

ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



DANGEROUS  
*Craving* Miami  
Scorcher  
SAVANNAH STUART

## **Dangerous Craving**

*Savannah Stuart*

*Book 4 in the Miami Scorcher series.*

A century ago, the only man Nissa ever loved turned his back on her when she needed him. Now that her life is in danger from one of her own kind, he may be her only hope for survival. As a full-blooded faerie and next in line to be queen, Nissa figures the last place anyone would think to look for her is with a pack of werewolves.

Werewolf Thomas Lazos knows he screwed up by letting Nissa go and he's suffered the consequences for too long. Now that she's finally back on the same continent, he shows her what she's been missing all these years. The sex between them is as scorching as ever and the seductive faerie is still the only woman who makes him lose control in and out of the bedroom.

When he learns that someone wants her dead, Thomas will do whatever it takes to keep Nissa safe and finally claim what is rightfully his, even if he has to use hot, primal sex as a means of persuasion.

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Dangerous Craving

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# ***DANGEROUS CRAVING***

**Savannah Stuart**

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BMW: Bayerische Motoren Werke Aktiengesellschaft Corporation

Miami HEAT: The Miami Heat Limited Partnership Florida Basketball Associates, Inc.

## Chapter One

"Phone's for you, boss." Stephanie, Thomas' head bartender slid the phone across the polished oak bar.

He looked up from doing the week's schedule and grabbed the portable. Probably one of the cocktail girls calling out sick. Again. His family's pack had been dealing with so much crap the past few months from crazed Immortals to rogue werewolves he'd been unusually absent at work. Some of the new hires thought they could take advantage. That was all going to stop tonight. "Yeah?" he barked.

"Hey, Thomas."

It was Paz. Immediately his demeanor softened. "Hey. Why are you calling the bar? Is everything okay?"

"I'm fine but your cell kept going to voicemail."

*Piece of shit phone.* For some reason he rarely got service inside his club. "What's up?"

"Ah, well...tomorrow's Alexandra's birthday party."

"Yeah, I know. She already called and told me I better bring her a good present. Sounded like she expected another bottle of Dom." His cousin Alex was turning twenty-two and last year he'd gotten her an expensive bottle of champagne. He shouldn't indulge her again but it was hard not to. She was by far one of the youngest in the pack. His Uncle Cosmo had mated late in life and they had a much younger generation of wolves. Barely over two decades old, Alex was the oldest of her three siblings and one of his favorite cousins. Not that he'd admit it to her face. She'd use it to her full advantage.

Paz cleared her throat nervously. "So, Adam and I will be there of course."

He frowned, wondering why she was acting so weird. "I kinda figured."

"I have this friend from work who I was thinking of inviting. She teaches English and she's sweet and really gorgeous. Tall, blonde —"

He massaged his temple. "Damn it, Paz. I don't need you to set me up with anyone." Did he seem so desperate his friend felt the need to find him a pity date?

"It's been a century. You can't pine over someone that long."

"Why did I ever tell you about *her*?" he muttered.

"Because I'm a good listener."

That much was true. But he'd mainly told her because Paz was half fae. He'd been hoping Paz knew something about the gorgeous full-blooded faerie who'd stolen his heart. No one in his family knew that he'd fallen for a faerie over a century ago. And not just anyone, but a princess. Of course he'd fucked things up but good with her. God, he couldn't even think her name. It hurt too bad. An ache lapped across his chest like a slow-building fire. He did not need to deal with this right now.

"I appreciate your concern but I'm fine and I don't need help finding a date." As owner of one of the hottest clubs in Miami he had his choice of gorgeous women. Not that he dated much.

"I've already invited her, so —"

"Damn it." He gritted his teeth. If he didn't care for Paz so much he'd be pissed.

"I didn't tell her she was there to meet you. Just that my in-laws were having a party and it would be fun. She might not even come."

Thomas bit back a sharp retort, knowing he'd upset her. Paz was his sister-in-law's sister and after a year in captivity at the hands of a madman, she was strong, but still more sensitive than most. And the little she-wolf held a soft spot in his heart. He didn't have any sisters but if he did he'd want one exactly like her. "It's fine. Just...no more attempted setups, okay?"

She blew out a long sigh. "All right."

He could hear Adam, her mate, in the background so Thomas changed the subject. "Tell Adam that I'm ready to start construction on that tiki bar on the top floor. He can start next week."

"I know you're trying to change the subject but I'll tell him. See ya tomorrow night."

He placed the phone on the bar. "Steph, I'm heading to my office. Unless the place is on fire, no interruptions."

The slim brunette absently nodded before returning to the inventory. Resisting the juvenile urge to slam his door, he shut himself in his office and collapsed onto his plush leather chair. After working on the accounts for over two hours he turned his computer off. He'd already caught himself inputting wrong numbers twice. His distraction could cost him too much money.

What he needed now was a drink. Lately all his thoughts had been consumed by *her*. His dreams too. And they were vivid. Not typical, fuzzy thoughts but real 3-D quality dreams. Her long blonde hair fanned around her face as he rode her. Then it was streaming down her back as he took her from behind. Her eyes were like shards of emeralds, vivid and striking.

Every time he shut his eyes at night, there she was. And it was always the same thing. She was crying and asking him for help. He ached to reach out to her, to comfort her. To just hold her one more time. Even thinking about holding her made his cock flare to life. In his dreams he knew it was pointless but he responded that he'd help her any way he could if she'd just let him.

Hell, he owed her that much.

But in the morning he'd wake up and be alone. It was just wishful thinking. There was no way she'd come to him for help anyway. Not unless she was desperate. Even then, he just couldn't see that happening.

He headed to the VIP section on the second floor. Loud music thumped through the speakers, jarring him straight to his bones.



Bruno, one of his security guys, held back the gold curtain as he reached the top stair. "Hey, boss. Didn't know you were still here."

Unsurprised by the statement, he nodded and glanced around. At ten it was still fairly early—for Miami—but the place was packed. "What's the status report for the night?"

