

Kissing Phoenix Shona Husk

When Lilith fell into lust with musician Aidan, she never expected it to last. And she was right. Her doctor has given her months to live, and telling Aidan is the hardest thing she's ever done.

Aidan has been keeping his own secret. He is a Vampire...but he can't turn Lilith to save her. The solution he proposes is illegal and dangerous and breaks every rule set up to protect non-humans from humans. He doesn't care. He will do anything to save the woman he loves.

Discovering the kiss of a Vampire and reveling in the erotic thrill, Lilith realizes her feelings are deeper than lust. But is giving up her humanity worth it?

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Kissing Phoenix

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KISSING PHOENIX

Shona Husk

Chapter One

Buffy swirled around Aidan's ankles and meowed more plaintively than usual. He bent and gave her a scratch between the ears. "You can sleep on my feet tonight. Promise."

The brown cat head-butted the takeaway bag, then sauntered down the concrete steps. Probably to the park to torment the dogs. That was how he'd found her, as a scrap of kitten left for dead. He wasn't a cat person. He wasn't a pet person. He didn't need an animal reminding him how quickly time slipped past – people did that.

Yet somehow he'd ended up taking her home after the vet had patched her up. Six months later he'd taken the vet home. Thinking of Lilith brought a smile to his lips. With dark hair, blue eyes and a heart that cared too much about her furry patients, she was everything he hadn't known he was missing and now couldn't live without.

He opened the front door, his stomach a ball of nerves pulled too tight, hoping dinner would make up for him not coming home last night. Tomorrow night they'd go somewhere special—assuming tonight went well. He couldn't ask Lil to marry him without telling her what he was. And while he'd bought the ring, he still hadn't found the right words to tell Lil he was Vampire.

"Lil?" His voice rolled through the terrace house as he shut the front door.

She was here. He could hear her heart beating faster than usual. She didn't answer.

"Lil?" Aidan walked into the kitchen and dropped the takeaway bag on the table. He'd bought her favorite. Indian. The English version was nothing like the curries served in Madras, but it was passable flavor-wise. Nutritionally, it didn't have what he required. The meat was too well cooked and the vegetables not fresh enough to contain the etheric he needed to survive. While blood was optional, etheric wasn't.

As he moved through the kitchen, he saw her, leaning against the window frame in the lounge-room. She would've seen him come up the stairs. How long had she been waiting for him to return, staring out of the window?

She didn't usually wait...was she pissed with him for staying out? He wasn't going to tell her the truth if she wasn't in the mood to listen. He didn't want to screw up what he had with Lil by rushing. He was going to do it right this time – no secrets. Aidan swallowed the words burning his tongue. He could wait, but would there ever a perfect time to tell Lil Vampires existed and he was one of them? The engagement ring in his pocket grew heavy. And once she knew would she still want to be with him?

He took a breath. One obstacle at a time. "Hey, Lil. Want to have some dinner with me?"

"In a bit." She walked toward him with a faint smile on her lips. "I didn't think you'd be this late."

Lil slid her arms around his neck. Her fingers were warm against his skin as she pressed against him. He trailed his hand up the curve of her back, relived she wasn't annoyed with his late return.

"Neither did I." The song had taken over and they'd all stayed until it was complete.

He kissed her gently, hoping she wouldn't feel the ring box in his jacket pocket. He would've been home sooner if he hadn't stopped to pick it up. He hoped he'd get a chance to give it to her.

Lil's hands skimmed over his shoulders and pushed his jacket off. The ring fell silently into the folds of fabric on the floor. Hidden for the moment. He relaxed, happy to let dinner grow cold since Lil was also keen on the delay. He traced the contour of her lips with his tongue, ignoring the rising pressure in his jaw as his fangs wanted to descend.

Soon, but not yet.

He hated lying to Lil about what he was. What held him back was the uncertainty of how she'd react to the truth. He didn't want to destroy what they had, yet he knew it couldn't last if he wasn't honest.

Her mouth opened, inviting a taste, but he couldn't risk that intimate contact. Lil finding a fang by accident would be worse than anything he could tell her. His lips brushed her cheek and tasted the sensitive piece of skin below her ear. She leaned back in his arms as his tongue swept over her pulse. Her heartbeat was fast, but not from lust. The beat was heavy instead of light. He drew in a breath. Beneath the sweet scent of Lil's skin and the cooling curry there was fear.

Aidan drew back. "What's up, Lil?" He forced light into his voice when all he felt was dark. As if night were closing in, rapidly and permanently.

Something wasn't right. Her smile was hollow and her desire was forced, as if she didn't really want his arms around her. He'd stayed out all night before and she'd never cared.

"Nothing. I just want to spend some time with you." Her fingers rubbed against his shirt as if she was afraid of letting go.

"We've got plenty of time to be together." Longer than she knew.

Her gaze lowered and she stepped back as if touching him hurt. "There's something I need to tell you."

The temperature in the house dropped as his stomach unraveled. That was supposed to be his line. A frown creased his forehead. There was nothing non-human about Lil. He would've sensed it—hell, if she wasn't human she would have known what he was and he wouldn't have spent the week wondering how to start *The Conversation*. The one that went along the lines of, *Hi sweetheart, I'm a Vampire*.

"What's going on?" He scrubbed a hand over his face as the lack of sleep caught up with him and jumped on his back, digging its claws into his shoulders and dragging him down.

Aidan was sure everything was good between them. Had he misread every sign? Every smile? Every sigh? Had she met someone else? Someone with an easier dream, one that didn't swallow up nights and spit them out as days? Someone who didn't hide fangs and a desire to sink them into her every time they made love?

He moved silently over the carpet toward her. If she couldn't look him in the eye, what reason could she give that would satisfy?

"Another all-nighter." She shook her head and her chocolaty-brown hair shimmied over her back.

He loved to bury his face against her neck and feel her hair tickling his skin as he imagined being able to bite her. His fangs ached at the thought, but he pushed the longing aside. He wouldn't bite without invitation, even though it had been a long time since he'd enjoyed both a woman's body and blood.

He wanted Lil. But she no longer wanted him. The pink diamond ring might as well be a lump of coal. He wasn't going to get a chance to use it, or tell her what he was. The dream he'd been holding onto began to fray.

"You work six days at your veterinary practice," he countered. They both worked long, often strange hours, yet it had never mattered because the time they did spend together was magic.

Lil turned, her arms crossed just under her breasts. Her face was set in a scowl that was betrayed by her sad eyes. "At least I work." She swept her hand over the room. "You, you play at being rock star and live on your inheritance. Have you ever lived in the real world?"

Aidan flinched, but didn't retreat. His inheritance had been accumulated over nearly two hundred years of blood, sweat and battle. He'd earned every damn shilling. He was entitled to take time out to do what he enjoyed.

"You don't know everything about me." His gaze flicked to the framed nineteenth century posters. Promo for the *William Black Quartet*. Life had been simpler back then. And while they'd played together for over a decade, the good times had ended.

Spending too long in the spotlight drew too many damaging whispers and none of them wanted to be responsible for the next witch hunt. Unlike the other Vampires that had been part of the *William Black Quartet*, his history was on display. He didn't hide it, but he didn't discuss it either. He let people draw their own conclusions. But this wasn't about him or the reformed band or the time he'd spent working on the album.

This was about Lil.

He ran his hand down her arm, half expecting her to brush him off. "What's wrong?"

Her face scrunched, then she took a breath and blinked, finding calm where there was only turbulence. "Do you love me?"

"You know I do." He could prove his love, but not until she knew the truth about him. He'd learned that mistake the hard way, thinking it would be easier after the wedding. It hadn't been. In the end he'd said nothing and headed off to war.

He cupped her face. "I won't do any more all-nighters."

What he felt ran deeper than the casual love most humans experienced. The last time he'd cared this much, he'd walked away with a broken heart.

"I don't care about the nights or the days or —"

"Then what? What is it? I thought we understood each other. I thought we had something." He kissed her to see if he could taste the lie on her tongue.

She responded to his touch and her lips parted as his tongue swept past, enticing a response that couldn't be hidden behind cold words or washed away by tears. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. His cock hardened and pressure built behind his incisors. The scent of her blood pulsing beneath her creamy skin was a delicacy he craved to sample. Lil never wore perfume to mask the sweetness. Every time they lay together, he longed to taste her. He couldn't lose her. Whatever the problem was, he would fix it.

Her hands landed on his chest and she shoved him back. It was too late though, he'd seen through her act and it gave him hope. He wasn't going to let her go without a fight, not while she loved and wanted him.

"I love you, Lil. We can work through this, whatever it is."

"I'm dying." Her words were rough, as if each one cost her dearly.

"Everyone is dying." Except him and the other Vampires and Lil while she was with him, sharing the energy that surrounded him – but she didn't know that yet.

Lil stared up at the ceiling and blinked. "Maybe I should leave. It would be better than watching you run."

Those were the first truthful words she'd spoken, but they cut deep. "Why would I run?"

What secret could she have that would trump his? His secret made most people reach for the nearest sharp implement and aim at his chest. His heart slowed. Was she really dying?

She stared at him, her lips tight and thin. "I have cancer. I have three months. Maybe four." The words shattered in the air. The brittle points cut everything they touched and tore open his now still heart.

Not again.

Memories of his first wife, his only wife, rose from the grave. Her frail body had fought to hold on until he'd gotten home from patching soldiers on the front.

"No. They catch it early these days. There are treatments." He pushed his fingers through his hair and held the back of his head to stop the memories from spilling out. His house was filled with too many ghosts and too much pain. This wasn't happening. Not to his Lil.

"I was treated three years ago. It came back."

"There must be something. It's 1998, not 1888. Surgery. Chemo." His mind scrambled for solutions he'd read about. He knew of the advances, had kept up with

the latest studies even though he no longer practiced medicine. At first he'd done it only to convince himself he'd done everything he could to save Eve. Then it had become habit.

"It's chemo resistant. Last time they cut it out...this time they can't."

"Why not?" Miracles happened every day in medicine.

"It's around an artery." Lil spoke without emotion. She'd had time to plan her answers and come to terms with her mortality.

He hadn't.

Aidan turned his back and snarled. His fangs dropped. His fists clenched at his side as molten rage stripped his control. He struggled for composure and failed. Cancer was once again trying to steal what he loved because it couldn't have him. He forced out a breath that tore at his throat.

A shouting match wouldn't solve anything. The cancer wasn't Lil's fault. He wasn't angry at her, he was angry at the doctors who shook their heads and did nothing. From the shelves black and white photos of his previous lives glared, daring him to do something. Eve's portrait smiled.

What would he do this time?

He'd planned to let Eve think he'd died in World War One so he never had to tell her the truth about what he was. He'd gone home for once last glimpse. When he'd seen her, he couldn't leave. She was waiting for him, waiting to die in his arms. Her letters had said nothing of the tumor eating her insides; they'd been filled with love. Love that would've died if she'd known he was Vampire. He'd tested her by dropping hints and each time her response had been either fear or disgust.

In his darkest moments, he was glad she'd died before he'd had to tell her and watch the love in her eyes burn. Would Lil react the same as Eve?

No. She'd been open to the possibility of other beings, curious even. But she hadn't trusted him enough to tell him she was sick. That was the most wounding.

"You weren't going to tell me."

"I didn't know how. Then I realized I had to. That you'd notice something was wrong when I started throwing up blood."

He knew that uncertainty too well and it had nothing to do with trust and everything to do with doubt. He uncurled his hands, forced back his fangs and turned back to Lil looking like any other man. Maybe another man would've taken the news better, but he wasn't an ordinary man and he wasn't going to let Lil die. She reminded him that there was beauty and kindness still in a world that delighted in killing and cruelty.

"There are options," he said. Ones not available to humans, but first she'd have to believe in Vampires.

Lilith narrowed her eyes, sensing a shift in the conversation. There was no smile on his lips like she'd come to expect. Aidan was usually the sun in a storm, now he seemed sharp like lightning and twice as dangerous. This was a side of him she'd never seen, but how long would he last when she got really sick?

Could she drag him into her nightmare?

She shouldn't have moved in, but she'd never been able to resist him. There was something about him—when he looked at her, it was as if she was the center of his world. She should've told him before they'd gotten serious, let him know what he was getting. But she'd never expected the cancer to come back and, deep in her heart, she was afraid that if she'd told him they would've been over before they'd started. She sighed. While it lasted it had been amazing. And now?

Would he stay and hold her hand? She didn't want to do this alone. Last time her fiancé had apologized as he ran for the door, never to be seen again. Her father had done everything, then twelve months later he'd died. This time, if Aidan left, she would really be alone.

Her hand reached for him, resting on his chest where minutes before she had pushed him away. She needed to feel him and make sure he was still really here. That he wasn't going to leave. Beneath her hand, his muscles were tense as if he were bracing for more bad news.

Black clad, ink on his fingers from a night spent writing music with his friends. He had so much faith in the project and she loved that about him, even though reality said an electric-string-grunge quartet was never going to make it. Did he have that much faith in her?

