or so she had discovered after the first few. If she could just ride it out, it wasn't as bad, a little easier to recover from as well.

"Are you enjoying yourself?"

Alaria's voice barely broke through the pain, but when it did, it gave Lillian just a little more strength. Hate was a great motivator and she was able to put on a calm expression even as her insides sizzled.

"I had this made especially for you. I am so glad to finally be able to put it to use."

"I'm flattered you have been thinking of me so often, Alaria. Had I known of your obsession, I could have perhaps spent more time with you. Then you wouldn't be feeling the need to act out in such a way."

"Obsession! Ha!" Alaria was letting her emotion show.

Lillian had to bite her tongue to keep her own smile of satisfaction from showing. If she could break Alaria, she just might be able to find a way to reverse this situation. Daring to not think it hopeless was probably stupid, but she didn't care. In that moment, she wanted to live just so she could kick Alaria's traitorous butt.

"I hold no more feeling for you than this, Lillian. You need to be removed from your position of power. You are unworthy of the honor of holder. You will use it to assist the wrong side, it has been foreseen, I can't allow that."

"Foreseen by who?"

"Who, doesn't matter, Lillian. What matters is this, you will die and I will take control of Ever. She will be the holder and she will choose the right side. That, too, has been foreseen. But before I allow you to leave this world, I must first make you suffer. You will feel the pain I have always dreamt of dealing you for all the times you walked around here like you were pure and good and I was shit for who my father was."

"What does your father have to do with anything? He may not have been a well thought of man, but he has been gone for years and none have blamed you for this poor parentage."

"Liar!" Alaria cried out, her hands fisted at her sides and her eyes wide.

Lillian wondered if she should push her any

farther, but wanted to know why this was happening, had to know. "Alaria I don't understand what you think has been happening but—"

"You understand, you know they all look down on me. They do it because you have done it. You should have taken me in, you should have become my mother in place of the one I lost, it was tradition and you failed. You left me to raise myself and they knew it was because of him. Vincent was thought of as such a horrible man no one would touch his daughter. I have been made into the joke of this colony and you could have stopped it all. But you didn't and now you will suffer."

A sound escaped Alaria Lillian could only describe as a chuckle, but it was cut off so quickly she couldn't be positive. Alaria was losing it, she was drunk with power and it was being spoon fed to her by someone else. If she hadn't already thought her situation hopeless, she now knew it was without a doubt. As another shock rippled through her body, she closed her eyes against the sight of Alaria's satisfied face.

When it eased, she opened her eyes to find herself once again alone. "Fuck," Lillian whispered and dropped her head down onto her raised knees. She was just waiting to die now. There was nothing else to be done. Alaria was so

much more disturbed than Lillian had ever realized and there was no changing that, not now.

What felt like days later, but really only turned out to be hours, Lillian was delirious with pain, her mind fracturing under the torture. She lay on her side, eyes wide and staring off into the darkness beyond her glass box of hell. In her mind, she was far away from this place. She was in a bright sunny room with an open window looking out at a field of wildflowers. The walls were painted a cheery yellow and she was lying on a soft bed covered in an old quilt. Across from her was a crib with pink blankets and a mobile with small faeries hanging down. Two tiny hands reached up toward them and coos of happiness floated to her ears.

“Heaven,” Lillian whispered. She had died and even though she hadn’t thought of what lay after death for her when she had been alive, she had made it into her own personal heaven. This is what she had dreamed of as Ever had grown in her belly. This is what she had been deprived of. It made sense she would be given this in the next life, given what she had most wanted all her life.

Noise and movement brought her attention to the open window. Outside, the sky had begun to darken and Lillian was worried about the baby getting cold. She tried to move, to get up and go

shut the window, but couldn't. Her body wouldn't move and the dark clouds raced closer and that noise, what was that noise? Whatever it was, she was sure it was dangerous. She had to save her baby. Was she alone? Where was the father? Who was the father? She didn't know and she couldn't move or speak or save her baby. She was helpless as the world darkened around her, swallowing up everything that was light and good.

The darkness didn't stop when it arrived at her window. It came inside and began to cover everything in the room. Soon even the happy coos of her baby were swallowed and gone. She was surrounded by darkness. Completely alone except for that sound.

I'm in hell. This is what I deserve for taking pleasure where it shouldn't have been taken. She knew it, knew this was truly what she deserved for the life she had lived.

The noise grew louder and louder until it was all she could concentrate on and even the darkness paled in comparison with that noise. Lillian wanted to cover her ears, but couldn't move her arms. She wanted to scream, to tell the noise to stop, to leave her alone and let her suffer her punishments in peace, but her mouth wouldn't open.