"A few HEAT players are here tonight and they brought a ton of groupies so we're at capacity. Until it clears out a little, we're not letting anyone else in."

"Good." Any time the Miami HEAT partied at his place, they were sure to stay busy. He had four fully stocked bars located strategically around the two-story club and half a dozen cocktail waitresses milling around the place but he wanted to expand. It was one of the reasons he was adding another bar on the top floor. That and he wanted to add a more relaxed atmosphere so there was something for everyone.

"Oh, your brother's here. Just arrived a few minutes ago." He nodded behind him.

Frowning, Thomas looked around Bruno, then grinned. His brother Nick sat at one of the high-top cocktail tables with his human mate, Carly, and a woman Thomas didn't recognize. Nick didn't normally frequent clubs and by the semi-sowl on his face, it was obvious he wasn't having the best time. Maybe it was because of all the men checking his woman out. "Thanks. I know I've been absent lately but I'll be here all night. Spread the word."

Bruno nodded. "Sounds good, boss."

Nick's expression changed when he saw him. His pale eyes lit up and he grabbed Thomas' shoulder. "Hey, bro. I hoped you'd be here tonight. This is Carly's best friend Sarah. She's visiting from Chicago."

After making polite small talk Nick practically dragged him toward the bar. "I need another drink. I don't know how you work here."

"I can work anywhere." Thomas motioned to the bartender and when she was close enough to hear, he ordered two beers for him and his brother and another round for the women.

"All this noise would drive me crazy." Nick's eyes narrowed when he spotted two male-model types walk up to Carly and her friend. They wore designer suits and drank martinis.

Next to him Nick's hand tightened around his beer bottle. One of his tattoos rippled dangerously under the flexing motion.

Thomas placed a light hand on his brother's arm when he sensed the subtle shift in him. As a mated male, Nick's human side might know the men talking to Carly were harmless, but his wolf side didn't care. And as an alpha in nature, his most possessive urges would be clawing to assert his dominance to the two strangers. "I know those guys, brother. Don't worry. They're just making their rounds, seeing who's single."

"That's easy for you to say, you're not mated." As soon as he'd uttered the words his pale eyes widened. "Shit, man. I didn't mean it like that."

Thomas' chest constricted but he just shrugged as if it didn't bother him. He was happy his two brothers had found their mates but it was a stark reminder he was alone. That he'd had a chance a century ago but screwed it up. "So why are you here tonight?"

"Carly wanted to show her friend all the hot spots in Miami and I got dragged along."

Thomas bit back a smile. "Her friend know what we are?"

Nick shook his head sharply. "Hell, no. Although she did mention seeing a couple big dogs running down the beach this morning."

"Nice." They picked up their beers and the mixed drinks for the women and headed back.

His brother stalked toward the table and before Thomas had reached it, the two men had scattered.

"So you own this club, huh?" Sarah asked.

"Yeah, I..." He trailed off as a woman caught his eye.

Not just any woman. His eyes widened and he actually had to blink. A flash of hot then cold curled through his body like a violent electric shock. It was *her*.

*Nissa.*

Her long, blonde hair was piled on her head in some sort of twist thing. It should have looked messy, but it was exquisite. Just like her. The shimmery gold dress—if she could even call that scrap of material a dress—fell against her willowy frame like it was a second skin. Among a sea of tanned, bronzed people, her ivory skin seemed to glow.

Around her, men and some women turned to stare. Part of it was because of her ethereal beauty but another reason was because of her natural appeal. Just like vampires, that same sensual magnetic pull emanated from all fae. It was just more prominent in her because she was royalty.

When her emerald-green eyes locked on his he forgot to breathe. Nearly a century had passed but she was just as he remembered. Some days he wondered if he'd created an illusion in his mind. But this was no figment of his imagination.

This was flesh, blood and pure sin in a dress. And she held the key to his heart. He might try to claim it was only a physical desire, but he wanted all of her. Mind, body, soul.

A hollowness settled in his chest as he remembered the last words they'd shouted at each other. The anger he'd felt when he thought she'd betrayed him. And then the inevitable suffering when he realized he'd been wrong. So fucking *wrong*.

"See you guys later," he muttered, not caring how rude he sounded.

He hurried toward the exit of the VIP room. When he pushed past the curtain, she stood at the bottom stair, one hand haughtily placed on her hip as she stared up at him expectantly.

He didn't remember moving but suddenly he was standing in front of her. "Nissa." After so long, her name felt foreign on his lips but her scent was familiar. She was like a sweet summer day. Fresh and intoxicating.

Addictive.

For a moment she looked almost nervous. Then her composed mask slipped back into place. "It's been a long time, Thomas." Her soft, slightly Irish accent rolled over him with an intimate warmth he missed. Despite having lived practically everywhere in Europe, she held on to a faint Celtic accent and it still drove him wild.

Nissa fought all her instincts to turn and flee. She'd forgotten how tall and intimidating Thomas was. And how quickly her brain short circuited in his presence. Around him she had to be strong, though. If he knew how much she still cared for him...she couldn't bear the shame. When he didn't respond, she cleared her throat. "Aren't you going to say hello or buy me a drink?"

His dark eyes narrowed. Wordlessly, he reached out and grasped her wrist. Not hard, but he put enough pressure on her that she couldn't pull away. Before she realized what he intended he turned and dragged her with him.

Despite the fact that they were surrounded by so many people, everything else around her funneled out as they continued behind one of the bars, through a swinging door, up a set of stairs and finally into a quiet office.

Definitely Thomas' office by the look of it. The furniture was old, big and with lots of polished dark wood. Very masculine. Very him.

"Please have a seat." He motioned toward one of the plush leather chairs in front of his desk.

Nervously, she sat on the edge and crossed her legs. To keep her hands busy she traced her fingers over the intricate stitching of the chair. Maybe she shouldn't have gone with such a short dress but she'd wanted to get his attention. It rode up against her legs revealing a lot of skin and reminded her how he'd kissed and licked every inch of her once. When his dark gaze raked over her legs she knew he was remembering the same thing.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked and motioned to a small bar in the corner of the room.