"I'm not spending what's left of my life in a hospital." She was going to sell the veterinary practice and travel, hopefully with Aidan.

She had to make him understand how much she wanted him. He'd taken away her fear of life and replaced it with a love she never dreamed of finding. She slid her hand over his long sleeved black t-shirt. Her mouth brushed against his, returning the kiss she'd tried to ignore before. Her tongue slid across his lips, seeking the familiar touch, the familiar taste, the familiar drug that pressed down reality until only they existed. He was sunshine and chocolate. A taste she'd crave for the rest of her life.

His fingers trailed over her hips and cupped her butt. The embrace tightened and she pressed toward him. He kissed along her jaw and his teeth grazed her earlobe as he rolled the small gold stud between his teeth. She tipped her head and let him trail kisses down her neck. His breath tickled her skin as his tongue flicked against her pulse. Her blood surged and liquid heat pooled low in her belly. Her body responded to his touch as if nothing had changed. She needed to feel his skin against hers. Details were forgotten as she existed only in the moment, wanting more from Aidan without knowing what it was. Her hands were under his t-shirt, sliding over lean muscle. She glanced up and caught his heated gaze. The golden light in his eyes burned for her alone. Would she be able to look at him when that light no longer shone?

"There are other options." His thumb traced her cheek as if he was begging for her to agree with whatever he said. She wanted to believe his whispered words.

"What do you mean?" Lilith raised a brow. "New age therapies?"

"Not exactly." Aidan's face was serious, as if he were balanced on a scalpel and walking barefoot along the blade. "More like ancient remedies."

She frowned. What was he trying to tell her? That there was a mystic cure and if she ate a lizard under a full moon, she'd be fine? If it meant living, she would. She would do anything that gave her better odds than her doctor. He'd sat there calmly and told her she had a five percent chance of survival if they cut and radiated her until she was a shadow of herself. Her odds the first time around had been better and she'd fought with everything she had and then more, but she couldn't do it again, not when the odds were stacked against her and her gut was telling her she couldn't win this battle.

"What do you mean?" Even though she didn't want to, she began to hope. To believe that Aidan might be able to save her life the same way he'd healed her heart.

"There might be a way..." He wouldn't look her in the eye.

She swallowed down the fluttering wishful thinking in her chest and returned to reality. Aidan was a musician, not a doctor.

"You don't get to raise my hopes before telling me what you're hiding." And she was sure he was hiding something. The past couple of days he'd been somewhere else even when he was with her. That had been fine. She hadn't been in the mood to talk anyway. She'd had her own secret to keep. It had taken her days to think of a way to tell him and even now it wasn't going how she'd expected.

Aidan closed his eyes as if the words he was trying to find were written on his eyelids. He sighed and forced them out. "I'm Vampire."

Lilith forced a laugh and stepped back. "You're not a Vampire." She crossed her arms. "I've seen you walk in daylight."

"Daylight generally isn't a problem." His lips revealed elongated teeth as he spoke.

Long, delicately pointed outer incisors. Not shaped like an animal's canines, for tearing into flesh. No, these teeth were something else entirely, but no less dangerous. Trapped between wanting to run and frozen with fascination, her blood pounded in her ears. The room became tiny and airless. Aidan had fangs just like a Vampire should.

He closed the distance between them. Smooth, constant motion, lord of his domain. He moved like a predator. She'd never noticed his grace before. Now all she could do was watch as he took her hand, turned it over and ran a finger over the pale blue vein. Then he kissed the inside of her wrist as if he was savoring the taste of her skin. Heat flowed from his touch and the pressure of his teeth and rose deep within her, awakening a part of her that had been dormant. Desire raced unrestrained through her blood and sparked every nerve. One touch and she was his. She waited for his fangs to pierce her flesh. Caught in a moment that shouldn't be, her breath became trapped high in her throat.

Aidan's gaze locked on hers as his tongue glided over the vein. Then he released her without biting. She gasped as if she'd glimpsed heaven and had it stolen. Her body trembled and ached. Her blood was too hot to be contained within her flesh.

What had he done to her?

Her shaking hand found its way to her neck. Her pulse bounced hard beneath her fingertips. Every touch, every lick of her neck had been for one reason. He wanted to bite her. Except she'd put money down he'd never actually bitten her.

Because Vampires don't exist. Get a grip.

She was hallucinating. She'd entered a daydream while waiting for Aidan to come home, but the cooling curry in the air smelled real. The kiss had been very real, searing her skin. Aidan's teeth looked very, very real. Her eyes narrowed. She was going to kill him if the teeth were fake. She'd be dead before it got to trial.

"Prove it, Dracula. Are the teeth real?"

She watched his incisors return to a more usual human shape and then lengthen again into needle sharp points. She shivered, her skin was like ice, but her heart raced at the sight. Fear and lust entwined to smother all remaining doubt. He wasn't playing.

Aidan flicked his tongue over a tooth. "Real."

Her mind skittered over the alien terrain. If he could walk in daylight, were all Vampire stories false? "Don't Vampires drink blood?"

He nodded and the light caught his hair, turning brown to red. "When we can get it," he said too casually.

She stepped back, feeling like a rabbit in a lion's cage. Could he hear her pulse? The tremor in each breath? Her calves hit the sofa. If she ran, she'd never reach the door.

His eyebrows drew together. "I never bit you."

Part of her sighed with relief; a more primal part was offended. She was good enough for sex, but not to bite. "Why? Did you know I was sick?"

"No. You never offered."

"How could I offer if I didn't know you were an undead..." She'd felt his heart beat beneath warm skin. They shared a bed, not a coffin. He disproved everything she thought she knew about something that didn't exist. "What are you?"

"Vampire. A genetic variation of human." The long incisors had no effect on his speech.

But they affected her. She wanted to know what it would feel like to be writhing in his arms as his fangs broke her flesh. The thought sent a shiver of desire down her spine. It had been lust at first sight with Aidan—how much of that was because of what he was, not who?

She looked away to clear her head. None of this made sense. "Scientists would have made that discovery."

"The change is in the junk DNA. It binds the etheric body close. Scientists can't prove what they don't believe in."

Aidan was right. The etheric body was new age hocus pocus. Supposedly. He took a step toward her.

She held up her hand to halt his advance. "If you're human, why drink blood?"

"I need etheric to survive." He shrugged. "From blood or food."

Lilith nodded. His obsession with organic food wasn't because he was a hippie or trendy, it was survival. It hadn't worked for her. No amount of yoga and health food had kept her in remission.

"So, do I stake you through the heart to kill you?"

His teeth returned to normal and he laughed. The sound could bring summer to the coldest winter. "That will kill most things."

She couldn't join in his amusement. He looked like Aidan, but the man she loved had been replaced by a Vampire.

"Have you always been Vampire?"

"Born that way. My father was a Vampire who paid my human mother for more than her blood."

"Are you immortal?"

"Near enough. The etheric keeps us young. Starved of it, we age and die."

Lilith nodded, reassessing the man in front of her, a plan forming. "Do you get cancer?"

His hair fell over his eyes as he looked at the floor as if he knew what was coming. But he'd told her for a reason. He could take away her cancer. He could make her Vampire. Her battered hope stood up, ready to accept her new fate.

"If you turn me, I will live." Life as a Vampire was better than death and Aidan could teach her how to live. She didn't have to drink blood. She could just eat healthy, extra healthy. For a moment, rainbows colored her vision.

Then Aidan lifted his head. Pain lined his face as if she was seeing old scars exposed for the first time. "It's not possible."

Lilith blinked as if she hadn't heard him properly. "Not possible?"

He shook his head slowly. "I'm sorry. Vampirism is genetic. The same as your blue eyes and brown hair."

Her lungs couldn't draw breath. He couldn't save her. He couldn't make her Vampire any more than he could turn her into a cat.

"Then why tell me?" Her voice was dark and broken. "Why tease me with your immortal life?" she said between her teeth.

He didn't answer. He just stared at her, his eyes shadowed and cold. Lilith shook her head and marched down the hallway and out the front door. She had nothing to say to her immortal Vampire boyfriend while the remains of her life could be counted in days.

Chapter Two

The slamming of the door rang in Aidan's ears after Lil had left. Overall, the Vampire talk hadn't gone too badly. Pretty much as he'd expected, except for Lil's news. He slumped onto the sofa, hollow as if his heart had been carved out. He hadn't seen her illness coming, but who would? She was life. Vibrant and joyful. He glanced at the door, waiting for her to come back. There was a chance she wouldn't. He bit back the thought. He couldn't accept a life without Lil.

He closed his eyes and tried to contain the ache filling his chest. They could fight this. There were ways no human knew of...but Lil was human and she had to accept him before he told her about the other non-humans and her chance at survival. If she couldn't tolerate the reality of Vampires, Fey, Weres and Shaman were going to give her nightmares. Right now she needed space and time to think.

He needed space and time to think. He opened his eyes. From the shelf Eve stared down. She'd watched over him for so long. What would she say now about the existence of Vampires? Had she forgiven him for lying and running away? Or was she laughing because he was losing Lil for telling the truth?

Unable to look at her heart-shaped face and half-hidden smile, he got up and laid the picture down with trembling fingers. He'd stopped grieving for Eve a long time ago, but the guilt had lingered. He hadn't tried to save her. By the time he'd gotten home from war she was too sick and it was too late to do anything but wait for the end.

Around Aidan, the house was devoid of life, and he didn't want to be alone. He picked up the phone. He needed to call someone, tell someone that his past was repeating and he'd screwed it up again. He gripped the handset without dialing. Who was he going to call?

Human friends wouldn't understand.

And his Vampire friends?

William never let anyone close enough to get hurt. Except for the band he rarely saw anyone. Etienne had lost all feeling centuries ago, and Owen, well Owen had broken up with more human lovers than most humans had hot dinners. He was the oldest Vampire Aidan knew, but he would get no sympathy there. All would remind him of the rules. He slammed the handset back into its cradle so hard it rattled. He didn't need reminding about Fendrake's rules. He'd just broken one of them by telling Lil Vampires existed. Saving her would break more than he was prepared to count.

His friends would all be there if it fell apart, like they had been before, but until then he was on his own. He let out a breath. Maybe it was better not to involve them. They would try to stop him from giving Lil a chance no human should get.

Unable to sit still, he paced around the lounge-room filled with the clutter of two centuries of life. Maybe if he were older he would want to forget the past, but he liked the tangible. The memories he could touch. His medals, a piece of shrapnel pulled from his leg, his first wedding ring. He touched the gold band. It had been good, despite the lies. He wanted this time to be different, but maybe Lil wasn't ready.

He picked up his jacket and pulled the engagement ring from his pocket and opened the box. The pink diamond glinted in the light. Even if she accepted Vampires, she may not want to be married to one, there were too many catches – the biggest one being the lack of aging. They would have to move every ten years before people realized they weren't getting older. These days it wasn't as easy to change lives and identities. He shut the box and put the ring into the cupboard, hoping it wouldn't become another souvenir. He wanted to hear her say yes, see it sparkle on her finger and have her at his side and in his bed.

Aidan scanned the contents of the cupboard, looking for something with a happy memory. From the bottom he pulled out his first medical kit, it was the oldest item he had. One of the first things he'd owned. A small smile turned the corners of his lips. Before then he'd only had what he could fit in his pockets. Back then, medicine had been little more than bleeding and opium. Good for Vampires, bad for humans. Still, it had been a better career than grave robbing.

Music had been an accident. He'd been treating Owen's human fling, bleeding and storing the blood for Owen's later consumption, and had heard him playing. From there it had been a short step to meeting William and an even shorter one into society parties he hadn't even dreamed of. In their spare time they taught him how to play – they didn't need to teach him how to compose. He'd been doing that for as long as he could remember. It had been Etienne who'd taught him how to write the notes down. In exchange, he'd stitched the many wounds Etienne acquired by not being able to feel even the simplest of sensations.

He ran his finger over the leather and glass. Some days he missed the precision of a scalpel and the knowledge he was doing something worthy, most days he didn't care. He'd seen enough blood to last his entire life, too much of it spilled in violence. He pushed the bag back into the cupboard. Some memories were best left in the dark.

But just because they were locked away didn't mean they were forgotten. They lived on to poison another day. He looked at his collection with a new eye. Maybe he should clear out the lot and create a fresh start instead of being surrounded by the echoes of other lives. But he knew if Lil died he wouldn't be able to walk away from the life they'd created so easily. He'd hold onto the memories even as they cut his hands.

Why wasn't she back yet?

He checked out the window, but saw no sign of Lil. Searching for her would annoy her, yet he couldn't go to sleep knowing she was out there trying to digest the meal he'd force fed her.

"Damn it." He ruffled his hair, his nails hard against his scalp. In his mind, notes fell together in a tune that could burn a soul. If he couldn't sleep, he might as well work. He waited a moment longer at the window, then stomped to his music room and closed the door. * * * * *

Lilith tucked her hands under her arms to keep her fingers from freezing. Spring was trying to push through, but winter's chilly hands still controlled the weather. It was one extreme to the other, by July there'd be heat waves. She walked on, determined to put some distance between herself and Aidan. She couldn't breathe in his cute terrace house surrounded by the remnants of his life.