She concentrated on her lips, felt them, felt her tongue inside her mouth and her teeth clenched

together. She put all her thought into it and managed to move her tongue, this gave her hope and she kept at it until she was able to open her mouth. She opened and closed it a couple times, tasting dirt, but not caring. Finally, she opened her mouth as wide as she could and let loose with a scream. A scream so loud and full it held every emotion she had ever been forced to hold back. Every pleasure she had ever been forced to look away from, every pain she had ever suffered without a flinch, every hurt and upset she had not been allowed to show. She let it all out and it felt so good, she wondered if she was smiling, but couldn't feel her cheeks, only her lips, tongue and lungs.

When she could do it no longer, the silence that met her ears was deafening. She was so utterly alone. The sound had left her, too, but she reminded herself she had wanted it to go. She hadn't liked the sound disturbing her peaceful punishment.

The sound began again, but it was different this time, clearer somehow. It was no longer an undistinguishable sound, it was now a clear banging and there was something more, a growl?

Lillian felt a small tingle in her ear, the tiniest pinprick of feeling at the tip of her ear. Soon it was spreading, and as it spread further along her ear, she heard more clearly, recognized more certainly

the sounds. The banging was rhythmic and combined with a buzzing of unrecognizable words. The growl was a low constant.

The tingle spread farther, reaching her jaw and she heard her name spoken. The tingle quickly spread from there, rushing across her face and neck. In its wake, she felt her muscles and was able to focus her eyes. It wasn't darkness that met her gaze. It wasn't the yellow room of heaven either. It was life, sweet, hard and horrible life. Henry, Ever and a male she didn't recognize, were banging against the clear walls of her prison cell. Henry seemed to be speaking to her and his wolf was growling beside her. The wolf had been able to enter the cage. No moonlight was in the room to make him tangible and so he had walked right through the thing. If it hadn't been for her Animal Elf senses, she wouldn't have been able to see the thing.

Its growl was nonthreatening, which she didn't understand. The last time she had seen Henry, he had been trying to kill her. She shifted her gaze to him, naked and looking ready to kill as he spoke to her, words she couldn't quite grasp the meaning of, so she didn't try. She moved her gaze to her daughter. Ever had green tears running down her cheeks and the male beside her looked concerned, but not overly, his gaze kept shifting to the open door behind the group—watching for

Alaria?

The tingle of recovery reached her fingertips and she was able to move her arms. She stroked the soft fur of Henry's wolf briefly, then pushed herself into a sitting position, leaning against the wall. Soon she was completely back to feeling and moving her body, tired though it was. Her mind, however, still wouldn't make sense of what was going on. It was stuck in a fog and couldn't seem to process the words that were being spoken. She remembered Alaria, she knew about this prison and the shocks that had somehow ceased coming. But what were *they* doing here? And what was Henry saying? She felt a small tingling in her ears. This was her mate speaking to her.

Lillian brought her hands up to her ears and covered them, trying to block out the annoying buzz his words were creating. It didn't work. She looked at Henry's wolf, locked gazes with him and did her best to communicate her desire for silence. The noise abruptly cut off and she sighed with relief.

Lillian smiled and rested her head back against the wall. She wanted nothing more right now than to rest. She was so tired. Henry's wolf growled at her and yipped, not wanting her to sleep. Lillian obeyed, lifting her head, but not happy about it.

The wolf looked from her to the group on the other side of her prison, back and forth.

Lillian caught its message, it wanted her to talk to them, let them help her even. But didn't the wolf understand she couldn't be helped? Didn't the others understand? This was her punishment for a life lived with treason in her heart and body. This is what she deserved for loving beings of other species and taking them into her body. For not giving her colony all it deserved in a leader.

The wolf whined again, stomping its foot to emphasize its order.

"I can't," Lillian shouted at the wolf, getting mad now. How dare he tempt her with the impossible? "This is mine, this is what I deserve!" She pushed at the wolf, just wanting to be left alone.

"No!"

The word reverberated through her entire body and echoed in her mind. It was the first sound that had made sense since she had awoken, other than the few times she thought she recognized her name and the growls of the wolf.

Henry was staring intensely through the glass, his eyes so yellow he seemed a mere shade from merging.

Lillian had a moment of thankfulness for the glass separating them. It would somehow be more painful for him to bring her death. She cared so much for him, Alaria was nothing to her.

"Lillian you will come out of there right now!"

Flash the hell out of there. I won't allow this."

Lillian wasn't sure if she could or should. The shocks had stopped, but she wasn't sure they were not going to return. More importantly, she didn't know what waited for her on the other side.

"The shocks...Alaria," Lillian whispered to no one in particular.