She nodded. "Wine would be nice." Anything would be at this point.

After he poured two glasses he handed her one then sat in the chair next to her instead of across from her. With his legs stretched out in front of him, he looked almost casual. But she knew better. He was tense. Every muscle in that hard body was primed for action. Unlike her kind, shifters were born hunters, predators. Hundreds of years ago the fae had been forced to take on that role when they'd become hunted but that was neither here nor there.

"Is it true your family has a half fae living with them?"

His dark eyebrows raised a fraction. "Yes."

"And...she is mated to the enforcer...ah, former enforcer, correct?"

He nodded.

Okay, he wasn't going to make this easy for her. "Is it also true The Council has changed their laws regarding the fae?" She'd heard that six months ago a half-werewolf, half fae had mated with the enforcer and as a result The Council had lifted their ban on mixed breed matings. Before that it would have been certain death if a shifter had chosen to mate with anyone of faerie blood.

"Why do you care?"

She'd taken a big risk coming to see him. No matter what had passed between them, she knew he wouldn't hurt her. And this was the last place anyone would think to look for her. The thought of her hiding among a bunch of shifters was actually laughable. "I need protection."

Something predatory and dangerous flashed in his dark eyes. He set his glass down on the desk and leaned forward. "From whom?" he growled.

"My family."

## **Chapter Two**

Thomas pushed down the rage burning through his veins. He could actually feel his canines starting to lengthen. He, who was one hundred and seventy five years old, alpha in nature, and next in line to be Alpha of his pack, had learned to control himself well over a century ago, felt as if he were spinning out of control. Against his better judgment he scooted his chair closer and grasped Nissa's delicate hand just to convince himself she was real. "Why does someone want to hurt you?"

For a moment she started to pull away but to his relief she relaxed her hand. "I'm not exactly sure. As I'm sure you know, my mother...ah, the queen is supposed to meet with your Council next month to establish a truce between our people."

He nodded and tightened his hold, rubbing his thumb over the pulse point of her wrist. It thumped wildly against his skin. "I don't know the details but my Alpha—my father—told me about the meeting. He'll be attending."

"My mother is sick and she doesn't have much time left. I'm next in line so I'll likely be the one to sign the peace treaty." Her voice was sad, dejected and clawed at his insides.

"I'm sorry about your mother." He'd never met her family but he remembered how close she'd been to them.

Brushing away his concern, she continued. "There are those who don't want this treaty signed. About a month ago someone tried to poison me and a few days ago...a masked man broke into my house and tried to kill me. He had an ancient iron dagger so I know he wasn't a typical intruder. I tried to neutralize him with a burst of energy but someone must have cast a protection spell around him. I managed to get away but just barely." She shuddered lightly and he ached to reach out and pull her close. Comfort her.

The fae feared iron as much as werewolves feared silver. Thankfully they were just as fast, though not physically as strong as shifters. His stomach twisted painfully at the thought of someone trying to harm her. He wanted nothing more than to hunt her attacker down and rip him apart. "And you think someone in your family is after you?"

"I didn't know where else to go," she whispered. A blonde tendril fell loose against her face.

Instinct kicked in and he reached out to brush it back. His hand froze as he grazed her soft cheek.

When her mouth parted slightly he knew what he was about to do was stupid, but was powerless to stop himself. Leaning forward, he inhaled her scent. Would she taste as sweet as he remembered?

Her emerald eyes flared with hot desire but she pulled back out of his reach. "I didn't... I can't get involved with you. Not like that. I'm to be married soon."

Her words were like a sharp, silver blade straight to his chest. His throat seized as he jerked back. "Married?"

Glancing away, she nodded but not before he missed the flash of pain flit across her face.

"Then why didn't you go to *him* for help?" he growled, hating the possessive note in his voice.

"It's complicated," she muttered.

"Do you love him?" *Why the hell did he ask that?*

Her eyes narrowed at him. "None of your business."

The hell it wasn't. "That's not an answer."

"No, it's not. The last man I fell in love with threw me out of his life and accused me of using my influence to make him fall in love with me. I can assure you that *love* is overrated bullshit."

And Thomas had done exactly that. Hearing her spell out exactly how he'd mistreated her made him want to jump into a dark hole. "Shit, Nissa. Don't say that. Don't ever say that, please." He scrubbed a hand over his face, unable to meet her piercing eyes because he knew he'd hate himself for what he saw there.

"Coming here was a mistake." She abruptly stood but he reached out and grabbed her arm, unwilling to let her go.

Not again. He'd fucked up once, but she was on the same continent as him for the first time in a century. She'd come to him for protection and he was going to give it to her. Whether she wanted it or not. He was not letting her out of his sight. Or out of his life. He didn't care if she was supposed to marry someone else. It wasn't going to happen. Not as long as he was breathing. He might not deserve a second chance but he had to try. "You didn't make a mistake. My family will protect you. You have my word."

She nodded stiffly. "Thank you."

After he stood, he motioned toward the door. "I'd like you to meet one of my brothers, then we can head to my Alpha's home. He'll need to approve that you're going to be under his pack's protection and he'll want to meet you in person."

When the color drained from her face he wrapped his arm around her shoulder and pulled her close. She tensed but he didn't let go. He couldn't. "My father will protect you because I ask him to. Meeting him is just a formality, I swear."

She relaxed next to him. Not by much, but it was a start. "I have a few bags at my hotel. Can we—"

"As soon as we leave here we'll pick them up."

Even though he didn't want to let her go, when she stepped out of his embrace, he did. There would be time enough tonight to convince her that they still had a chance. Time and distance hadn't diminished his feelings for her. If anything, seeing her again after so many years reminded him of how much time they had to make up for.



\* \* \* \* \*

Nissa grasped the stem of her wineglass tightly. After meeting Thomas' father some of her earlier apprehension had dissipated, but she was still scared out of her mind. She'd left her home without telling anyone, fearful of who wanted her dead. Her sister had been acting odd lately and even though they were close, the hunger for power did strange things to people. It made her sick to think of her own flesh and blood betraying her but she knew it was possible. She'd seen it happen before. Far too many times.