Outside his house, normality prevailed. Everyone was bursting with life except her. People walked their dogs. Mothers pushed overly bundled children in prams. Their lives would go on. Aidan's life would go on and on and on.

Hers would end.

She stopped in the middle of the park with her hidden hands in fists and her nails digging into her palms. She swore under her breath.

It was so goddamn unfair.

She'd fought this battle and won. Or thought she'd won. Then the cosmos yanked her chain and brought her to heel like a disobedient puppy. If only she could wake up and find all of this was a dream. No cancer. No Vampires. No secrets.

Lilith huffed out a cloud of air and stamped her feet. She should have grabbed a jacket. Now it was freeze or go home and face the music. Her ageless Vampire boyfriend was waiting. A giggle bubbled out. She was dying and Aidan was immortal. Laughter interrupted her breathing and she snorted. He shouldn't exist, but no matter how much her mind rebelled, in her gut she knew Aidan hadn't lied. However he hadn't trusted her enough to tell her the truth either. And neither had she. She'd waited weeks before telling him because she was so afraid of him leaving. He wasn't leaving – he was Vampire. Which was worse?

She sucked in a lungful of icy air and sighed. On the surface nothing had changed. Yet everything was different. The colors were a little sharper and the sun shone a little colder on the world she thought she knew. An overly hairy man with a loud Discman jogged past. Vampire?

Lilith turned her head. What about the mother yelling at her boys not to run across the road? She spun, studying the people in the park. How many Vampires passed for human? How did the humans not notice?

She recalled an offhand comment Aidan had made during a film. Something about humans not seeing what was in front of them. Only it wasn't aliens hiding in plain sight, it was Vampires. They could be anyone, and anywhere. If daylight didn't stop them, what did? Why was the news not full of suspected Vampire assaults? How many were there? She turned on the spot; sure the people in the park were watching her. Her heart thumped. How many of them could hear its call?

Despite the chill in the air, sweat formed on her back.

There was nowhere safe to run. In a world full of Vampires, there was only one she trusted. One who'd had every opportunity to bite her, but hadn't. One who claimed to love her. One who claimed to have a cure. If it wasn't becoming Vampire, what was it?

Curiosity made her head home toward the terrace house. Buffy sat on the front steps, waiting to be let in. The cat purred and smooched her legs. Lilith smiled, getting the joke for the first time. It was so typical of Aidan. The cat sauntered into the house before her. Lilith closed the front door and turned the lock. Then she took a moment to catch her breath and compose her thoughts. She had questions she didn't want answered. She didn't want the safe world she knew destroyed by truths that should be hidden by the night.

If neither of them was lying, would there be anything to say?

She tried to remember what life had been like before she'd been given the news which had taken her dreams as well as her hope. There'd been something between them from the moment she'd seen him with the kitten in his hands. A spark of desire that had taken hold and become a love she couldn't extinguish, even though she knew he wasn't as human as she'd thought. He reminded her to live and laugh. With Aidan she was more alive. Falling for him would be an accident she wouldn't live long enough to

regret. She'd lived her daydream. Those few short months had been worth it. To bask in his smile and curl up against him at night. Vampire or not, she loved Aidan.

A jagged melody cut through her thoughts, snagging and tearing the air in the house. She grimaced. Aidan had retreated to the music room. She walked down the hallway to the noise. Her hand touched the door handle and the music stopped with a skin crawling screech. She hesitated, this was his space. He didn't enter her operating theater and she stayed out of his music. They met around the edges in moments of white hot brilliance and until today it had worked. Today the rules were under review. Lilith pushed open the door.

"I wasn't sure you'd be back." He didn't turn around as he plucked the strings of a beautiful cello. The graphite surface shimmered, blue over black. Midnight made music. The wretched melody began again.

She ground her teeth. This wasn't music, it was torture. "Why did you tell me if you can't turn me?"

His fingers stilled. "I've been wanting to tell you for a while. I just didn't know how."

"So you picked today? Of all the days, you wait until I tell you that I'm dying?" Lilith crossed her arms and shook her head. Men really were a different species, human or Vampire.

"You caught me off guard." He got up and offered her the stool. "Sit with me."

She hesitated; she was supposed to be angry at him for having a better secret and being all immortal at the same time. But her anger melted like snow in spring. Her gaze flickered over his mouth, searching for a hint of fang.

"I won't bite unless you want me to." He smiled and the tips of his long teeth were visible.

Her heart gave a flutter as the sight of his fangs made her blood ache to be spilled. She swallowed her rising pulse and sat. Aidan adjusted the floor peg. "Open your knees."

Her legs separated without thought and with the familiarity that only came with sharing a bed. His fingers brushed her inner knee as he rested the cello between them, but his touch was uncertain as if he was no longer sure they shared the same world. He moved behind her and she leaned against him as he leaned into her. His heartbeat was steady in her ear while hers raced in anticipation. He was letting her into his music. She was part of it, not an observer. This was a piece of him she hadn't seen.

"Comfy?"

His breath on her skin brought the hairs on her neck to attention. She waited for the caress of his lips to follow. Liquid warmth took the place of blood flowing through her veins. She had a Vampire breathing down her neck and her knees spread by the cello. Her pussy dampened, the ache for his touch building, but she couldn't close her legs. All she could do was give into the sensation of being in his arms. A look, a kiss, she'd always responded to Aidan too fast. It was why she liked being with him. He made everything easy.

She nodded, unable to find her voice.

Aidan kissed behind her ear and started to play. The music flowed around them and through them. It hummed in her muscles and caressed her skin. She didn't recognize the song, but it didn't matter. The tune was beautiful, soaring and crashing, like lovers finding each other only to be ripped apart.

A lump formed in her throat and she closed her eyes to concentrate on breathing. This was their song, his way of dealing with awful reality. Just as his secret had altered her world, her secret had fractured his world and he was grappling with the pieces that wouldn't stay together. Had telling him been a mistake?

No. Now she knew who he really was and she wanted to know all of him while she still had the opportunity. She wanted to feel those Vampire fangs in her flesh.

She turned her head and he met her halfway. Aidan's lips were soft, but unyielding. He rarely kissed with an open mouth and now she knew why. He was hiding fangs.

Her tongue swept over his lower lip and she kissed the corner of his lips, but she couldn't tempt him into letting her in and touching his concealed teeth.

"Lil..." He rested his cheek against hers and murmured in her ear. "Don't tempt me with what I can't have."

"And if I said you could?" Her voice was soft as though if she spoke to loud the moment would break.

"I wouldn't be able to say no. You need your strength." He placed his lips on hers in a kiss that was meant to end the discussion. "I have a friend, a specialist."

Lilith ran her hand along the golden stubble on his jaw. She couldn't live on wishes, no matter how hard she tried. "Don't give me false hope."

"There is more out there than Vampires. If I call in the favor, will you see him?"

More than Vampires? She considered Aidan for a moment. He was sure she could be saved. And when his not-quite-human connections couldn't save her, what then? When did he accept what they had was over? When would she accept it was over? Aidan waited for her answer. It would be easy to agree and make him happy. They deserved all the happiness they could get.

She traced one finger over his lip. "Will you let me feel you teeth?"

He turned his head away and forced out a breath as if he was trying to resist.

"Will my blood make you sick?"

He gave a choked laugh. "No. It's just I've been waiting to hear you ask for so long."

"Will it hurt me?" She spun on the stool so she faced him. As a vet she'd been bitten plenty of times by animals, but this was different. His teeth were different; made for piercing, not tearing.

"Not unless you want it to." His eyes were dark, as if night had swallowed his golden irises.

He was trying to be honorable, so she gave him a reason to let go, give in and bite.

"I'll see your friend if you give me this."

"Why do you need me to bite you?"

"I want to know you." She placed her hand over his. The bow was fisted in his grip. "All of you."

"You do know me."

"No. I know the Aidan pretending to be human."

"I'm no different."

"You have fangs. It's why you've never kissed me with an open mouth." She stood so her body pressed against his. He wanted her more than he was saying. She slid her hand over his jeans to stroke the hard length of his erection.

He swallowed a groan and the bow hit the floor.

"If I start...There would be no going back. You can't offer and then change your mind. Well, you could, but it would – "

She silenced him with a kiss. This time he didn't try to hide. His hand cupped her head and their tongues met, gliding safely between his fangs. But she didn't want safe. She needed to feel the edge. Her tongue flicked against a pointed tooth. Heat traveled through her blood and lodged between her thighs as if he'd struck a new erogenous zone. One that pulsed through every inch of her body and demanded to be sated. She pulled back with the taste of metal in her mouth.

"They're sharper than I thought." Like little razors. It was amazing he didn't injure himself with them.

Aidan licked his lip where a drop of her scarlet blood had fallen. "They have to be." He touched her neck and let his fingertips glide down her throat as he traced her artery.

Beneath his touch her skin burned, her breathing becoming shallow as she willed him to show her how he used those wickedly pointed teeth. She wasn't afraid. She wanted to live every second she had and being with Aidan made her feel more alive than she'd ever been before. Maybe on some level she'd always known he was different.

Lilith held his gaze, daring him to make a move, then she realized it wasn't his pupils that had swollen and taken the color from his eyes. The color in his irises had faded.

"Your eyes have changed." Her words were a whisper.

He closed them and looked away, his hand dropping to his side. "It happens. The color fades to white when we want blood."

Lilith brought his hand back to her neck. "I won't stop you."

For a moment that was a lifetime compressed into a heartbeat, he didn't move. It was as if he was having a silent battle with himself. When he lifted his head, his eyes were their usual golden-hazel.

"I know." He laid the cello down, but didn't waste time packing it away. As he stood back up, his hands tracked up her thighs and caressed her butt, then settled on her hips. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

Lilith nodded. She'd never been surer.

"Then let's do this properly." He picked her up as if she weighed no more than the cat.

"Properly?" Her eyes widened.

But he was already walking. "In bed."

Aidan laid her down on the bed. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks pink from being out in the cold. Everything he'd ever dreamed of finding was now entwined with his greatest pain. Lil had accepted him, wanted him, but she was dying. He couldn't breathe. He shouldn't be biting her no matter what she wanted. Then she started unbuttoning her shirt, her eyes on him, her heart like the hammering of a thousand trapped butterflies in his ears.

Her pulse the sweetest echo of his desire.

She wanted this and in exchange she'd see the specialist.

It wasn't too late for Lil. But it was too late for him. He needed her—all of her. He pulled his shirt off and shucked his jeans and underwear, toeing his boots off as he went. Lil's eyes tracked down his body as if she were seeing him for the first time. His cock twitched under her scrutiny. In a way she was.

Lil lifted her gaze. "Is the myth about the bite of a Vampire true?"

"Which one?" There were so many, from becoming Vampire through to being enslaved. Many were false; some depended on who was doing the biting and with whom. He'd seen William entrance with just a glance. Aidan tugged off his socks.

"The erotic one." She let her shirt fall on the floor. "Does it make everything more...intense?"

"Depends on how it's done." Aidan undid her shoes, then took them off and tossed them into the corner. He knew he was revealing his fangs with his smile, but he didn't care. For the first time in decades he didn't have to pretend. He could just be. He placed a kiss on her ankle.

"When you cut your tongue, that was technically your first bite as I tasted your blood." That wasn't how he'd planned for her to experience her first bite, but he'd make amends this time.

Her tongue glided over her lip as if she were remembering. "What do I taste like?"

"Like honey." Sweet, untainted and full of life. He undid her pants and drew them down her legs.

"You can't taste the...?"

His hands paused on her inner thighs. He couldn't taste it as such, but he could feel it in the etheric of her blood. If he'd told her what he was months ago, he would've found the tumor before the human doctors. Calling in the favor was a last ditch attempt to steal back her life. There would be casualties. No battle was fought without them. But he was willing to pay the cost – would she be when she found out? He pushed aside the thought.

"No." He hooked his fingers into her hot pink panties and pulled them off. They went sailing over his shoulder.

His smile widened into a grin as his gaze roamed over her almost naked body and ended on the darks curls of her mound. He wanted to taste more than her blood. Tonight she was his. All his. As long as he was careful to take no more than a few drops, enough to wet his fangs, she wouldn't be weakened. She needed to be strong.

He lifted her leg and kissed her behind her knee, his tongue tracing the crease and tasting her skin the way he had many times before while dreaming of this moment. Lil shivered as if anticipating what was to come. He didn't rush, instead he let her feel the pressure of his teeth against her flesh and nothing else. She wasn't ready yet. Her breathing was tight and her pulse still had the heavy steps of fear in it. Even though she said this was what she wanted, she was still unsure. He kissed and licked his way along her leg to her pussy. The scent of her arousal was like a drug. It raced through his body, straight to his cock. He ran his tongue over her labia and nudged her legs wider to revel in her satiny-slick skin. She propped herself up on her elbows.