"Alaria is gone, I avenged Suzie," Ever spoke with a matter of fact emotionlessness that made Lillian smile.

She was proud to call Ever her daughter, proud to see the elf traits come out. Beside her, Henry looked unhappy and Lillian wondered doubtfully if he had wanted to kill Alaria to avenge this torture. *No, that is just wishful thinking.* She knew better. Henry wouldn't need to avenge her, he was going to kill her himself. "I am sorry about your friend." Lillian wanted to keep her mind off Henry and herself, it was more painful than the shocks had been.

"It's done, she can rest now."

"We deactivated the shock system, Lillian. You're safe. You just need to flash out of there now." Henry's voice was steady and full of order. He didn't expect to be disobeyed.

"I don't know if I can," she answered honestly. *Or if I should.*

"You can, you just have to try," Ever reassured her.

Ever was looking at her with pain and hope in her eyes. There were twin streaks of green dried tears on her cheeks and Lillian's heart ached to know she had been the cause of such pain to her daughter. Whatever else might be waiting for her out there, her daughter was worth facing it all for. Lillian concentrated on Ever, drew strength from her daughter's presence until she was calm enough to focus herself, until she was able to flash out to them. Her strength was completely drained when she appeared on their side and she couldn't even manage to lift herself from the ground. She closed her eyes, too tired to fight whatever was coming. She half-expected Henry to attack, but didn't brace for it.

Strong arms lifted her and she recognized the scent of her mate. She didn't understand, but she wasn't going to complain. If he was going to keep her alive for a bit longer, then she was happy with that. It gave her more time to gain strength and fight him off.

"I would rather flash to safety, but it doesn't seem as though that's a possibility now." Henry's voice was a whisper above her as he spoke to the others.

"I am sure we are safe enough now. With Alaria gone, the others will have no reason to rally against Lillian, and besides, I won't allow it if they think to try."

Ever's voice was firm and in control, just as an elf's should be, Lillian thought.

"Let's get her up to her house then." The strange man was speaking now.

Lillian sniffed the air and scented warlock. Fear for her daughter brought her eyes wide and she whipped her head around, but all she could see were the walls of dirt that made up the tunnel leading them from her torture chamber. "Henry," she whispered, hoping the stranger wouldn't be near enough to hear.

Henry's eyes, yellow with banked rage, looked down at her, making her feel like a helpless child in his arms. How easily he could rid himself of her if he wanted to.

"Just rest, Lillian, all is well now."

"Who is he, Henry? The warlock, I can smell what he is."

"He is Wraith, but worry not, he is on our side... for now."

Lillian was not comforted by this. Especially since she wasn't sure she and Henry were on the same side anymore. "I would like to walk." She wasn't sure if she could, but she didn't want to be in his arms, so vulnerable.

"No."

"What do you mean no? Let me walk."

"You are in no shape to do anything, Lillian, just rest."

"I don't think you are the one to judge what is right for me."

"I think that is exactly what I am."

"You tried to kill me! Why the hell should I trust you now?" She hadn't meant to say it, hadn't meant to bring up her fear or remind him of what he had intended. But once it was out, she couldn't take it back so she smoothed her face and stared blankly up at him, giving nothing of her fear away, she hoped.

His eyes flared a brighter yellow, lighting up the small space they were walking through and his wolf growled, close by. He looked away from her and she saw his jaw was clenched tight. He was struggling with his anger. No doubt he wanted to rip her apart right now. Perhaps the presence of the others was all that was saving her.

Just then, they emerged from the ground through a vine-hidden hole in a small mound of earth. She recognized the area outside of the colony and cursed herself for not knowing Alaria was building such a thing so close to her colony. She hadn't been paying attention like she should have been, obviously. The very first rays of sunlight were peaking over the horizon and Lillian squinted against it, trying to get a handle on where exactly they were outside the colony, as if it would make a difference in how much this whole thing was her fault.

A scream and shout from behind had Henry twirling about to face the danger. When Lillian saw what was taking place, she tried lunging from Henry's grasp, but it was impossible—he held her in a hold that, in her weakened state, she couldn't possibly get out of.

Ever was limp and held with seeming ease in Vincent's arms. He stood stiff and still, a completely bored look on his face as he held a knife against Ever's exposed throat. Wraith was near, his face twisted in anger and his stance was that of a fighter—he was ready to fight for Ever, but there was no way to attack without risking her life.

"I will take her. She was supposed to be mine all along. I don't know why my sister thought she could have what was rightfully mine. You will all see this is for the best. If not, well then, you only have Payton to blame, don't you. She has failed." Vincent disappeared then, taking Ever away with him.