The ironic thing was she didn't even want to be queen. She hated to think that her sister Kassia had been behind the attempts on her life but she couldn't think of another way someone had gotten into her home. Her security was damn near impenetrable and the intruder had known her security code and somehow gotten around the biometric scanner. Nothing added up.

"So who's this...man you're engaged to?" Thomas asked as he strode into the kitchen.

He'd gone to put her bags in his guest room and left her sitting at the marble-topped island in his kitchen.

She thought she'd have more time to gather her thoughts but it didn't matter. All he had to do was walk into the room and she forgot to breathe. "Why do you care?" she snapped. Her haughtiness was her only defense. Let him think she was a bitch. It would be easier to keep her distance from him.

His dark eyes raked over her from head to toe as he pulled up a seat much too close for comfort. "I think that should be obvious."

It wasn't obvious. Not at all. But she didn't say that. "Technically I've never met him." Saying it aloud was worse than she'd imagined. Maybe she should have kept her mouth shut. She cursed her fair skin as she felt her cheeks warm up.

"You've never met him?" The slow way he asked the question made her feel even more embarrassed.

"He lives in Paris and his family is of the right bloodline according to my mother." She could hear her mother's voice ringing in her ears as she told Nissa who she'd be marrying next year. Told. Not asked. As usual. *You're getting too old and when I die I want to know you will continue our line.* Even thinking of her mother's words made her cringe.

"So you're not technically engaged?"

"I'm to be married to him." She understood what he was asking but her people rarely did engagements. At least not the royalty. Anyone else could marry or mate with whomever they wanted. And after next month, that included shifters. The world was changing and she was thankful the laws were about to be rewritten. It was time to throw out those archaic rules and regulations. If only her mother would rewrite some of the standards for the royal line.

"Where are you living now?" The abrupt change of subject surprised her.

"Dublin. I've been there for a few years now."

Something about his expression told her he'd known exactly where she lived before he'd asked. "Back in Ireland? Why not London?"

"Because that's where my mother and sister live. Which, I have a feeling you already knew." The truth was, she'd been born on the beautiful Emerald Isle almost two hundred years ago and had always felt safe living there. Well, until recently.

Thomas took a deep breath and his big, annoyingly muscular chest expanded when he did. She hated that she noticed. She hated that she'd seen it before. And she really hated that she still fantasized about it. Even if they didn't have a past, they could never be together anyway.

"Nissa, I don't even know how to say this without sounding like an ass but I'm going to try. I'm sorry for what I said to you a century ago and I'm sorry for turning you away when you came to see me that day. If I could take it back, I would."

Her throat clenched at his words but she steeled herself against her building emotions. She'd wanted to hear this in person for so long, but it was too little too late. She lifted her shoulders slightly because she didn't trust her voice.

He continued. "I came after you later when I realized how wrong I'd been. I...shit, I think I'm screwing this up, but I'm sorry. I know it's just words but it's all I have right now. If there was some way I could make it up to you—"

"It was a long time ago and we were so young. I eventually got over you." The lie rolled off her tongue so smoothly she even believed herself. "I received the letters you sent me apologizing and it's part of the reason I'm here. I knew you'd help me. So rest easy, it's all water under the bridge, okay?" She'd never gotten over him but actually saying that to his face was too shameful for words.

"It's not okay," he growled.

She scowled at him. "What do you want me to say? I'm still angry at you? Well it's not going to happen. We were young and naïve. It wouldn't have lasted so—"

He moved so fast she didn't have time to react. His mouth covered hers in a harsh, dominating kiss. She didn't want to give in to this. To him.

She wanted to push him away. Grabbing at his chest, she fully intended to shove him back but instead she clutched on to his shirt and held tight.

Her legs opened wider as he positioned himself between her spread thighs. With her barely-there panties and only his pants as a barrier, she could feel his hardness pressing against her.

It would be so easy to get rid of the clothing between them. So easy to let him push deep inside her. To open herself completely to him. But if they crossed that line it would be that much harder when she walked away.

Instead of pushing back, her fingers splayed against his hard, muscular chest. *Push him away!* Her inner voice was very noisy but not loud enough. She wanted to curse her weakness but as his tongue stroked against hers it was hard to care.

The gentle teasing reminded her of how gentle and sweet he'd once been with her. It was in opposition to the tight hold he had on the back of her head. One of his hands gripped her so intensely she knew he wasn't letting her go anytime soon.

His scent was so familiar it made her ache. A long time ago there had been no barriers between them and everything had been so easy, so fresh and exciting.

But she wasn't that innocent girl anymore.

She wrenched her head back despite his hold. "Thomas, this is—" She stopped as he ripped her panties free with his other hand. She'd been vaguely aware of his hand inching up her thigh but the tearing sound seemed to reverberate against the walls.

He quickly shoved the material to the side as the skimpy strap against her hip broke free completely. Then he completely cupped her mound.

The feel of his hand against her sensitive flesh made all her good intentions vanish. A moan tore from her throat as his calloused fingers began rubbing against her folds.

"I've wanted to do this for so long." His voice was a ragged whisper against her neck.

The words and the feel of him speaking against her skin sent a sensuous shiver curling through her entire body. She wanted to tell him she'd fantasized about this too, but held back the words.

It didn't matter. He continued anyway. "I've dreamed about having you stretched out beneath me or wrapped around me like this so many times."

She swallowed hard at his words. As he lightly scraped his teeth against the sensitive spot beneath her ear, the spot where he could mark her if he chose, she arched her back.

When she did, he pushed a finger inside her. He understood exactly what she wanted without her having to ask. One of his thick, blunt fingers pressed deep inside her, filling her, and making her want things she had no right wanting.

He didn't give her time to get used to the intrusion. Thomas pushed another one into her wet sheath with skilled precision. The stroke was smooth and fast. He held his two fingers still, letting her body adjust.

It had been so long since she'd been with anyone and the feeling bordered on painful. Holding his fingers in place, he began a trail of kisses down her neck. Not bothering to push her dress to the side, he kissed her over the material until his mouth covered one of her nipples.