Aidan glanced up. "Relax, Lil."

"I want to watch." Spoken like a scientist studying something different.

He knew she didn't want to watch him go down, she'd done that before. She wanted to watch him bite down.

"I'm not going to do it yet." And he wasn't sure he wanted her to watch, not the first time. Better to experience the thrill without seeing the teeth embedded in her skin and the white eyes of her lover.

He flicked his tongue over her clit until she began to melt and he tasted her cream. The sweetness went straight to his cock and he hardened further. He was sure he'd never been this hard. The promise of blood shimmered through him hotter than fire, an ancient desire that longed to be fed. But it was more than just blood. Lil was giving him part of herself. She was trusting him totally with her life. He took a breath designed to bring calm and failed. He'd wanted this moment with Lil for so long. "Ohh." She eased back. "You sure?"

"Yeah. I want to enjoy you without my jaw aching from holding back fangs." He slid his fingers along her slit, slowing down even as he wanted to fuck her.

He knew what she liked, how to make her come. The teasing, and stroking, drawing her closer then pausing just long enough to make her wait, her heartbeat giving away her reaction before she even realized what it was she needed. Today he added something different. He pressed his fangs against the flesh of her pussy and sucked on her clit until she squirmed. Her fingers twisted in the sheets as her hips lifted, but he held back, listening to her pulse. She had to love more than just the touch of his teeth; she needed to long for the bite and the release it promised.

"I can feel them," she said between pants.

So could he. There'd been nights when he'd been less than careful, when he'd let them drop just for the relief of not holding back. Now he used them to tease her, and himself, as he waited for the right moment to bite. He pushed two fingers into her slick core. She was wet and ready. His cock ached to take their place, but not yet. He kissed her thigh over the vein, his fangs scraping lightly over her skin. Not hard enough to draw blood – he was testing to see if she'd recoil and change her mind.

She gasped, but didn't pull away. "Did you?"

"No." He dragged his teeth over her thigh again, the hunger to taste and fuck pushing him closer. She trembled and her pussy tightened around his cream-coated fingers. His cock throbbed. The tight self-control he'd had over the past few months unraveled faster than he'd expected. Around Lil, he'd never had much. They'd fallen into bed fast.

"It's kinda sexy."

"Glad you like them." Because forcing his fangs back and acting human now would've really dampened the mood. He glanced up at her half closed eyes and parted mouth. A picture of lust, repeated in the music of her pulse. If she were going to freak out, she would've already.

His thumb circled, moving over her slick clit as his fingers pumped in her core, drawing her closer to the edge. His tongue traced over the place he wanted to bite. Inner thigh, intimate without being dangerous or visible. He's always liked Lil's long legs. His teeth pressed into her soft skin. Her heartbeat rose, while her breathing almost stopped. He paused for a second.

Then bit. His fangs cut through her skin.

She came hard. A moan on her lips and a drop of blood in his mouth. The etheric of her body became part of him before he had time to truly taste her. There wasn't enough blood to satisfy, just enough to tempt him with her coppery-honey. He resisted the urge to take more, even though he knew could safely, and licked the puncture closed, lingering over their first bite. It had been a long time since he'd had a lover he could truly share with.

Lil slapped him on the shoulder. "You did it."

"Hmmm." Aidan kissed her stomach, working his way higher to her breasts. He raked his teeth over the satin-covered peak of her tight nipple as his hands slid under her back to undo her last piece of clothing.

She lifted her arms so he could remove the bra. Then her hand went searching for the bite on her leg. He guided her hand to his shaft instead. Her grip tightened as she worked along his length, stroking across the head and smoothing the pre-come over his hot skin.

He groaned, his hips moving. "I'll do it again." He pushed his teeth against the soft pale skin of her breast in mock threat.

Her back arched in encouragement, but he didn't bite. He wanted to be thrusting inside her tight pussy the next time. He lowered his hips until she was forced to release his cock. The wet heat of her sheath encased him as he entered slowly, drawing out the moment, hoping he could stay lost in it forever and forget about the future.

Lil had other ideas. She looped her legs over his, her hips bucking so he was forced to match her rhythm. Beneath him her heart raced. He heard each part of the beat as the

chambers contracted. He could time the bite for between beats so the heart seemed to stop and time hung suspended around a climax that tore at the soul.

Her fingers threaded into his hair, drawing him to her throat, her head tipped to the side in open invitation. If she were healthy he would've answered unspoken request, but she didn't know what she offering, not fully. Would she want this every time, like he would? Did it matter when they only had now?

His mouth closed over the place he would love to bite. Her blood called to him, the taste of her still on his lips. Instead he sucked on the skin with his fangs pressed hard against her. Her blood was so close to the surface. The craving to have her life on his tongue almost drowned every other sense. His balls tightened, but he held back, wanting Lil to come with him. Her nails tracked down his back to dig into his ass, imprinting on his skin, urging him on. Her breathing was little more than wispy pants.

A growl lodged in the back of his throat. The scent of her skin sweetened with each stroke. Lust and blood were a heady mix. The intoxication spiraled through him. He nipped without breaking the skin, even though every instinct wanted to drive his fangs into the artery, but he couldn't be that reckless with Lil. Unable to resist any longer, his teeth scraped twin red lines on her throat.

Lil gasped, the muscles of her core clenching around him, milking his cock. Her blood coated his tongue as he came. He rolled his hips, dragging out the sensation for another few thrusts, enjoying the connection that came with sharing.

Sex created the perfect balance, the swapping of etheric that would have extended her life to match his if not for the cancer. Vampires may not get sick, but their human lovers still did. Immortality wasn't one hundred percent transferable.

Slick with sweat, they remained pressed together, unable to move. He didn't want this moment to be over. Maybe he'd gone for too long without a lover who understood him and now it was too late. While Lil knew him for what he was, what they shared would be over too soon. Aidan shifted his weight, but remained inside her with her fingers digging into his skin.

He kissed her, his fangs gone. They only appeared when lust was simmering in his blood and for the moment it was well sated. "I love you."

Lil gazed up at him, her eyes a little unfocussed. "I love you too."

"I'm guessing you don't want to get up for dinner," he murmured against her lips.

Lilith sighed. Her bones were liquid and her blood was air. She was a puddle of exquisite desire, and she'd never felt so good. "I never want to get out of bed again."

Her fingers gentled and traced shapes on his back. "Next time I want to watch." She kissed the freckles on his shoulder, then pressed her teeth into his skin hard enough to leave a mark.

He shivered with pleasure. Inside her, his shaft twitched as if he were regaining interest. The marks on her thigh and neck throbbed in response as if their bodies were in synch.

Lilith raised one eyebrow. "You like that?"

"Of course I do."

Of course he did. He was Vampire. He liked to bite and be bitten. That was why he never complained when her nails left crescents in his skin. "You've been with other Vampires."

He drew back to look at her properly. "Yes, but I prefer human lovers. I like sex without the violence."

She frowned and her hands stilled. The heat of desire cooled, leaving her confused.

Aidan gave her a half smile. "What would kill a human, many Vampires do for kicks. Getting my ribs broken while getting off was not worth the twenty four hours it took to get there."

In her arms was a man she thought she knew, yet she barely understood what she saw, let alone what was beneath the surface. He'd had experiences she couldn't start to

understand. The idea of Vampires doing themselves an injury in an effort to come harder seemed absurd, but then she was human and mortal. And her boyfriend wasn't.

"How old are you, Aidan Lawrence?"

"One hundred and eighty-three." He said without pausing to think.

Lilith let out a breath. Older than she'd thought. He really didn't age. He was born before cars, back when women wore corsets. With her next breath, everything stopped spinning and made sense. The house was his, but so was everything in it. The World War One medals, the antiques, the turn of the century posters. *The William Black Quartet*.

Realization slapped her in the forehead. How could she have been so blind? True, the haircuts and clothes were different, but the men were the same. Aidan, Etienne, Owen and William. She'd met them all, had a beer with them and listened to them practice once when their schedules had aligned like a rare astrological event. No wonder they played so well together. They'd had a lot of time to rehearse.

"You're all Vampires. You're The William Black Quartet reformed."

He grinned as if sharing his secrets was better than Christmas. "This time we're going to tear up the town." There was no doubt in his voice, his faith unshakable.

"Sex, blood and electric strings in the top forty?" Had he listened to the radio lately and heard what passed for music?

"When you see us perform as *Lucinda's Lover*, you'll understand." He rocked his hips so his shaft made a languid stroke in her pussy, proving he was ready to go again. She'd always thought him a good lover, but how much of that was because he was Vampire?

Her body responded like it always did to his touch, hungry for more. She ignored the rising desire and the heating of her blood. Too much of Aidan was a mystery. He'd lived history she'd only studied.

"Who's Lucinda?" There was the faintest spike of jealousy in her voice. The name of the band had never bothered her before, but now, given his age and what he was Lucinda could be anything. Had they all been with Lucinda?

Aidan gave her a pointy smile that made him dangerously sexy instead of just plain sexy. "The Bringer of Light, a Goddess."

Not one she'd ever heard of. "A Vampire Goddess?"

"The mother of all Vampires. In the dark and ice she brought life." He pulled back on to his knees and dragged her hips with him so she was tilted back on the bed.

"Isn't that a little sacrilegious?" She bit her lip to keep from crying out as his fingers touched her still sensitive clit, bringing her close again without any effort.

"Our Gods are fallible. Lucinda went mad and bled her lover dry." He took her hands and pulled her up, shifting so she sat in his lap with his cock deep inside her pussy.

Lilith swallowed, her blood pumping fast, loud enough for him to hear. Face to face, his irises were light, growing paler as she watched. His fangs were visible against his lip. She was having sex with a Vampire. She'd given him permission to bite her and take her blood. The bite on her neck burned hot like a brand. Her fingers traced the twin lines. More like scratches than a bite. He hadn't punctured her neck like a movie style Vampire. How many Vampires bled their lovers dry?

"Have you ever done that?"

He removed her hand and kissed the wound. "No. I have stolen blood, but never killed."

His hands caressed her hips, moving them to continue what they had finished.

She covered his hands with hers, not ready to go on, but unwilling to stop him. Her body craved his touch as much as she needed air. "Who did you steal from?"

Because it mattered where Aidan was getting the blood from, and how.

"A dying soldier. The rations provided weren't enough. I was starving for etheric. His last moments were pain free." His fingers stroked her skin. "It's not something I'm proud of."

She could imagine what the soldier's last moments were like – a brilliant moment of pure bliss before death. Much better than wounded agony. But Aidan needed blood. So where was he getting it? The thought of him taking blood from the veins of a stranger was...well, it was like having a boyfriend who thought kissing someone else wasn't cheating.

"When did you last bite someone?" Lilith tried to sound casual and keep the needy pant out of her voice. Without thought, she'd begun to move, small movements that teased them both.

"Six months ago. I didn't want another after I met you." He kissed her lips and his mouth opened to her in a way he'd never done before when he'd been concealing fangs. This time she was careful as their tongues met around the razor points.

Aidan laced his fingers with hers. He brought her wrist to his lips and caressed the place where her blood showed blue beneath the skin. His lips pressed against her flesh as though he was deciding where to bite, tormenting her with the possibilities. She watched, unable to look away. She wanted to feel the world spin again as he bit. In those seconds she'd never been closer to anyone. It was a connection she never wanted to break. He lifted his head with a grin. He knew what he was doing to her. She wasn't going to let him back out. Her skin was fevered and Aidan was the cure.

Lilith wove her fingers into his hair. "You owe me a bite."

His eyes didn't stray from hers as he lowered his head back to her wrist. His teeth on her skin was enough to push her to the edge. Her blood burned too hot to be confined in her veins.

He traced the blue line with his tongue. "Hmm, I do." He bit without breaking the skin. "Here? Or here?" With his free hand, he worked her hips so she was riding his cock hard.

Lust tightened every nerve in an endless ripple of pleasure. She drew in a shallow breath ready to fall. His teeth sliced through skin to the vein beneath. She threw back her head, unable to do anything but hold to the wave that crashed around her and sucked her into his darker world.

Chapter Three

Aidan's grip on the steering wheel tightened as the sun broke through the clouds. An instinctive reaction. It wouldn't burn him through the tinted windows, but he still felt the ultra-violet light ripple through his etheric body like the feather light touch of a lover on too sensitive skin. Unlike humans, in Vampires the etheric body was tightly wrapped around the physical. One could damage the other or heal. He never got sick, the etheric he consumed in food, or blood, made sure of that. It also stopped him from aging.

But blood, fresh from the vein, made him more light sensitive. And while he had been very careful with Lil, it was still more fresh blood than he was used to having. He glanced at her with his eyes hidden by polarized sunglasses. Her finger traced a figure eight around the bite on her wrist. The one she'd insisted on watching. There was something very sexy about a woman so fascinated by a love-bite. Letting her watch him bite had only made things hotter. Being with Lil was like nothing he'd ever experienced. The pressure in his teeth built and while he didn't fight the lengthening of his fangs, he didn't reveal them either.