Lillian heard screams erupt from deep inside of her. Such sorrow she had never heard and she felt as if her entire body was being consumed, eaten alive by the fire of grief. It was all too much, her mind started to blank, her vision flickered and went black.

When she came back around she was still in

Henry's arms, but she was surrounded by elves from her colony. They were now within the colony walls. Tears ran down her face, an endless flow of sorrow for her daughter and she didn't care if she was showing emotion and weakness in front of her people. Now it didn't matter, Ever was gone.

She tried to focus on the activity around her and realized Henry was taking control of the situation, like a born leader. He was setting elves out to search for Ever, to find out more about Vincent and to find out where he could have taken her and why.

Wraith was there beside him as well, volunteering to take along a party of elves in his own search. The elves around her were displaying varying degrees of upset, the slightest changes in their expressions and body language indicating extreme upset. It was comforting to know her people were rallying around her now, they didn't seem to be about to turn on her. In fact, they seemed to be concerned about her and Ever, even though they had never met her. This was unexpected.

"Why?" Lillian asked, looking up into Henry's face. She was still cradled in his arms and didn't understand it. Why was he helping her?

"That's what I want to know. Payton is being fetched right now, it was her brother."

"Vincent, yes, but why are you doing this,

Henry? Are you not going to kill me anymore?"

Henry's eyes flashed bright yellow.

Lillian could have kicked herself for bringing it up again. Did she have a death wish?

"Lillian, I am not going to discuss this with you right now. Suffice it to say that you are my mate and I will not be killing you at any time."

"But—"

"No, now Lillian you have to trust me, that is the only way we can stay mated."

Lillian had no answer for that. She didn't know if she could trust him. "I think I can stand now."

Henry hesitated a moment, then set her on her feet, but kept his hand firmly around her waist.

Lillian didn't like it but refused to make a scene in front of all her people, more of a scene anyway. No doubt they had heard her speaking to Henry and would discuss it at length with each other. It was now more important than ever for them to present a united and strong front. Her position was in jeopardy, especially without Lucas here and she needed them on her side, following orders to find Ever.

When Payton arrived, Lillian listened desperately for hope.

"Vincent has claimed Ever because she is one of the prophesied ones. She is to be used as a tool in the war. All may not be lost, she still has a choice. She can become like him or she can remember

what she was born from." Payton's gaze locked onto Lillian. "She will have to choose and we will have to hope she chooses the side of light." Payton nodded and turned to leave without more explanation.

Lillian wanted to scream. It was not possible that her daughter could be used in such a way. It was not something she could accept.

"What do you mean, *one of the prophesied ones?*" Henry spoke quickly before Payton could flash away.

"It is prophesied that two immortals of great ability will come to us, the eldest of the elves. These two will be trained in our ways and used in the war. The other is long dead." Payton stopped speaking, leaving more questions than answers as she flashed away.

"We will not stop searching for her," Henry assured her, then sent the search parties that had formed out on their way. "We will question Payton further at a later time. She will have to give more information."

There was nothing to do now but wait. Lillian knew the horrible truth. There would be no finding Ever. It was now up to Ever to save herself. She had to choose the right path. Lillian's mind and body were done. She couldn't take any more and knew it, but to collapse in front of her people was not an option. "Henry, I need to go to

my home.”

“Yes, of course.” With a few last orders, Henry scooped her up, ignoring her protests, and started off toward her home.

“I can walk you know.”

“Not very well, just relax and rest, you need it.”

“I need a lot of things, Henry. Why should I think I’m going to start getting them now?” Lillian wasn’t sure where that bitter honesty had come from and she regretted it as soon as it was out. She was not the type of female to whine and cry about things, but lately, it seemed she was a lot of things she had never been before.

Henry didn’t respond until he had her in her room and was laying her on her soft bed. He lay down beside her and tucked her up against his warm body, which was still naked she noticed now that they were alone in her bedroom. She wondered what her people had thought of that little fact. They had gotten an eyeful, she was sure. Lillian was surprised at the tiny rise of jealousy that reared up inside her at the thought of other females looking appreciatively at his strong young body.

“Lillian, I love you. You are my mate and I would never attack you, no matter how angry you made me. I was angry in that hotel room, yes. I was no doubt showing it with yellow eyes. I didn’t merge to attack you though. I was going after

Alaria who had appeared behind you. I'm here to stay. I'm going to be a part of your life and your colony. I need them, and you, to accept that. Accept me once and for all, Lillian, so that we can make our life together."

Lillian's mind got stuck on the third word and as it tripped along with the rest, she became breathless and her heart ached with hope. "You love me?" she whispered.

"I do," he whispered back, his face buried in her hair next to her ear.