She hadn't worn a bra so there wasn't much clothing between them. He ran his tongue around the covered bud until it was rock-hard and pebbled against her dress.

Then he did the same to her other breast.

Clutching his shoulders, she tried to hold on to her control but knew she was losing that battle.

While he teased and tweaked her nipples, he began moving his fingers inside her. Slowly at first. The action was smooth and her inner walls clenched around him with each stroke.

Part of her wished it was his cock inside her, but in her heart she was glad it was just his fingers. What they were doing was stupid.

"Stop thinking and relax," he murmured against one of her breasts.

Nissa hadn't realized he'd been able to sense her distress, but he was right. At this moment all she wanted was release. To feel something other than the weight of all her people's responsibility on her shoulders.

Forcing herself to do exactly as he said, she shoved everything else out of her brain. Her fingers flattened against his shoulders and she allowed herself the joy of touching him anywhere she wanted. As he continued pushing deep inside her, she traced along the muscles and striations in his shoulders and arms. Savoring the feel of him, she closed her eyes and focused solely on the pleasure.

When his thumb tweaked over her clit, she jerked. Her inner walls started contracting wildly. She was so close.

Moving away from her breasts, he lifted up so that their faces were barely an inch apart.

“Let go.” The command in his voice sent a thrill through her.

So she did just that. She let go. Covering the tiny distance between them, she met his mouth with her own as the climax ripped through her. Her kisses were jerky and wild as pleasure pounded through her.

Like a waterfall, her orgasm broke free with a sudden urgency. Her inner walls clenched around his fingers as she wrapped her legs tighter around his waist.

As she came down from her high, the only other sound in the room was their erratic breathing. Even though he hadn’t come, he was still as affected as she.

Slowly, he withdrew his fingers and she immediately missed his touch. Holding on to her hips, Thomas pulled her farther past the edge of the counter and tighter into his embrace. He wrapped his arms around her waist and buried his face against her neck. The action was submissive and totally out of character.

“I’ve missed you, Nissa.” The quiet desperation in his voice threatened to crack the wall she’d built around her heart nearly a century ago. Why did he have to make this so hard?

Her vocal chords refused to work. She felt the same way but she couldn’t return the sentiment. Not aloud anyway. If she started thinking about how much he meant to her, it would be that much harder when she had to leave him.

And leave him she would.

She had a duty to her people and once this whole assassin mess was figured out she’d have to return to her life. And he had no place in it. No matter what kind of treaty she signed with The Council, her people would never accept a werewolf as her mate. It wasn’t as if he was asking anyway. He wanted her physically but he’d kicked her out of his life once. No matter that she said she’d forgiven him, the truth was, he’d turned his back on her when she’d been willing to leave everything behind for him.

Her family, her friends, her title.

*Everything.*

She actually had forgiven him. She just hadn't forgotten the pain. And she didn't know if she ever would.

"Share my bed tonight." His intoxicating voice sent a tremble curling through her. His rock-hard erection pressing into her abdomen left little to the imagination what he wanted. After what they'd just shared she wanted to please him as much as he'd pleased her.

However, she stiffened in his embrace. "I can't, Thomas."

He jerked back and stared at her with those dark, penetrating eyes. "Can't or won't?"

"I won't." Why did her voice have to shake so bad?

When he didn't respond she had the irrational urge to fill the silence. "There's too much going on in my life right now. I just need to regroup, get in touch with those I know are loyal and figure out who is trying to kill me. This..." She motioned with her hand between them. "Is too complicated."

"Let me help you."

"You are helping me by giving me a place to stay. For the first time in months I can sleep feeling safe." She might not get one minute of sleep under his roof but at least she knew no one would harm her with him around.

"You'd be safer in my bed," he growled softly.

Maybe physically but not emotionally. She resisted the urge to sigh. "When you kicked me out of your life—"

He cursed but didn't back away from her. If anything, his grip around her tightened. "If you'd let me make it up to you—"

"No. I'm not asking for that. I'm simply saying that when you...when we parted ways, I realized it was for the best. We're too different and things would never have worked. I don't know about you but I...I don't know if I could live through another

breakup from you.” It had nearly broken her the first time. Even admitting this much was stripping a huge chunk of pride from her. If it got him to back off it’d be worth it.

Regret flared in his eyes but then that damn mask slid into place. Instead of responding, he stepped back, his gaze shuttered. “Come on. I’ll show you to the guest room.”



## **Chapter Three**

Nissa swiped mascara across her eyelashes one last time before grabbing her clutch from the bathroom counter. Thomas had been gone practically all day but the house certainly hadn't been empty. His brothers and cousins had been coming by, never leaving her alone for one moment. For that she was grateful.

She'd wanted protection and that's what she'd gotten. Unfortunately she hadn't been able to contact her mother despite numerous calls. Her sister kept answering the house phone and even her mother's mobile phone. Since she didn't know if Kassia was behind the attack on her life, she didn't want to give away her whereabouts. If she could just talk to her mother everything would work itself out. She was sure of it.

As she exited the room she was struck by how quiet the house was. Unlike Thomas, she didn't have extrasensory abilities so she couldn't scent anyone. Her flat sandals were quiet against the bamboo flooring.

When she reached the kitchen and found it also empty, her heart rate quickened until she spotted Thomas and Stephan through one of the windows on the lanai. They sat on two loungers drinking beer and looking completely relaxed.

She wished she could loosen up around him but was finding it impossible. More than anything she wanted to get Thomas out of her system once and for all. A century was too long to fantasize about someone. He shouldn't have lived up to her expectations, but if anything he was better than her memories.

He laughed at something his brother said and her chest tightened. She'd been able to make him laugh once upon a time. He'd been all smiles around her. Back when he'd thought she was just human. Then he'd discovered her true identity and a switch had flipped. She'd seen him angry for the first time. His eyes had practically glowed with

rage as he'd kicked her out of his life. Despite the even temperature, she fought off a shiver. That was such a dark time in her life and she hated thinking about it.