Sunlight, blood and bites weren't going to be issues for much longer. He fixed his gaze back on the road and traffic of the M25. Theo had been happy to squeeze in the appointment. Pity he hadn't told him the whole truth. His heart contracted hard, making breathing impossible. There was still a bloody massive chance Theo would do nothing and that Aidan would have to take her home and watch her die.

He wasn't strong enough to do that again. He'd been lost for a decade after Eve had died. This time would be worse. Lil was part of him, now that he'd tasted her blood, as well as part of his life and heart. He'd lain awake half the night wondering if Owen was

right—loving a Vampire was easier as everyone got bored before anyone died. He sighed. Immortality was a bitch.

Lil's hand landed on his thigh. "Thank you for trying."

Aidan forced a smile, his teeth deceptively human, to conceal the dread clumping in his gut. She shouldn't be thanking him yet. He hadn't told her the whole truth either.

Lilith ran her hand over his leg, the muscle firm beneath her palm. He didn't respond to her touch. The closer they got to London, the more sullen Aidan's mood had become as if he were reflecting the weather. Gray with small patches of smiles that were more for show than warmth.

She gave his thigh a squeeze, then let her hand fall back into her lap. Her thumb went back to stroking the twin punctures on her wrists. It wasn't really a bite, more like cuts that just nicked the vein. They were tiny and already half healed. No bruising. They reminded her she hadn't imagined the bite. She'd watched his teeth sink into her flesh and all she'd been able to do was let the climax roll through her. Even now her heart pattered with excitement at the thought. In response, the places where he'd laid his lips and teeth tingled. Her ankles, behind her knees, the base of her spine. Places she'd never thought could be so sensitive.

For Aidan, biting was like kissing, an important and enjoyable part of making love. She could see the change in him; he was more relaxed now that he wasn't hiding part of himself. For her...she wasn't sure. He could bring her crashing down with just the touch of a fang against her lip, as if the anticipation were enough to make her blood simmer. Aidan was a drug and she was addicted.

Part of her said this was dangerous and should be stopped while the rest went *what the hell*. She was screwed anyway, so what did it matter? She might as well go out on a high that most people never tasted.

She pulled her sleeve down and changed the track of her thoughts. If Aidan was tense about seeing the specialist, should she also be worried? Was this a pointless trip?

He'd been tight-lipped about where they were going, saying only that he'd called in a very big favor. What was a big favor to a Vampire?

"Your friend is Vampire, right?"

"Yes."

She glanced at him. The way he concentrated only on the road, his fingers too tight on the steering wheel. She wouldn't get anywhere asking about the treatment—she'd been trying all week. That was apparently for the doctor to discuss with her. But if the treatment worked, and she hoped it would, there was still a question mark over their future. Aidan was an immortal Vampire and she was human. She would age and die.

"If he can cure me, what then?" How long did they have before Aidan left her?

He frowned, his eyebrows forming sharp lines she wasn't used to seeing on his face. "What do you mean?"

"You can't die."

"I can die, just not of what you'd call natural causes."

Sunlight broke through the clouds and caught in his hair so it shimmered like fire. Her throat hurt. She wanted more than three months. "I can."

While she wanted a lifetime with him, she had to be realistic and she was already on borrowed time.

His lips moved as if he were about to speak, but it took several heartbeats for the words to form. "When a human is with a Vampire, there are changes."

"What kind of changes?" He'd said she couldn't become Vampire. "Have they started?"

"Let me finish." He gave her a tight half smile that usually would've been followed by a laugh. "When a Vampire is around a human, some of their life force rubs off. Those people who age so well have a Vampire in their life. They probably don't know it. It could be their boss, the nanny, anyone. For lovers, the effect is more pronounced."

"Pronounced?" Even as she spoke, Lilith understood. Aidan wasn't making her feel younger with his sunny personality. It wasn't his attitude to life or the little jokes that had smoothed the lines starting to form around her eyes. He was stopping her from aging because he was Vampire. If she could beat this, they could have forever.

"I'm immortal?" How did that work when her doctor had told her she was dying?

"No. But the human aging process is slowed. In fifty years you might have aged the equivalent of a year. You don't gain my ability to heal. You only get a glimpse at what it's like and only for as long as you're with a Vampire."

"Oh." Lilith bit her lip.

That was a double-edged deal. Vampires got their lover addicted to the bite and youthfulness and then when they broke up...it was back to what would be a dull colorless human life. Unless they found another Vampire. Was there a dating service for humans looking for a new Vampire partner? How many lovers had Aidan had? She stared out of the window, unable to look at him. He'd been with Vampires and she knew she wasn't the first human he'd dated. He'd said as much and one of the old photos had gone missing from the shelf. She was guessing it wasn't his grandmother as she'd first thought.

"What happened to your previous human lovers?" Her words were harsher than she'd intended.

"What happened to yours?"

Lilith shrugged. "We broke up."

"Same. Most never knew what I am. They were nothing more than passing interests. It's hard to hide what I am once I'm living with someone. I was going to tell you before you moved in, but I couldn't bear losing you, so I waited." He pulled off the freeway, heading toward a swanky part of London. "I wish I hadn't."

That he'd never told them he was Vampire or bit them was supposed to make her feel better. And it did in a strange kind of way. He loved her enough to trust her with his secret.

"And the woman in the missing photo?"

His chin dropped a fraction as he sighed. "Eve was my first wife. She was human."

Of course he would have been married at some time in his life. He was hardly going to be a two-century-old bachelor. Shouldn't Eve have stayed young and beautiful around Aidan? Shouldn't they still be together?

"What happened?"

"She died."

"But not of old age, as she was semi-immortal?"

"No, not of old age."

"When did she die?"

"April 4, 1918." He glanced at her. "She didn't know." For a moment he looked older, as if her digging in his past had uncovered the pain he thought well buried.

Lilith pressed her lips together to hide the smug smile. She may not be his wife, but she knew he was Vampire. It didn't stop her from being jealous of a woman who had been dead nearly eighty years. How long had Aidan and Eve been together before her untimely death?

A white building appeared on the other side of the park. She swallowed down the rising, greasy unease that was swelling in her stomach. She shouldn't be here wasting the doctor's time when she already knew the answer, but she couldn't give up, not when Aidan had shown her there was another world just beneath the surface of the one she thought she knew. Maybe in his world humans could be cured—if they knew who to ask.

"Where does your friend work?" Lilith asked even though the answer loomed five stories high in front of them.

"Our Lady's Grace." His eyes never left the road, but his knuckles whitened as he gripped the steering wheel.

"I can't afford that." It was one of the most expensive private hospitals in London.

"It's a favor." Aidan glanced at her, daring a challenge. "Theo and I served together."

"World War I vets?" She'd seen the medals on display, but could picture him in uniform. It didn't suit him. He didn't behave like a 'follow the rules' type.

Aidan didn't respond.

"What did you do in the war?" She was chattering now, anything to keep her mind off meeting another Vampire. The Vampire who would decide her fate. Her fingers flexed, unable to keep still.

"Doctor," he said through clenched teeth.

She whipped her head around to face him. "Really?" If imagining Aidan in uniform was hard, imagining him doing something so serious was almost impossible. "Why did you give it up to become a musician?"

How could he quit healing? Just walk away while people died? She loved going to work. Even if she didn't like the owners, she liked the pets—even the neurotic Doberman that kept chewing its own feet.

Aidan parked the car and turned off the ignition. "I've had many jobs over the years. Now I do what I enjoy."

"You don't enjoy helping people?"

He pulled out the key and studied it as if he'd never seen it before, testing the weight in his hand. "When it mattered, I couldn't help." He looked at her. "I came home from war and Eve was dying. She had a tumor." He clenched his fist, examining the size. "It was large. I could patch strangers so they could fight another day. But for Eve I could do nothing but watch her die."

He got out of the car and slammed the door, dragging his emotional baggage with him. Vampires came with a Heathrow of baggage. And she was the understudy for Eve.

She raced to catch up with him as he strode toward the entrance, the first heavy drops of rain breaking on her hair. "You said Vampires don't get cancer. What's your friend's specialty?"

Aidan turned. "Cancer in Weres."

"I'm not a Were, what's a..." Her stomach tightened and rose into her throat. She did not want to be right. "Were?"

He went through the glass doors without answering.

"Aidan?" Her voice was high and thready. The only Weres she knew of were in horror films. Half man, half beast, terrorizing the town and tearing people apart.

"Theo will explain your options better than I can."

She crossed her arms. "You explain. What aren't you telling me?"

He glanced around, his lips parted slightly so she could see the tips of fangs. "Now is not the best time." He held out his hand to her.

Lilith cast her gaze across the reception area. The patients and nurses paused to watch the brewing drama all looked human. But so did Aidan. The chill that wrapped around her gut told her she was the only human in the building. Our Lady's Grace wasn't just expensive, it was exclusive. For a heartbeat she was frozen, her feet stuck to the shiny blue linoleum floor. She hadn't realized the enormity of Aidan's secret society.

It wasn't just a couple of Vampires in a band. There were others, other things that weren't human, but looked human and that had their own hospitals and who knew what else. How the hell did they stay hidden? How did no one know about them? The gazes of the staff narrowed and hardened as if they knew she didn't belong.

She reached out and took Aidan's hand. The tension that had been forming in reception like a sheet of ice on a slow moving river cracked and broke up. Those who had been staring at them went back to whatever they were supposed to be doing. What was she doing here?

Aidan stabbed the up button and they waited for the elevator. He looked as if he were chewing glass just being here, the muscle in jaw working.

The hair on her arms spiked. She *really* shouldn't be here. The cure she would find here was secret for a reason. No human should be crossing this line. As she took in the tense line of Aidan's shoulders, she knew he had the same doubts.

"If you don't want to do this..." She was happy to leave. Except if she did she would be giving up on her last chance and she wasn't ready to quit. Even though she knew there would be consequences for coming here. Humans didn't belong here and it was only a matter of time until she got busted. Only this would be worse than getting caught trying to sneak into a nightclub underage.

"I have to."

Because of her or because he wanted to heal a ghost?

She touched his arm. "It won't bring Eve back."

He sighed. "I want to let her go."

The elevator chimed open and they got in with a young orderly. The doors closed and the orderly moved a fraction closer, then sniffed. Lilith stiffened. He took a step closer. There was a glint in the orderly's odd brown eyes that she'd only seen in a dog with more bite than brains. Aidan pulled her to him. His arm slid around her waist as he gave the orderly a cold, fanged smile.

The orderly cocked his head. She held her breath. Aidan growled, a low rumble that vibrated in her chest and rolled through her body. Instead of terrifying her, the sound reassured her as if her mind recognized and welcomed the primitive response to danger. The orderly stepped back and looked down. If he'd had a tail, it would have been between his legs. The elevator had to be the slowest one in England, crawling up the three floors while the orderly kept his eyes on her feet. She refused to shuffle out of his line of sight.

The doors opened on a bland hospital corridor and Lilith let out the breath she'd been holding as they shut behind them with the orderly on the other side.

"What was that?" She pulled on Aidan's hand until he turned to face her.

He raised his brows. "What?"

"With the fangs and the growl?"

Aidan shrugged. "He realized you are human. I pointed out you were mine and my responsibility."

Mine. The word sent a shiver of heat down her back. But he hadn't said that, he'd flashed his fangs like an animal scaring off a competitor. Here, being Vampire meant more than loving nips, it meant danger even to the other not-so-human humans. She wasn't sure what had unnerved her more, her reaction, Aidan or the orderly. "You couldn't use words?"

"Not here. The rules are different."

Lilith licked her lower lip. She was the only human in a building full of...others, and she hadn't read the etiquette handbook. She'd woken up in her own personalized horror film. Her hand gripped his a little tighter. "Am I in danger here?"

"Not with me." He led her down the corridor.

Her heart was pounding like a bad soundtrack as the doomed girl went blindly forward to meet the monster. If she didn't go through the door, she couldn't be saved, but going through the door could kill her. "Are you breaking some kind of rule by bringing me here?"

He stopped. "A few."

"What'll happen to you if you're caught?"

"Let's hope we don't find out." He touched her cheek with the tips of his fingers. "Let me give you this choice."

She nodded and swallowed. Whatever the choice was, it was one he'd never given Eve, maybe because Eve had never known about Vampires.

They went around a corner and into a waiting room.

Aidan spoke to the nurse behind the counter. "Ms. St. Jack for Dr. Godwen."

"He won't be long. Take a seat." The nurse indicated the chairs near Dr. Godwen's door. Several other specialists also had offices off the waiting room.

They sat on the ubiquitous lightly padded hospital vinyl chairs, waiting for the Vampire doctor who specialized in Weres and had a possible cure for humans with cancer. Yeah, there was nothing weird about this visit. She rubbed her palms over her skirt.

I have nothing to lose by being here. The doctor can't give me worse news.