His hot breath increased the delight of the tingle his words always would produce in her ears.

"Now sleep, I want you recovered so I can show you just how much I have come to love you."

Lillian's body heated as the meaning of his words became even clearer by the presence of a very hard cock pressed against her ass.

He growled low and dark and her ears tingled, along with the rest of her body, as his husky voice commanded her to sleep. She did, because she was so thoroughly exhausted she really had no other choice.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Henry hadn't wanted to wake her. She was sleeping so peacefully and she seriously needed it. But it was nearly dark and there was a full moon tonight. He had already been contacted by his mother, his father and his alpha. One guilted, one encouraged and one ordered, all wanted him there with the pack, no excuses. There was no avoiding tonight's run and there was no way he was going through his first mated full moon without his mate.

He intended to enjoy it thoroughly. Of course, that would not be possible if Tarquin and Zyra didn't accept his mating. There was only one way to find out. Unfortunately, it was a bad time within the pack. The missing immortals still hadn't been found and everyone was on edge about it. Luckily, the Council of Immortals was out there tracking the monster who was behind it. Henry had to believe they would succeed. There

just couldn't be another option, not if peace was going to be viable in the immortal world.

Tonight it was a battle of a different kind, a battle for a place among his pack for his mate of a different species. Luckily, he was a part of the only pack in existence, that he knew of, that had an alpha mated to another species, a vampire. It would, no doubt, help them accept his mate. It would be a much surer thing if it weren't for the little fact that Lillian had tried to have Tarquin and Zyra killed for their mating.

There was only one way to find out and so he woke Lillian up. Thankfully she was willing to do what he asked. Be pleasant and accepting of the pack that was going to probably hate her for a long time. Henry smiled at her as she calmly explained her position on the subject, sighting her species' obvious superiority as a reason she could go into his pack with head held high. She would never change completely and he was okay with that.

Henry had prepped the pack, but showing up with Lillian was something else. His parents met them outside of Tarquin's home. Behind them stood Tarquin and Zyra, behind them was everyone else.

"Mother, Father, this is my mate, Lillian."

Lillian stepped forward with hand extended. She was beautiful, dressed in a light pink flowing

gown, her white hair hanging loose down her back and in the fading light of the sun, her luminescent skin was nearly glowing. Henry was proud to claim her as his mate.

“Hello, Jack...Staci.”

“Lillian, we are very glad you were able to get through to our son, this...unexpected mating is just another joy to heap upon that gladness in our hearts,” Staci said and Jack nodded agreement.

Henry sighed a huge sigh of relief. He hadn't been sure his parents were going to be accepting, even if they had claimed it over the phone. Tarquin and Zyra stepped forward as Jack and Staci moved on to embrace Henry. He hugged them both briefly, but kept his focus on Lillian and his alpha.

“I'm willing to welcome you, Lillian, into our pack, as is my mate.”

Henry watched Zyra's expression carefully as Tarquin spoke. It remained indifferent and Henry knew she wasn't all in, but she wasn't going to deny Lillian's presence among the pack either. The two females shook hands, neither meeting the other's eyes and neither speaking more than a polite hello.

Tarquin turned to the gathered pack behind him and held up Lillian's hand. “Lillian, Animal Elf, co-leader of the Oregon colony and now mated female to Henry, werewolf of this, my

Oregon pack. Welcome her, protect her and rejoice in her.”

The pack cheered, but Henry saw reservation on all their faces. Most would never truly accept or trust her, just as they didn’t trust nor accept Zyra truly.

When the expected rounds of introductions and welcomes were done, Henry pulled Lillian off into the dark woods and embraced her. His body was humming with the energy of the full moon and he couldn’t wait for it to be over so he could claim his mate with the fervor of the full moon pumping through him.

Lillian broke the kiss and held his face gently in her hands. “I love you, Henry. I just hope we can survive this ordeal once a month.”

“I’m sure we will. Everyone will be nice to you or they will have me to deal with.”

“I don’t need you to protect me, Henry. And it’s not the pack I’m worried about, it’s Zyra. Even you can’t convince her to be welcoming, not that I blame her for hating me.”

Henry growled and nuzzled her neck. He knew he couldn’t go against Zyra, unless he wanted to die, but he would not sit back and let his mate be treated badly either.

“I hate to interrupt you love birds, but Tarquin is gathering the pack, I thought I would take Lillian with me in the house while you all run

about like wild animals. Normally I would head into town while so much of the pack is about, but I thought I would stick around since Lillian is here as well."

Zyra was speaking to Lillian now, ignoring Henry who had moved to stand in front of Lillian. He didn't care if it was disrespectful. He didn't trust Zyra's intentions to his mate.