As if he knew she was watching him, he turned toward her. Averting her gaze, she smoothed down her sea-green halter-style dress. He'd told her they were going to a birthday party but she wasn't sure if it was dressy or not. His response when she'd asked had been to tell her she'd look good in anything.

She jumped at the sound of the sliding glass door opening and met Thomas' gaze. In one swoop he assessed her from head to toe. His dark eyes were *very* approving when he reached her face again. Looked like she'd worn the right thing after all. Not that she cared what he thought. Or at least she kept trying to convince herself she didn't.

"You look beautiful." He spoke low, for her ears only.

She swallowed back her nerves. "Thank you."

An awkward silence started to stretch between them when his brother slid the door shut with a bang.

"I hope you're not shy, Nissa, because you're meeting the whole clan tonight," Stephan said with a grin.

She wasn't exactly shy but meeting a houseful of werewolves was intimidating. But she knew how to fake it. Plastering a smile on her face she nodded. "I'm ready to go if you guys are."

Sidestepping Thomas, Stephan threw his arm around her in a brotherly gesture as they headed toward the door leading to the garage. "My mate and sister-in-law are so excited to meet you. You already know that Paz is half fae but she's never met others like herself. She and Marisol spent all afternoon cooking."

Nissa didn't know if she should be more surprised by how nice Thomas' family had been so far. It sounded as if some of them actually wanted to meet her. If she'd brought Thomas home to meet her family he'd have been met with cold stares or snide remarks. Or worse, considering someone wanted her dead.

Thomas cleared his throat loudly as Stephan held open the passenger side door to Thomas' BMW coupe. Thomas glared at his brother.

Stephan just grinned and stepped back. "See ya at the party, Nissa," he said to her but kept his gaze on his brother.

"Uh, yeah, see you," she muttered as he shut the door, unsure why Thomas was annoyed with his brother.

When Thomas slid into the driver's side, she squirmed against the leather seats. Alone again. At least the drive wouldn't take long.

"I'm sorry if my brother made you feel uncomfortable." His words were practically a growl.

"He didn't. Why are you frustrated with him?"

"I don't like him touching you." His knuckles turned white as he gripped the steering wheel.

She frowned at his words. "He's very happily mated. Even I can see that."

"I don't care." He didn't look at her but his jaw clenched tightly.

His answer didn't invite much conversation so she crossed her legs and smoothed down her dress as he pulled out of the garage. Part of her wanted to ask what he'd done all day but it seemed a bit too familiar. Like they were a couple or something.

She truly wanted to know about his day but at the same time, she didn't want to get even more invested in him or his life. It would just cause her heartache later. For years she'd been shoving memories of him into a tiny compartment in her mind and she needed to keep doing that if she planned to survive.

As they pulled down a long, private driveway, her heart beat a staccato rhythm. His family owned a private stretch of beach in Key Biscayne and though she'd met his Alpha the night before, panic started to set in. Luxury cars, midgrade cars, an old muscle car, trucks—new and old—and a few hybrids lined the driveway. She'd known

it was a party but the reality of her situation crashed over her. She was going to be in a house full of werewolves.

*Werewolves.*

She trusted Thomas, and his Alpha had been kind but what if—

“Stop!” Thomas’ voice thundered in the enclosed space.

She jerked in her seat causing her purse to fly to the floorboards. “What?”

“I don’t know what you’re afraid of but the terror rolling off you is actually hurting me.” There was no anger in his words, just sadness.

Nissa bit her bottom lip as she looked into his dark eyes. She’d forgotten he could sense her emotions if she didn’t keep them in check. “Sorry. I just started thinking and...” She shrugged as she trailed off.

Surprising her, he reached out and grasped one of her hands. “My family would *never* hurt you. And if someone tried, I’d kill them.”

She swallowed hard at his words, hating what they did to her. She’d forgotten how protective he could be. Since she didn’t trust her voice, she squeezed his hand and gave him a small smile before plucking her purse from the floor. As she started to open her door, he’d already gotten out and was helping her out. Another thing she’d forgotten. How fast shifters were.

Thomas kept his hand firmly around her waist as they headed toward the front door. She tried to subtly step away but his grip only increased.

“Don’t think you can run away from me,” he murmured so low she wasn’t sure if she’d heard him right.

Before she could contemplate it, the front door swung open and a dark-haired girl who couldn’t be more than sixteen jumped at Thomas, giving Nissa the opportunity to put some distance between them.

The girl wrapped her arms around his waist in a tight hug. “Thomas! I’m so glad you’re here.”

He chuckled as he hugged her back, then gently set her away. "I take it you missed me."

"You missed the last party and you haven't been around lately." She pouted in the way only a young teenage girl could.

His lips pulled into a small smile as he shook his head. "Some of us actually have to work. Athena, I'd like you to meet Nissa. She's my guest."

The girl smiled shyly and held out a hand. "Hi, it's nice to meet you."

Nissa took her hand and some of her nervousness dissolved. "It's nice to meet you too."

Thomas covered the small distance between them and once again his hand was at the small of her back. "I'm going to introduce her to everyone, okay?"

Athena nodded and ran back inside. Thomas' hand moved from the small of her back to her waist once again. He held her in such a proprietary manner as he made the rounds, introducing her to everyone, and it surprised her. He'd said he'd protect her but he seemed almost proud to be standing with her. If anything she thought he'd keep her at arm's length because of what she was.

After meeting a dozen shifters, they stopped in the Mediterranean-style kitchen and she finally caught her breath. Under the hanging copper pots, there was a smorgasbord of exotic-looking food on the center island. Through the sliding glass door she spotted a small bar outside. His brothers and most of the males were out there. She tensed for a moment when she realized he planned to take her out there.

He paused by the bar chairs lining the center island. "Are you thirsty?"

She nodded. She wasn't but she wanted to keep her hands busy and maybe get a little distance from him.

"I'll be back in a sec." Shocking her, he dropped a quick kiss on her cheek in plain view of everyone.