Not knowing what news the doctor would give her was almost as bad as hoping for an impossible cure. She couldn't help herself hoping. Aidan wouldn't bring her to this hospital otherwise.

Lilith took a few deep breaths to center herself. Antiseptic almost masked the scent of illness. She'd spent too much time in hospitals to not recognize it. The way it leeched into anything and anyone who dwelled for too long near illness. She tried to project the same air of calm that Aidan had around himself. It was an act. His hands lay flat on his thighs, his fingers too stiff. He was as tense as she was, but to the casual observer he appeared relaxed.

Lilith tried to give him a smile, but her lips stuck to her teeth. Her heart was racing, part nerves and part fear at what the possible cure would entail. Before she could ask Aidan again, the doctor stepped out of his office. He looked barely thirty and too young to be a specialist. Fit, healthy, Vampire.

Now that she knew about Vampires, it wasn't hard to pick one out of a crowd. They had an aura of life, extra life, which drew people to them. The myth of Vampires being seducers of women was true. She proved that by falling under Aidan's spell the moment she'd first seen him in her clinic.

Aidan stood. It had been years since he'd seen Theo. Partly because Theo didn't agree with the choices he'd made, namely abandoning medicine for the life of an unemployed musician. While Theo's research project had sounded tempting, the offer

hadn't been enough to lure him back. What he was about to ask should slam the lid closed on that coffin forever.

"Aidan." They shook hands. "You haven't aged a day." Theo laughed at his own joke. "It's good to see you again. It's been too long."

Aidan managed a nod. Lil came to stand next to him. "This is Lilith St. Jack."

"Yes, pleasure to meet you." Theo held out his hand to Lil, his eyes slightly narrowed as if he was trying to work out what type of non-human Aidan had dragged in. "I'm Theo Godwen."

Lil shook his hand without flinching. "Aidan has mentioned you."

"Only the good bits I hope. Come through." Theo held the door open for them both.

His smile shone for Lil, but as Aidan passed, it slid to a frown, which Aidan chose to ignore. Whatever Theo wanted to say, he would wait until the door was closed. They owed each other that courtesy. It was that loyalty Aidan was counting on today.

Everyone sat. Theo shuffled his files. Aidan was sure it was for show. He would've had everything in order before they'd arrived. Theo never had a piece of paper out of place. Ever. Even in the middle of field surgery under fire he'd kept everything in order.

Lil wiggled in her seat. Her pulse was a rapid hammer both Vampires in the room would be listening to. Her uncertainty may not have shown on her face, but it was revealed by the way she moved and the way her heart pulsed. He couldn't do anything to settle her. He couldn't tell her about Theo's research without his emotions clouding the discussion. He was too involved to be impartial. He wanted Lil to live—regardless of the cost. She may not agree and he didn't want to force her into a life she couldn't cope with. The potential cure had to come from the doctor.

"I've read your file Ms. St. Jack." Theo tapped the open file on the large wooden table. He would've sourced her medical records as soon as he'd hung up the phone.

Lil glanced at Aidan, one eyebrow raised, but he kept his gaze on Theo. He had to act as if he had every right to be here, instead of pulling century-old favors. Vampires had long memories and debts could be carried for decades, yet there was no guarantee Theo would help even though Aidan had something Theo would be interested in. Lil.

"I'm curious why you didn't come here to start with, you are a...?" Theo let the sentence hang for Lil to finish.

It was the question Aidan had expected Theo to start with. It was where he would start if he were on the other side of the table.

"Human?" she ventured.

"Yes, we all are," he laughed. "But what type?" Theo pressed.

"Lil is plain human." Aidan voice was flat and smooth like polished steel. He couldn't let emotion slip out and make him stumble. Theo would hone in on any weakness and that would be it, appointment over. Fendrake called in. Theo had his own skin to think about, just visiting was dangerous.

"Aidan. You should know better than to bring a human here." Theo closed the file and the air in the room froze. "There's nothing I can do for a human."

Lil slumped into the chair as if she'd been hit. Aidan didn't reach for her. He didn't move. This was why he was here. It wasn't Lil's cancer that could be cured. It was her fragile humanity.

"I know." Aidan had been through this argument a hundred times in the car on the way here. A hundred times before he'd even picked up the phone. Somehow it had been easier when Theo wasn't glaring at him as if he was the lowest form of rat-sucking Vampire who'd just crawled out of the nearest sewer covered in shit. "As a human she is untreatable. I'm aware of this. I'm also fully versed in your research. I turned down your offer ten years ago, but I have followed your success."

Theo blinked and a small smile turned the corner of his lips. He'd always appreciated flattery.

"Hang on, have I got this right? You won't treat me because I'm human?" Lil put her hands on the desk as the understanding that her last chance was being decided for her pushed down on her fear.

"As you have been told, your cancer is untreatable. I can't perform miracles." Theo spoke as if he were speaking to a child.

"No. But you can perform transformations." And that was all Aidan was asking for. If Lil wasn't human, she would live.

"That's illegal and you know it."

Aidan pushed on. He wasn't going to let Theo brush him off. "Explain to Lil why Weres don't get solid mass tumors."

"This is not a path you want to travel, either of you. Stop trying to save Eve."

He could never have saved Eve. Eve would never have accepted the existence of Vampires and Weres. While he'd loved her with all of his heart, he could never be himself with her. He'd rushed into marriage thinking it would solve their problems. It hadn't. The outbreak of war had given him an out and he'd taken it rather than explain to Eve why she wasn't aging. He wasn't here for Eve. He was here to prove he wasn't a coward and that he'd do anything to save the woman he loved.

"I'm here because of Lil. Let us make that decision."

"No, you're still second guessing—"

"What has cancer in Weres got to do with me?" Lil interrupted.

Theo's eyes narrowed. "You haven't told her?"

"I thought it best to come from you, it's your research." And Aidan couldn't be lover and doctor. He wasn't even sure he wanted Lil to take this chance. It was illegal and dangerous, but the alternative was worse—death. She had too much life and too much good in her to let her die. She was everything he loved about humans. The way they could care for no reason and love without holding back. Lil deserved all the facts, every choice and every chance.

"Were children are susceptible to the same cancers as human children. However, if they survive to adolescence, the shifts halt the growth, in some cases the tumor actually shrinks." Theo paused to let Lil soak up his words. "Aidan would like to turn you into a Were, Ms. St. Jack."

There it was, nice and simple. A solution to a deadly problem. If Lil became a Were of any kind, her cancer would stop growing, it wouldn't choke off her artery and she would survive to live a long life. Hopefully with him, unless she decided to never speak to him again which, given the dark look in her eyes and the heavy thumping of her heart, was becoming quite a strong possibility.

"You want me to do what?" she spoke to Aidan.

"If you become a Were, your cancer won't kill you." It was the only solution he had. Not even non-humans could cure all diseases.

"A Were. As in wolf?"

"There are other forms," Theo added unhelpfully.

"Seriously, there are really Were-wolves in London like the song?" Lil let out a little giggle. "Do they eat Chinese?"

"This is why we don't bring humans here. Get over the human obsession, Aidan." Theo picked up her file and stood. "This discussion is over. I won't take part."

Aidan stood. He wouldn't let Theo leave without at least giving them a chance. "I'll run the risk, Theo, I only came for a correct blood sample."

"You'll lose your license."

"I haven't practiced in nearly eighty years." *If our friendship ever meant anything, give me this.*

Theo glanced at Lil, then back at Aidan. He nodded even as he dismissed them. "I understand your plight and I'm sorry I don't have a magic bullet. This way will bring only madness and death."

The door clicked closed behind the doctor. The weight of the air threatened to crush Lilith. She couldn't breathe. Aidan hadn't lied; he'd just left out the truth. A great big slice of unholy, impossible, hairy truth. She pushed her chair out and fought her way to the window. From here she could see the park, half hidden by rain. Now she knew what the rain hid. It had been easier not knowing the creatures who crept through horror films also shared the suburbs. She pressed her palms and then her forehead to the cool glass.

"A Were-wolf." They wanted to change her in to a Were-wolf. A cold, clammy hand stroked her back. The cats in her clinic would love that. The cold hand slid around her throat and tightened as she realized what she was thinking. "Were-wolves seriously exist."

Vampires existed, so why the hell not?

"What else exists?" Her fingers slid down the glass. "What other monsters are hiding out there?" She spat out the words and turned to face Aidan. "Maybe I'd be better suited to being one of them."

He shoved the chair back. "You have nothing to fear from us. Humans have killed more non-humans than we have killed humans."

Realization knocked her back against the window. Aidan was one of them. And always would be. A forever youthful Vampire. In his world, humans were the monsters, hunting them down.

"You should've told me before we got here." Given her some warning. Given her a chance to refuse and run away.

He walked over to her. "Would you have come?"

"What difference would it have made?" What difference did any of this make? She wished Aidan had never shared his secret and never let her glimpse another world. He'd offered a taste and then left her to starve. "Madness and death is not much of a cure."

"It's a chance. Your only chance."

"Dr. Godwen said what you want is illegal."

"He's right." His hands rubbed down her arms.

Lilith pushed him away and ran her fingers through her hair.

"Why, Aidan? Why raise my hopes?" She forced back the tears. He didn't get to see her cry. Not now. Not ever. They'd go home and she would pack up and head south to spend her days on a golden beach in France, leaving Aidan to his unnatural life. He could find another human to seduce with tales of Vampires.

"I love you, Lil."

The words that should have warmed her cut like knives. "But only if I join your secret society of nightmares."

Aidan laughed, but it was dark and half strangled. The Aidan she knew was gone, replaced by a man who couldn't live in his own skin. "Hardly, love. Weres and Vampires don't make good bedfellows."

"What do you mean?"

"If there was another way, I would be showing you. This is the best I can offer. If you want to live, this is all I have to give you." Aidan grasped her hands. "I don't want you to change, but I want you to live. I want to get the chance to ask you to marry me."

She stopped fighting his hold. "You want to marry me?"

"I've thought about it."

So had she, but she wasn't about to agree to a pity marriage. She'd rather die single. "It doesn't matter anyway. Dr. Godwen said he won't help."

"Right now Theo will be checking his research samples for a matching blood type. You are his ultimate guinea pig."

"Guinea wolf," she corrected.

Aidan didn't smile, his face more suited to a funeral. "He wants to know if Lycanthria will halt cancer in humans."

Halt cancer. Not cure it – possibly. She would be the clinical trial. He'd dragged her down here on a hope more delicate than fairy wings.

"It may not work?" Lilith shook her head. This was insane. "Become a beast in the hope of a non-cure. That's a big ask, Aidan."

"It's not like the movies. You're in one form or the other. You like animals."

"That doesn't mean I want to be one." Exasperation colored her words. Everything she knew was human. Aidan's world operated concurrently, but never crossed her world. Her world and her humanity was the price of Aidan's maybe-cure.

"That's your decision." His fingers slid through her hair as if he were trying to hold on to her, but losing his grip. "I wanted to give you an alternative to certain death."

For me or for you? She leaned against him. Join him or die. Some choice. Yet the thought of cheating death and living regardless of the cost was already sounding appealing.

"Is Lycanthria a virus?" Her words were muffled against his chest.

"Yes, it's a mitochondrial virus. Different strains cause the different Weres."

Mitochondria were the cells' energy producers. A virus of the mitochondria would have an effect on the cells ability to function.

"How does it work?"

"The virus ramps up the energy and causes the shift in form. It's passed from mother to child. Occasionally humans get infected."

"Our children would be Weres?"

"There would be no children. Vampires and Weres can't breed."

"No children?" While she wasn't ready to be a mother, having that choice taken away was another blow that ricocheted around her delicate heart. Her mind tried to grapple with the flood of information and latched onto the bits she understood. She was a vet. She knew medicine. "If Lycanthria is a virus, there's a cure." Lilith slipped her arms around his waist, using him as an anchor.

"There might be, but that research is banned. Weres don't want to be cured. Plus you would need a cure for cancer first."

But it could be temporary. A treatment until something better came along. The madness receded as the idea took hold and began to look like a rational option. A lifeline until a real cure came along and she was sure it would. Too many people got cancer for the scientists not to be researching a solution. It was just a matter of time. Becoming a Were would give her that time.

She lifted her head to look up at him. "But in the future..."

Aidan pressed his lips together and the rest of the sentence dissolved on her tongue.

"We're not second class citizens wishing to be human. I can't promise a change in policy. I've already broken half a dozen rules bringing you here. One word from Theo and Fendrake will be breathing down my neck, asking for a pint of blood. I don't mind, they could bleed me dry every day for you, but you need to decide. I will fully support your choice, whatever it is."

"Fendrake?" The name seemed familiar, but she couldn't place it, the thought just out of reach. The harder she tried to find the memory, the further it faded. Fendrake was hiding a potential halt, if not cure, to cancer.

"They broker peace between the different species and keep us all in line. Keep us out from under the human microscope."

"If Lycanthria is successful in halting my cancer, will there be a human trial?"