"And anyway, with the missing immortals still not found, Tarquin is not *allowing* me to leave the pack lands." Zyra's tone clearly showed how ridiculous she felt Tarquin's order was and that she was only humoring him with her obedience.

"Alright then," Lillian said, surprising Henry with her easy agreement. She pushed passed Henry, trailing her hand enticingly across the front of his loose pants. "I suppose I will see you when you're through." She followed Zyra with confidence exuding from her posture. If she was worried, she certainly wasn't going to let Zyra know about it.

"Don't worry. I spoke with her about Lillian."

Henry jumped and shame filled him as he realized he had allowed his alpha to sneak up on him while he had been worrying after his mate.

Tarquin chuckled, surprising Henry with the reaction and put an arm around his shoulders. "I understand what you're going through. Life would be easily lived if we mated with a nice

obedient werewolf, wouldn't it? Unfortunately, we both have been fated to women who only obey when they feel like it and are destined to rule us far beyond our ruling of them. Enjoy it though, Henry, I know I have. A weak-willed female never could have held my attention like Zyra has been able to. With that comes a level of trust though, trust in their capabilities to protect themselves and make decisions that will not harm us. I trust my Zyra completely and she will do nothing to harm Lillian without provocation. If you can say the same, we will have no troubles within this pack."

"I trust her completely. I suppose there is no other option, is there?"

Tarquín chuckled again, putting Henry even more at ease. "Definitely not, now let us join the pack and bask in this wonderful moon."

* * * *

Lillian kept herself calm and revealed nothing as she followed Zyra into her home. This would be very bad for Henry if she didn't manage to make some sort of peace with Zyra, and so she would try.

"Can I offer you something to eat or drink? There is always an abundance of food in the kitchen. Weres eat a lot, as I'm sure you are finding with Henry."

They had come in through the kitchen door and Zyra was at the refrigerator, pulling out a small package that could only be one thing. Lillian hid her disgust easily. "No, thank you I'm fine. How long will they be?"

Zyra gulped the entire contents quickly, when she was finished, her face was flushed and her eyes were bright, the rejuvenating effects of blood.

Zyra's gaze searched Lillian's face.

Lillian was sure she saw disappointment there. She had been hoping to gross her out it seemed.

"Tarquin usually returns as soon as he can, as I am sure Henry will. The others will be out until daylight, finding their pleasure with their mates in the woods." Zyra's eyes were bright and her smile was wickedly anticipatory.

Lillian knew the full moon merge was a time of carnal pleasure for weres. It was the only time a female could conceive and because they, like most immortals, had difficulty conceiving, it was doubly important they let themselves follow their animal instincts on these nights. Animal Elves could conceive at any time, although it was a rare thing to occur and much celebrated. It was always twins, always a boy and a girl, balance even in birthing. Not always did each child survive, however, it was a sad and often event that one did not make it. Lillian figured it was because death was the balance of life and if too many were born,

that balance would be destroyed. Lillian wondered what tonight would be like for her and Henry, her body heated at the thought.

Zyra led her into the living room and they sat silently together while the howls of merging weres flowed in from outside. It was midnight.

“I have made up a guest room for you and Henry. It’s customary that the pack members stay through ‘til morning, sometimes Tarquin has matters to discuss and it’s rare to have the pack together other than full moons.”

“I’m willing to do as Henry wishes in this matter. My colony will be fine unattended for a day or two.”

Silence, uncomfortable and heavy with accusations unspoken, filled the room for far too long. Lillian knew she would never be able to ask forgiveness of Zyra, knew she had not acted without reason, even if she now disagreed with that reason. This is what she would live with she supposed, for Henry.

When the howls sounded closer to the house again, Lillian’s body began to vibrate with anticipation. She recognized Henry’s howl and growl as it approached the house along with another she assumed to be Tarquin. Zyra’s reaction confirmed this. She stood and smoothed her long black hair, then moved to the bottom of the staircase. The howls silenced, then the door

slammed open.

Tarquin was the first huge, very naked, male body through the door and he didn't miss a step as he swept inside, grabbed Zyra up in his arms and took off up the stairs, his red-brown wolf loping behind. Henry was next and his body was huge, larger than she remembered and vibrating with sexual energy. He was deliciously naked and ready to take her. He stalked toward her, his eyes glowing so bright her breath caught in her throat at the beauty of the site.

His steps slowed and his hands clenched. "Do not fear me, Lillian, I won't harm you, but I must have you, now."

"I'm not afraid, Henry, you are just so beautiful."