As he disappeared outside she turned away from the window so she wouldn't stare at him like some lovesick idiot. Her skin tingled where his lips had been and the deepest part of her heart wished he'd kissed her mouth. She knew they had no future together and after that mistake last night it seemed foolish to pretend otherwise.

"Nissa?"

She swiveled in her seat to find a petite, dark-haired woman sliding onto one of the high-backed chairs next to her. "Yes."

"I'm Caro." She slid a glass of white wine across the marble top. "You can probably use this."

She pushed out a grateful breath and took the long-stemmed glass. Was she that obvious? "Thank you. Are you one of Thomas' cousins?"

She shook her head. "No. I'm his aunt, though I'm not that much older than him."

Nissa nodded and took a sip of her drink. That meant the woman was close to two hundred even though she looked as if she were in her early thirties. Werewolves and other shifters aged at the same pace as the fae. It was one of the few things they had in common.

The dark-haired woman's eyes narrowed a fraction as she assessed her. "I've never seen my nephew so smitten over someone before."

Nissa cleared her throat. She knew he'd told his family who she was and why she was in Miami, but he hadn't told everyone about their past. Or she didn't think he had. "We're just friends."

Her dark eyebrows knitted together. "Ah, *right*."

Nissa would rather talk about anything other than Thomas so she tried to change the subject. "Is that your mate over there?" She tilted her head in the direction of the back patio where most of the males were. A dark-haired man with electric-blue eyes hadn't taken his eyes off Caro since she'd sat down.

Caro glanced over her shoulder and when she turned to face Nissa her expression was dark.

*Uh oh.* "I'm sorry. Is mate the wrong word? I'm still not sure of all the correct —"

She shook her head and placed a gentle hand on hers. "I'm sorry, it's not that. No, he's not my mate. He's a very persistent... Never mind. I'm actually unmated."

"Oh." She racked her brain trying to think of a decent response, but was saved when two petite, slim she-wolves grabbed a couple more bar stools and pulled them up close, creating a small circle. "Hi..."

"I'm Paz." The smallest one spoke first.

"And I'm Marisol. We're sisters," the other dark-haired one said next.

"We're so happy to meet you. I can't believe how tall and gorgeous you are. You're the first full-blooded faerie I've met before. Actually, any of us have met. I thought maybe you'd be short like me. Are all full-blooded fae like you?" Paz asked.

Marisol nudged her sister and shot her a sharp look. "Let the woman breathe, *hermana*."

Paz's cheeks tinged pink. "I'm sorry. My social skills are crap. If I ask you anything inappropriate feel free to ignore me. You won't hurt my feelings, I promise."

Feeling immensely relieved — and amused — Nissa smiled at the sisters. "It's okay. Ask anything you want. And to answer your first question, the Gentry — the royal line — we're all fairly tall I suppose." In reality she was one of the smallest of her family.

Paz shot another question at her and for the first time in ages, Nissa let her guard down. She'd expected a cold reception from these werewolves but so far everyone was incredibly nice. So much so, it scared her a little. All these wolves were so welcoming and Nissa couldn't help but wonder why her kind had been at odds with them for centuries. She knew what her mother had told her about the Great War but this pack didn't seem like evil, conniving monsters.

Leaning back in her chair, she answered another question and found herself smiling at the sisterly banter between Paz and Marisol.



## Chapter Four

"I really like your family—uh, pack," Nissa said as they headed back to Thomas' house. Now that they were alone again she felt the need to fill the silence.

"I think they were quite taken with you too." His voice had a sensuous quality she didn't think she was prepared to handle.

"I was surprised by how nice everyone was." She wasn't sure why she told him.

Thomas shot her a quick glance and a frown marred his sharp features. "Why?"

She shrugged. "Why wouldn't I be?" When she realized he probably thought she meant it as an insult she shook her head. "I meant that as a compliment, Thomas. I've never spent any time around your kind...well, except you of course."

At her words, he relaxed a little but not much. His fingers gripped the steering wheel a bit too tight and the muscles in his arms were pulled taut. She itched to reach out and stroke his arm. Just to feel all that power underneath her fingertips.

The few lovers she'd taken since Thomas didn't compare to him in any way. Not only because he was a skillful lover but because he'd taken a piece of her heart when he'd kicked her out of his life. Maybe more than a piece. More like a huge chunk.

"I'm sorry my mother wasn't there. She's looking forward to meeting you though." The words were sincere, but still surprising.

Nissa frowned. Somehow she doubted his mother was *dying* to meet her. Her own mother would likely have a stroke if she found out she'd slept with a shifter. The Gentry didn't even like to intermingle with the common fae, preferring instead to marry those of similar social standing. Shifters, humans—they were all off limits. Vampires were accepted, but it was still a rare thing.

"You doubt me?" he growled softly.

She turned to him. "I didn't say anything."

"I can still sense it. When I say my family wants to meet you, I'm not lying."

"Well, my family doesn't have any interest in getting to know you, Thomas. They don't know I'm here and if they did, it would kill them. My mother especially. Treaty or not I don't think they'll ever truly accept the mixing of our kinds." The words were harsh but he needed to understand that just because times were changing, her family never would. She desperately needed to keep him at arm's length. Maybe if he realized that their two worlds would never mesh, he'd back off.

"What about you? Do you care what your family thinks?"

No. "Of course I do."

"Even if they want to kill you?" His voice was soft, concerned.

She shrugged, but his words were another reminder of the real reason she was in Miami. "I tried calling my mother again tonight." She'd sneaked away to one of the bathrooms and called barely an hour ago.

"And?"

"My sister answered again."

"You're sure she's the one trying to kill you? You always said how close you two were. Have things changed that much?"

Stark sadness filled her chest, spilling into her lungs, making it difficult to breathe. Her sister had been acting odd lately but actually trying to have her killed? It just seemed too diabolical. But the proof said otherwise. And it burned a harsh hole inside her. Her family might have their issues but trying to kill her? She pressed a hand to her stomach to quell her nausea. "I didn't think so, but I truly don't know. I can't take the risk of trusting her until I know more. If I could just talk to my mother..."