"No." He kissed her lips. "Humans aren't ready to share the world with us."

Aidan was right. She couldn't defend her own species and their awful track record with minorities. Was she any better, using something of theirs to save her life and breaking their laws in the process?

"What would you do?"

Aidan took several breaths before answering. "As your doctor, I would recommend the experimental treatment." His composure faltered. The ice that had surrounded him since their arrival melted. "As your boyfriend, I want a third option."

Like that. She knew those options. She had given animal owners options that were bad either way and then expected them to choose. Now she had to decide, risk it or die.

"I've got three months to think about it." Decision avoided, she kissed him, more for reassurance than out of forgiveness. She would need those three months to think about it and to learn more about what being a Were meant, because already the idea was sounding tempting. More tempting than it should.

His lips parted. She was careful, but his teeth were normal human teeth. He ended the kiss. His eyes focused on something out the window.

"You don't. The weaker you become, the less successful the change." He dragged his attention back to her. "The risk of death during transformation increases."

There it was. The other giant shoe hitting the floor after kicking her in the ass. Death. The non-cure could kill her before the cancer.

"Increases? How many die?"

He closed his eyes as if he didn't want to tell her. "From accidental transformation, fifty percent."

She took the hit in the chest, fighting for breath. Dodge the black cab only to be hit by a red double-decker. Half died when infected. She almost missed the rest of what he was saying.

"Your risk would be less. Same blood type, hot, fast change. That would bring it down to one in five."

A twenty percent chance of dying. Dying sooner than she had to since she had to make the change before she became really ill. She forced out a breath and tried to see the numbers as a doctor and not a patient. A twenty percent chance of dying was an eighty percent chance of living, which was a whole lot better than the five percent her

doctor had given if she went through a couple of rounds of radiation and surgery. Statistically, becoming a Were looked good.

"So I get infected. Survive and become a Were and my cancer is halted."

"Essentially. The virus would become a part of you and you would have to shift to your animal form as the need arose."

"Like on the full moon?"

"That's a human myth. But Weres do like to get together and hunt. Before calendars, the full moon was an easy meeting day."

She didn't want to be hunting anything. She liked her meat well-done, not furry. But none of that would be an issue if she didn't survive the initial infection. She looked Aidan in the eye. "Have you ever treated infected people?"

He weighed the answer. "Yes."

So he knew what to expect and what would happen to her. Given the tension around his eyes and the set of his jaw, it wasn't good. While Lycanthria was a virus, catching it wouldn't be like catching the common cold. It would attack her body and change it forever.

She had to ask anyway. "How bad is the transformation?"

He sighed like it was his last breath. "In truth, if you knew, you wouldn't want to go through it."

It couldn't be worse than her treatment the first time round. It couldn't be worse than the doctor telling her the tumor had grown back, bigger, faster, stronger. It couldn't be worse than the drawn-out death she was expecting. If she did this, she would become one of them. She would become part of Aidan's world.

She touched his cheek. "Then don't tell me."

Chapter Four

Aidan fingered the vial of blood. The red syrup didn't look as if it had the power to change lives beyond all recognition. He wanted to crush the fine glass and let the blood spill. But he couldn't. He couldn't come in contact with the blood. If it entered his system, he would be driven mad with blood lust as his body fought the infection. If he was lucky, someone would kill him quick.

While Vampire bodies had the etheric wrapped tight like a second skin, Weres, much like humans, wore it loose. It was how they shifted between forms, like fluid taking the shape of the container it was held in. A Vampire infected with Lycanthria would have their etheric body torn away. The damage would trigger the need to feed and take in liters of blood to heal. Except the Vampire wouldn't be able to heal no matter how much blood they drank. Between the pain and hunger, they went mad and killed everything that crossed their path. Reading about the known cases had been horrific and he had no intention of becoming a victim. As long he didn't bite Lil, everything would be fine. The prickly uncertainty of what they were doing remained tied around his heart.

Lil had ignored Theo's, and his, recommendation to become a Were-snake. Of the four suitable blood types Theo had available, it was the choice that required the least effort. Snake shifters stayed home in front of a nice log fire. They didn't require a special habitat.

Wolves and bears both needed forest. Wolves needed a pack. For a human becoming a wolf was hard, they would always be bottom of the pack—assuming they found a pack to accept them. Lil had dismissed both of them. She'd opted for seal. So they'd concocted a story about being bitten at the beach while trying to help a wounded animal. It was barely believable.

He filled the syringe, his hands remembering the actions of another life as if only moments had passed instead of decades, and placed it on the table next to the bed. They had decided her vet surgery was the best place. Plenty of medical equipment ready to go and drugs, and if she died, Aidan wouldn't be held responsible. She was writing the suicide note now, just in case it all went bad. She was already sick... he pushed away the thought and swallowed the rock lodged in his throat. Lil would live.

Theo had examined her and pronounced her fit, but they'd better do the transformation as soon as possible. So here they were, a Vampire, a human, two dogs and a cat sleeping off a spaying and a vial of Lycanthria infected blood. Everybody's idea of a good night out. While Theo had assisted, he wasn't doing it for free. Lil had had to agree to regular checkups to make sure the cancer had indeed been halted. What Theo would do with the research was anyone's guess; maybe it was just to satisfy his own curiosity. It wouldn't be the first time his research had walked a very fine ethical line.

Like any doctor, Theo had done everything he could to make sure his star patient would survive. He'd given Aidan the name of a Fendrake shrink who would be able to help her afterward and one for him because he was obviously temporarily insane for thinking this was a good idea as well as a reminder of the optimum conditions for transformations. Transformations might be illegal, but if a human got bitten, they needed help fast.

His sleep had been haunted by the screams of the other transformations he'd attended. True, they were more than a century ago and much more was understood now, but of three he'd attended, only one had survived and he'd killed himself after the first shift. Those memories had made for bitter music the first time round. He'd shared none of the compositions Lil had inspired with his friends; he doubted *Lucinda's Lover* wanted anything so painful on their first album.

He checked the temperature in the room, forty degrees Celsius. Another five degrees and it would be right. He stood watching the thermometer creep up. It was

easier thinking of the requirements than facing Lil. Whatever happened tonight, he was going to lose her.

The past week had been a haze of sheets and blood and sweat. She was so responsive to his touch and teeth...and he hadn't told her yet that it would have to stop. If he did, would she refuse treatment?

Together they'd researched seals and nearby colonies. She would need water, and while a bathtub might suffice at first, she would want open water as she gained strength. In the ocean he couldn't protect her. There were predators that wouldn't care if she were human or Were-seal or seal. She was meat.

Forty-three degrees.

She was his girlfriend.

His hand slid to his jacket pocket and pulled out the black ring box.

She was the woman he wanted to marry.

He flicked open the box and stared at the ring he'd bought two weeks ago, wishing he'd had the balls to tell her the truth before she'd told him she was sick and everything had gotten screwed up.

And now?

Now it didn't matter. Everything would change, yet nothing would change. He snapped the lid closed. He would marry her regardless – if she said yes.

"Everything ready?"

Aidan jumped at the sound of her voice as she came through the door. He checked the temperature. One more degree.

"Almost. You?" He put his hand behind his back in an effort to conceal the ring box.

"The letter's done." She scuffed her shoe on the floor. "No one will ask questions about a dying vet OD'ing on animal tranqs."

"You're not going to die." He made himself smile. "Shut the door before you let the heat out."

She did, closing it softly. "Are you sure Theo didn't make a mistake with the Were type?"

"He doesn't make mistakes."

"What would he call this then?"

"A calculated risk to further his research." With him and Lil taking all the risks. Aidan suspected if they hadn't gone to Theo, he would've eventually found someone else to study.

"What would you call it?" She leaned against the door, her gaze flicking between the blood, the bed and Aidan.

Aidan took a moment to find the right word. He didn't want to lose Lil. "Desperation."

Lilith nodded. She knew Aidan didn't like it, and truthfully, she didn't either. It looked like a good deal, but if an offer sounded too good to be true, it usually was. But she was out of options and no matter what he said about Fendrake rules, there was a chance someone would eventually find a cure for Wereism and cancer. All she had to do was survive.

Easy.

Aidan held out his hand. She closed her fingers mechanically over his and let him draw her to the camp bed set up for the occasion. She sat. The room was stifling hot, the air was too thick to breathe and delicately scented with disinfectant and dog.

Then he knelt. And despite the heat she shivered.

He opened his hand and in his palm was a black ring box. He opened it slowly. On a bed of black lay a not-so-small, pale pink diamond ring. Her lips parted in amazement.

"I bought this two weeks ago. I didn't ask you because I didn't know how to tell you what I was. Then...then you got sick and now...now I know it's not the best time. But will you marry me, Lil?"

The heat left the room in a rush. He was proposing. Now. Of course she was going to say yes. Her mouth was dry. Worse than any chemo session and she couldn't speak. Instead she nodded and offered him her hand. It trembled as he slid the ring on. Perfect fit.

"It's beautiful." She found her voice, but it was quiet as if speaking too loud could break the moment.

He smiled and looked more relaxed than he had all week. "I'm glad you like it."

Then he sealed the engagement with a kiss. His hand tangled in her hair and his incisors lengthened against her lip. The fever rose in her body, but he was so careful. Tonight she needed to feel him, all of him; she needed to feel her humanity racing through her blood before she became something else. Would she still love him when she was no longer human?

Tears filled her eyes.

His thumbs brushed her cheeks. "You will always be my Lil, no matter what happens." He placed a chaste kiss on her lips.

His Lil. She could hold onto that. Only her body was changing, not her mind. She'd read one of Aidan's old books on Weres and the various types. Her research made it all seem easy when it wasn't. Knowing the process wasn't the same as living it or consciously making the choice to change instead of being born with it. Because she was human and they didn't want anyone knowing what they were doing, she'd been unable to talk to a Were. That would have to wait until afterward.

She wasn't ready for this. She wanted a few more minutes with Aidan before everything changed. Before she changed. Her tongue flicked over his lip, seeking him out, wanting more than a pale kiss shadowed with worry. She wanted one more taste of life, just in case it all went wrong.

Lilith looped her fingers into his belt. "You don't get to hold back tonight."

"You need to be strong," he murmured against her mouth.

"No. I need you." She kissed him hard so the tip of his fang grazed her lip. She shuddered and tipped her head, exposing her throat, willing him to bite.

As his lips touched her throat, control slid away like mist in the sun. Her body demanded more of Aidan, but he didn't break the skin. Not yet, he was teasing her, his tongue making circles over her pulse. Her hands traced over his back, pulling him closer, tugging off his shirt. She needed to commit every detail to memory.

Between kisses, her clothes were peeled off. She was shedding clothes the way cats shed hair in the summer to cope with the heat. "If I die -"

Aidan crushed her to him, the embrace too tight. "You won't." He kissed her forehead, then her lips. "I won't let you. I can't live without you."

His leg parted her thighs and his fingers slid into her damp panties, teasing her with feathery touches. But a hint of fang on skin and she was ready, her pussy wet and her body pulsing with heat. Raw need for life surged through her veins. She nipped at his lip and he responded in kind. Rough, but careful. His teeth drew no blood even though it flowed so close to the surface, seeking escape. He'd handled her like glass the past week. The bites he'd made had been shallow as if he were holding back when what she wanted was everything. Tonight she didn't care. She wanted to feel everything one more time, to see Aidan unrestrained and unworried about hurting her. After this, things would be different. She'd be well and one of them – a non-human.

Lilith worked his belt open and then his jeans, needing Aidan inside her, filling her core. She took hold of his hard shaft—he was just as ready. She smoothed her thumb over the dimpled head. He groaned and she tightened her grip, stroking the length of his cock as if she could tempt him into losing control. His eyes lightened as he thrust into her fisted hand. The white eyes didn't scare her, they were a sign of how much he wanted her. A lust only she could sate.

She swept her tongue over his nipple, then she bit. Not as gentle as she once had been, but she knew how much he liked to feel her teeth. Aidan shuddered, a groan lodged in the back of his throat. Unable to help herself, her hips rocked against his thigh, trying to find the right rhythm to take her to the edge. He moved with her, circling her clit, dipping into her pussy so his fingers were slick with her cream.

Her eyes closed as she gave into his touch. When his lips touched her neck, her body trembled like a flower in a thunderstorm, waiting to feel his razor sharp teeth in her flesh. Her breath became shallow pants.

"Do it."

"Say it." He whispered in her ear.

"Bite me." Fuck me and send me over the edge.

Aidan's teeth scored her skin, sending fire through her blood and scorching her nerves. Then her body broke apart in his hands. She tried to grind her mound against his hand, but he was already removing her panties. She eased out of them and lay back on the bed.

He stripped off his jeans and shoes. The tips of his long incisors were visible against his lower lip, but no smile turned the corners. He moved over her, their skin already glistening with sweat because of the heat. Their lips collided as he forced her legs apart. She lifted her hips to him, but with one hand he pinned them down. She tried to fight the hold even though she knew it was pointless. She'd learned how strong he really was and what his weakness was. She ran her fingers through his hair, lifted her head and bit him on the neck, right where he liked it. The touch of her teeth was enough to get a reaction.