He growled in response and in an instant, he had her in his arms, crushing her against him. As his lips devoured hers, she forgot they were in the living room. His hands pulled roughly on her clothing until he revealed her breasts. His mouth moved on to them and she wrapped her legs around his waist, arching her back to give him better access.

"Hey now, don't you two have a room to go to?"

Henry growled a vicious sound, whirled around to face the intruders and thankfully covered her bared breasts.

Mating Call

The two weres who had entered were apparently unmated wolves ready to crash out for the night as was customary. They both held up their hands to Henry and didn't dare move forward.

"Henry, take me to our room," Lillian whispered in his ear. He obeyed quickly, carrying her into the nearest room and slamming the door shut behind them.

As soon as they were once again alone, Lillian nipped and licked along his neck as he tore the remainder of her clothes from her body.

They came together swiftly, Lillian still held in his arms, legs wrapped around his waist and back pressed against the wall. Henry was beyond control and Lillian loved it. She took him in all his animal lust with such unbelievable delight. Never had she experienced something so all consuming and so right. This is what mating should be like and she hoped every mortal and immortal out there could experience this at least once in their lives. It was worth every pain she had gone through to get to this moment of perfect union.

Henry reared his head back and howled his release to the ceiling as her body clenched and rippled with ecstasy, her cunt squeezing his cock, wringing out every drop.

Henry's mouth was at her ear, his tongue sliding up to the tip. "That was a bit too quick, I

think we should try it again.”

Henry swung her away from the wall and they fell together onto the bed. His cock hardening inside of her as their mouths devoured each other. Tongues mating as their bodies did.

Lillian gasped as Henry shifted, lifting her legs over his shoulders, holding them tight as he started a ruthless rhythm. Pounding into her cunt, his cock slamming so deep, hitting the perfect spot and making her pant and groan loud and uncaring.

“Fuck, Lilly...” Henry groaned as she arched her back.

Lillian slipped a hand down her body, her finger sliding over her clit as Henry continued to push her to orgasm. His body was beautiful as it strained and pounded. His eyes bright yellow and his teeth bared, practically snarling as he fucked her.

Henry howled and Lillian lost it. She opened her mouth and let loose a scream as she came. Her body convulsing as pleasure washed over her. Henry came a second later and she could feel him pulse inside her, his hot come spurting deep, filling her.

Henry collapsed beside her and she struggled to catch her breath. “That was well worth being here for the full moon.”

“It’s not over yet, my love.” Henry pulled her

on top of him, his cock already hardening again.

As the sun came up that morning, they lay together on top of twisted sheets, the musky scent of their passion filled the room and smiles of satisfaction curled up each of their mouths. Lillian was drifting between awake and asleep as Henry ran his hands through her hair.

Any doubts she may have had about their mating was gone. She loved him, had told him so multiple times during the night. She fully accepted this as her life, her delightful wonderful immortal life. She was ashamed she had ever denied the suitability of interspecies mating and the validity of what Paxton and Lucas were trying to do with the Council of Immortals. "I owe my brother an apology." She sighed.

"Okay, not exactly what I had hoped you would say after our wonderful night together, but I'll go with it. What for?"

"For guilting him into leaving his mate because she's a mermaid."

"Oh, well I'm sure he will forgive you."

Lillian turned her head away from him and tried to think positively. "I hope so." But she wondered if she could forgive someone, anyone, if they kept her from Henry. She knew the answer, definitely not.

Three days later, Lillian found the way to make her brother forgive her. He and the other members of the Council of Immortals had saved all the kidnapped immortals and although Lucas had worked alongside Marina, she had not, in the end, been able to forgive him. It was all her fault, too, they should have spent years together by now, instead her brother was wallowing in his room, Henry keeping him company and she was going to go get that damn mermaid and fix this.

Lillian flashed herself to the mermaid's little seaside shop, hoping to find Marina there, or at least someone who would be willing to tell her how to find her. It was a risky move. All of them hated her, with reason, but she had to get Lucas to calm down and focus, she needed him to help her find Ever. Lillian walked into the shop, delighted to see Marina there, and no other in site or that she could sense with her Animal Elf instincts.

"We are closed! Can't you read the damn sign?" Marina didn't turn from the shelf she was stocking as she spoke, but eventually she turned around. When she spotted Lillian, she looked like she was choking on her own tongue.

"If you treat all your customers that way, it is a wonder you girls make any money at all. Of course, from what I hear, you all do quite well. Your things are...neat. I am sure simple human minds just delight when they walk in and see so

much delicate sparkly stuff. If only they knew how delicate and sparkly the girls who work here are."

"What the hell are *you* doing here, Lillian?"

"Now, now, is that any way to treat your mate's sister?"

"Why are you here, Lillian? You are not welcome and Lucas isn't here, you don't need to drag him away from me to do his duty to the colony again."

"I know Lucas isn't here, it's why I came."

"If you want to tell me to stay away from him, don't worry."

"Do you not love him anymore?"

"What does that matter? We can't be together. I am below him."

Marina's last words were said with so much spite, Lillian was filled with sorrow for her. "Rina, I have come to apologize, for everything."

"What?"

"I was wrong back then to take Lucas from you. I was wrong to say two species could not mate. It seems love does not care what species you are. It chooses for you the one that is best and we are helpless to fight it."

It doesn't matter, Lucas is not here. He doesn't want me anymore."

"He does, he always has, but he could never come to you because of me." Lillian allowed a

slight hint of shame in her voice. "And now he is afraid you do not want him, which is why I am here, to beg you to come with me. You must go to him, you must tell him you are still in love with him and want to be his mate."

Marina took a step back and leaned against the shelves there, looking as if she might pass out. "You can't be serious, you *hate* me. Why should I trust you when I am pretty sure you wanted to kill me the last time we met?"

Lillian's lips twisted in the barest hint of a smile. "Oh I wanted to kill you then."

"Lillian!" Acquanetta's voice drew both their attention to the back of the shop. "Leave here and never come back."

Lillian disappeared instantly, unprepared for persuasion. She appeared across the street, throwing up a glamour to distract any who may have witnessed it. She thought about leaving, she had tried after all. But no, she couldn't do that to her brother. Lillian flashed herself back into the shop.

"Damn it, mermaid! I wasn't going to hurt your sister. I was merely trying to apologize and tell her that my brother is sulking like a big baby at home because he wants her back and doesn't think she wants him!" Lillian's voice filled the shop and the annoyance there was obvious, but no anger.

"If he wants her, then why isn't he here, why

didn't he tell her when they were together searching for the missing immortals? Hell, why didn't he show up during all those years they were separated?"

"I may still love him, I always will and that is my curse. But I won't be with a man who doesn't love me enough to fight for me."

Lillian planted her hands on her hips and gave them a look of frustration. "That is all he did for years. He just doesn't work in big flamboyant ways. It isn't the elfin way. We are subtle and we take our time. But he never stopped working toward his ultimate goal. You."

"How so?" Rina asked, hope clear in her voice.

"He started looking for precedents of interspecies unions. When he found one, he made sure I saw it and took the bait. There was a trial where not only was I forced to say different species could mate without violating the laws of nature, but he accepted a position on that damn Council of Immortals, taking him away from the colony all the more. Now there are no grounds for me to say you cannot mate with him, and he you. I am forced to admit you are equals. But he does not think you want to mate with him anymore and you must go fix that. He will not do what he terms bothering you. Even though he suffers greatly while hoping you will let him know if you want him back. He is trying to be honorable and give

you time. But I can't stand seeing his stupid solemn face around the colony any longer." Lillian left out anything about her and Henry. She didn't want to shove her happiness in Marina's face, it just didn't seem right.

"It's only been a day." Acquanetta pointed out.

"Yes well, I have my own things to deal with at the moment and I don't want him around, getting in the way."

"Rina, you have to go," Acquanetta whispered. Lillian politely pretended not to hear.

"I...I don't know what to do, Netta," Marina whined.

Lillian wanted to roll her eyes. "If you don't go, you will always wonder. You can always come back to the clan. You know your clan sisters will always be here for you."

Marina bit her lip and turned to Lillian. "Alright then, let's go get this over with."

"If I don't hear from you soon, we will storm the colony," Acquanetta warned.

"I am forever in your debt for this, Rina," Lillian said just before grabbing her arm and flashing them to the colony.

Lillian flashed them to the hall outside Lucas's room. Movement sounded behind the door and it flung open. Lucas stood there, hair disheveled and clothing askew. He held a glass of something in one hand and seemed to sway as he stood. His

eyes took a minute to focus, glaring first at Lillian, then when they spotted Marina, they filled with such longing, such love Lillian knew she had done the right thing.

Marina opened her mouth and let the song flow as she flung herself into his waiting arms. The song was beautiful, Lillian noticed. She supposed she would be hearing a lot of it around here.

As the two embraced, Henry scooted around them and grabbed her up in his arms, kissing her deeply. "You did a good thing, Lillian."

"Yes I did, finally." This was one wrong she had righted with pleasure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I reside in Idaho with my husband and two daughters. I read, write and soak up as much of the sun as possible. Check out my website for my latest and what's to come - www.courtneybreazile.com or you can follow me on twitter www.twitter.com/cbreazile and if you want to check out more of Zyra, follow her twitter at www.twitter.com/ZyraZyra