He growled and drove his cock into her waiting pussy.

"That's cheating," he said with a thrust.

"Mmm." Her sheath was tight around his cock, so every stroke sent heat spiraling deep into her belly.

Aidan lowered his head so his hair tickled her skin, then his mouth closed over her tight nipple. His teeth grazed her breast as if he no longer cared what his teeth did and neither did she. It was all or nothing tonight.

Sweat made her hands glide over his skin and the air in the room seared her lungs. She tilted her head, offering her neck, needing him to bite as they came together.

She was so close. The superheated bubble in her belly grew, ready to engulf her. Her nails curved into his flesh in a silent demand for more.

Aidan pressed her hard into the bed as he fucked her. His fangs found the shallow bite on her neck and reopened it. She moaned and came as he sank his teeth and shaft deep into her. His groan of satisfaction rumbled through her skin and made her core quiver again.

Together they lay with their legs tangled. Both spent. He released her hip and rested on his elbows above her. His weight was comfortable and familiar when nothing else was. Her heart rate slowed, but she didn't open her eyes in case the tears spilled. That was it. Maybe the last time she'd lie in his arms.

"You okay?" Aidan murmured in her ear.

She took a breath laden with the scent of sex and sweat and Aidan. "Yes."

She was better than okay. She was going to survive and she was going to marry him and she wouldn't allow any other thought to linger and take hold.

He kissed her, his tongue tracing the cut on her lip as if he were savoring the lingering taste of her blood. "I won't be able to bite you after tonight."

Her eyes opened as her heart skipped a beat. No more bite? But they'd only just begun. What was she going to do without it? What was he going to do? How could he just stop when he'd longed to taste her for so long?

"Why?" She couldn't keep the panic out of her voice.

"Lycanthria turns Vampires into savage killers," he said without looking at her.

Horror crawled under her skin, freezing every drop of her blood. The room seemed to tilt before crashing. Aidan had kept the most awful part of her treatment to himself. Lycanthria was a blood born disease. She knew that, but she'd never thought of the consequences. She'd somehow thought him immune.

"I could infect you?"

He looked at her, his expression firm as if he'd expected this reaction and had already formulated the arguments. "Only if I taste your blood."

"You should have said."

"Said what? Tasting you will be as fatal as biting the sun?" His jaw locked. "I had to let you decide, and I didn't want this to affect your decision."

Oh, and it would've. It did now, even though the Were blood was ready. She would lose this connection with him. The thrill she felt at the touch of his teeth was nothing compared to what he would lose. She put a hand against his cheek. The golden fire in his eyes was the burning of his soul. Her heart cramped. How could he start the craving only to cut her off and leave her with nothing but a memory? Leave himself with nothing but a lingering taste?

No tastes, no nips, no blood. Ever.

"How could you suggest this maybe-cure, Aidan?" Her fingers moved to his lips.

He kissed her fingertips. "I can give up your blood if you can give up being human."

And now she knew what a sacrifice he was making, how much he liked to bury his fangs in her neck as he came. It was part of him. Part of being Vampire.

"Aidan." She shook her head. It was too much to lose. For both of them.

"It's the only way, Lil." He kissed her again and withdrew from her body.

She was left empty and aching for more. Now she understood why he wanted a third option, but it didn't exist for either of them. Not yet, and who knew how far in the

future a permanent cure would be found? Tears stung her eyes and burned a salty path down her cheeks. She brushed them away, the new ring catching in her hair.

Lilith looked at the diamond and the promise it held. The only way she could keep it was to take her medicine. Her fingers brushed the loaded syringe.

"You are sure this isn't snake blood." She did not want to be eating mice when she got snackish.

"I'm sure." Aidan was dressed, but only in jeans as the room was too hot to be fully clothed, offering her a hint of what fans would see at the *Lucinda's Lover* shows. She'd gotten a sneak peak of him clothed in the leather pants and eyeliner he'd wear for performances. The view had left her wanting more than an encore.

She smiled at him. "Summer wedding?"

He held out his hand for the syringe and she handed it over. She couldn't inject herself in the backside and apparently the best place to stick it was in a big muscle.

"Dusk?"

"Sunlight a problem for some guests?" She rolled over onto her stomach, her arms crossed and the ring on display. He'd asked knowing that he would never be able to bite her. He loved her regardless of what she became. The same way she loved him, even after she knew he was Vampire.

"Not all Vampires are as circumspect as me."

"Meaning they like more blood." Cold antiseptic touched her skin. She pressed her teeth together to stop them from chattering with nervous energy and tried to relax her butt muscle so the injection wouldn't hurt as much.

"Indoors or outdoors?"

"Garden – " She gasped as the needle entered her skin.

Fire exploded in the muscle as the virus spread. Her back arched and her body went rigid, pain stripping every nerve as if she were being turned inside out. Then the room went mercifully black.

Aidan watched the clock. The seconds ticked past too slow. He knew the stages of transformation, but it didn't sooth his mind. Watching someone he loved get torn apart by Lycanthria was tearing him apart, yet there was nothing he could do beyond keeping the room hot and making sure she didn't hurt herself.

She'd have bruises from where he'd held her down. Her limbs slipping and sliding and changing shape. The bones cracking and popping as her body struggled to work out what it was – seal or person.

That was the easy part. Now her body was rigid, stiff with fever, he kept checking her temperature. He couldn't cool her because that would slow the change and a slow change would result in death, but if she went into convulsions, the transformation would go bad very fast.

With one eye he also kept watch on the door. Even though there were only three people who knew what they were doing, that didn't mean Fendrake hadn't heard. He was half expecting an Agent to come through the door and arrest him like the criminal he was. He'd started medicine with such high ideals, healing and helping the poor after watching so many die while his Vampire blood—the only thing his father had given him—had kept him healthy. Music had been an indulgence. After the war, it had become his salvation.

Now he was back where he'd started, willing to break the law to survive, for Lil to survive. With a sigh her body relaxed. He laid his hand on her forehead. The fever had broken. Her heart still beat, it hadn't stopped like he'd feared. As long as her major organs didn't start shutting down in the next three hours she would survive. She was doing better than the random bites he'd attended. He'd never thought that knowledge would have a purpose in his life.

While there were rules against Weres biting and infecting humans, the same way there were rules against Vampires killing, accidents happened and Fendrake made sure no one heard. There was no such thing as good publicity for non-humans. Even if they

found a cure for cancer, humans would still fear them and hunt them. Lil would have to learn the dangers of being non-human.

His finger brushed a damp lock of dark hair off her face.

They would have to find out together how to make a Were-Vampire relationship work.

Chapter Five

From beneath the water, Lilith watched the sky darken. Around her the sea became inky. Swimming at dusk made her nervous, other animals became active and began hunting. Last week she'd glimpsed what could've been a shark. She hadn't stayed around long enough to find out. It was times like this she wondered if she should've been a Were-snake safe in front of the heater.

She swam toward the shore, her body a sleek torpedo slicing through the water. She did a spiral and scattered a school of fish without catching one. Then there was the fun only a seal could have and she knew she'd done the right thing. A snake could never feel the weightless glide and sweep of water over fur.

In the shallows on her stomach, her heart found the rhythm of the waves as they pushed against her. The power that the infection had given her was never far from reach, but she always had to prepare herself for the shift between forms. It was kind of like breaking her leg to prove she could heal in under five seconds. The pain was over before it really began and with each shift it lessened. Born Weres felt no pain, only the altering of their body like bending a sapling. But she was getting used to it one shift at a time. She pushed out a breath. A ripple of energy burst from within, cracking bones and pulling muscles. Her body changed from seal to human as efficiently as if she'd been doing it all her life and not a few short months.

Lilith shivered as her bare skin was touched by the smooth, cold pebbles of the beach. In winter this wasn't going to be fun. She gritted her teeth as she shook out the needles of pain in her limbs, then stumbled as she stood. Her legs burned with the strain of supporting her. After a couple of paces she was okay and her muscles remembered how to work in their human form.

So did her stomach.

It growled like a wild beast. Shifting burned a lot of energy, but the temptation to have a snack and catch a fish, or two, while swimming was one she avoided. Now. Once had been enough. She'd spent the best part of an hour throwing up after returning to human form, with Aidan patiently holding back her hair. Just the thought of having a raw, scaly fish in her stomach made it turn as if caught in a rip. Her therapist assured her it would pass. She hoped it wouldn't. It reminded her she was human.

She scanned the beach for Aidan. Although he may not be able to protect her in the water, he was there for her the rest of the time. He never let her go alone to shift. She saw him sitting against a rock, waiting for her to return, and smiled, knowing he could see her perfectly in the fading light. To her he was nothing more than a dark shadow. The shadow stood and her nipples tightened in expectation.

Food could wait. Her blood was still running hot from the shift.

Lilith crossed the pebbled beach, hips swaying and water trickling over her skin, to Aidan's waiting arms. He wrapped her in the towel and used it to pull her close.

"Good swim?" He slid her engagement ring off his pinky and back onto her finger.

She relaxed as the gold band slid on. She felt naked without it, but seals didn't wear jewelry and she didn't want to lose it. The diamond ring was more than an engagement ring – it was a reminder they could survive anything.

She ignored the bite in the air and kissed him. She wanted to feel his mouth crushing hers, but he kissed with care and without teeth, the way they had to now, but the remnants of the shifting energy still coursed through her, seeking a release. She worked her hands under his shirt. He flinched as her cold fingers raked his skin.

A low chuckle reverberated in his throat. "Eager to get warm, love?"

"Always. What were you reading?" Lilith dragged his jeans zipper down and wrapped her hand around his cock. His was hot and satiny-hard.

"Cross checking tour schedules and beach locations." He kissed her again as his fingers slid beneath the towel.

The infamous *Lucinda's Lover* was about to embark on their first European tour. Their first album was still number one, defying the critics. And Lilith knew why. When they played they wore nothing but leather pants and black eye makeup. They looked like sin made flesh and sex made easy. Their music was raw and rowdy or souldestroying mellow. Women sighed and swooned in their presence. But no one would look at Aidan and think he was Phoenix the cellist.

With a smile on his lips, he thrust his cock into her hand. He liked it when she was still running hot from a shift. His smile was contagious and her lips moved, tightening her cheeks. How had she gotten so lucky?

The cancer's spread had halted, and aside from changing into a seal once a week as part of her treatment, she was fine. She was alive and marrying a Vampire rock-star tomorrow. In her belly, excitement fizzed. Despite everything, she was as nervous as any bride-to-be.

He lifted her against a boulder. The rock was cold and the towel offered little protection. In front of her, Aidan's body was warm and familiar. Her legs wrapped around his waist, her body burning from the inside. His hands scalded her sea-cooled skin as he held her hips, ready to slide his cock into her slick core. She was ready for him. The energy of the shift made her blood hot and fed her desire. She rocked her hips so the head of his shaft rubbed against her pussy, teasing as he moved against her folds without entering.

His lips burned down her neck licking off drops of saltwater, warming her better than any fire. His mouth travelled over her collarbone. He licked the water off the tip of her nipple, then closed his mouth over the tight bud, engulfing her with heat and sending shivers down her spine. She arched her back and he released her breast, but continued thumbing the peak of the other one. She squirmed in his hands. She couldn't wait. She had to have him.

"Now, please."

He shifted his hips and his shaft pressed into her pussy. Her nails dug into his shoulders. Aidan circled her clit as he thrust into her, as hard and unyielding as the rock behind her. Her sheath clenched around him as she came fast, the rush stealing her breath.

The remains of her shifting heat dissipated into the night, leaving her limp in his arms. Aidan placed his lips to her neck, his breath raising gooseflesh. A tremor ran through her as her body remembered the sensation of his bite and longed for his razor sharp kiss.

He breathed her in with his teeth against her skin. A couple more strokes and he tensed and groaned, but he didn't bite or scratch her skin.

He couldn't bite.

But biting was what he thought about every time he spilled inside her. It was what she thought about. She wished she could feel his fangs in her flesh and the dizzying rush and fall. But she had Aidan and her life and it was enough. More than enough. Like his stage name, Phoenix, they had risen from the ashes to survive and go on.

"I love you." She ran her fingers over his two day old growth and hoped he'd shave before the wedding.

Aidan lifted his head. His eyes were colorless with lust as he placed a sharp, but careful, kiss on her lips. "I love you too."

About the Author

Blessed with a lively imagination, Shona spent most of her childhood making up stories. As an adult she discovered romance novels and she hasn't looked back. Dark fairy tales and the paranormal have always fascinated her and it's not uncommon to get to know spirits, vampires, were-creatures and demi-gods through her books. In her free time Shona likes to keep fit and get creative in the kitchen...Toblerone brownies, anyone?

Shona welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her <u>author bio page</u> at <u>www.ellorascave.com</u>.

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