He sighed heavily as he put his car into park. "You can stay with me as long as you need, Nissa." Thomas reached out and grasped her hand. When she tried to pull away he threaded his fingers through hers. Instinct told her to yank her hand back, to make

him let go, but her heart told her something entirely different. Instead, she let him comfort her and she savored the simple act of holding his hand. Since it would probably be the last time it ever happened, she tightened her grip.

“Nissa.” Her name on his lips was an unsteady growl.

The car was still running but the engine was barely audible. Sitting in his driveway, she felt as if they were the only two people on the planet. As if someone wasn’t trying to kill her. As if he wasn’t a shifter and she wasn’t fae. As if they *somehow* actually had a shot at making a relationship work.

“We should probably go inside,” she whispered, though she wasn’t sure why. If she spoke louder it would sound as if she meant the words. And she didn’t. She didn’t want to go inside and she didn’t want to let go of his hand.

With his free hand he reached out and cupped her jaw. The grip was positively possessive. His hand tightened as it slid back a few inches until he held the back of her head.

Her mouth parted slightly as she stared into his dark eyes. It was all she could do to breathe as their gazes clashed. Suddenly the interior of the car was too small, too stuffy.

The pad of his thumb stroked her cheek. “Stay in my room tonight, Nissa.”

*Yes.* The word was on the tip of her tongue. She wanted to be in his bed right then. Wanted to feel his mouth and hands covering her entire body. Wanted to experience the type of raw, primal pleasure only he could give her. As she started to answer, the loud blare of his cell phone split through the air.

Jerking out of his embrace, she tugged her hand away too. She clasped her hands tightly together in her lap to cover her slight shaking. A rush of air entered her lungs as she escaped his hold. She could breathe again. Letting him touch her was bad news. When he did, she couldn’t think straight. Didn’t want to think, really. Just wanted to feel.

Thomas cursed under his breath then yanked his phone out of his pants pocket. “What?” he snarled. “Can’t you take care of this yourself... Damn it... You’re right, just

give me some time. I'll be down there soon." As soon as he snapped his phone shut he looked at her. Regret burned in his eyes. "I'm going to take you to Stephan's house. I need to go to the club and –"

"I'll go with you." The words were out before she could stop herself, but she didn't want to be separated from him. Apparently she really was a masochist.

"You sure?"

"I'm probably not dressed appropriately but –"

"You look gorgeous, Nissa. You could be wearing..." He shook his head and kicked the car into reverse. "You'll be the most beautiful woman there tonight, trust me." Thomas said the words with such sincerity, something long buried inside her fluttered.

Thomas gripped the steering wheel tightly as he headed down Ocean Drive. Nissa had been ready to say yes. He'd seen the decision in her eyes. Until that damn phone had rung. Then it was like she'd been wrenched out of a trance.

Now he wasn't sure she'd agree to share his bed tonight. The night actually hadn't been half bad. Not as bad as he'd expected anyway. The entire pack had been welcoming and Paz hadn't brought her human friend she'd wanted to set him up with. Nissa had seemed like she'd had a good time, which was important. If he wanted to convince her to make a life with him, she had to feel like she belonged.

The second he pulled up to the club, one of the valet drivers opened his door and another opened Nissa's. Thomas didn't miss the way the young kid stared at her. He seemed almost mesmerized as he looked her over from head to toe. When his gaze reached her face again he gave her a goofy grin.

Thomas' inner beast growled but he refrained from pummeling the kid. Hell, he couldn't blame him really. Hooking his arm around her shoulder, Thomas steered Nissa through the front door. He savored the feel of her against him. Even for a shifter he was tall, but so was she and he liked the way her entire body molded to him. It was too bad they had their clothes on.

A familiar song blasted through the air. The downstairs area of his club was always louder. Men and women danced and moved in rhythm with the hip-hop beat. Next to him, Nissa relaxed. The action was subtle and if he hadn't been holding her so close he might not have noticed.

The music soothed her.

He'd forgotten how much she liked to dance. Okay, maybe not forgotten exactly. He'd forced the image of her dancing from his mind because it always got him hot and hard. Before they'd met, her family had lived everywhere, including Egypt and Turkey. She'd learned the sensual art of belly dancing at a very young age. Years ago she'd performed many private dances for him.

His cock pressed painfully against his pants. Damn it, he didn't need to be meeting with his staff with a raging hard-on.

"Hey, boss." Bruno ducked out from under one of the bars as they approached.

"Where are they?" Thomas asked. Bruno had called to let him know his best bartender and his best cocktail waitress had been ready to exchange blows. Whatever the problem was, this was something he needed to handle himself.

"Your office. I've got someone covering for both of them."

"Thanks. This is Nissa. Don't let her out of your sight." It was not a subtle order.

Bruno's eyes widened slightly as he nodded. "Of course."

Without giving her a chance to protest, Thomas pulled her close and captured her mouth with a dominance he knew would throw her off-kilter. She tasted sweet, probably from the wine she'd been drinking earlier. When he pulled back, her green eyes practically glowed. She ran her tongue along her bottom lip in a seductive manner that had his cock begging for release. So he turned away before he did something stupid like throw her over his shoulder and find the nearest secluded spot.

As he made his way to his office, he pushed down his inner wolf. Everything inside him told him to claim Nissa. Take what he wanted before she left again. His human side

would never do that but the fierce battle waging inside made him uneasy. He took a deep breath when he reached his office door. Once the throbbing of his canines pushing against his gums subsided, he opened it.

"She's stealing my customers!" Ally jumped up from her seat.

Stephanie rolled her eyes at the other woman and shook her head. "She's crazy."

Sighing, Thomas shut the door behind him. This was going to take a while.

\* \* \* \* \*

Winding her way to one of the dance floors, Nissa let her hips sway with the music. She couldn't remember the last time she'd gone dancing. Or done anything fun, really. Lately she'd been so consumed with Gentry business and trying to figure out who wanted to hurt her she'd been afraid to let her guard down.

But now she was with Thomas. In beautiful, sunny Miami. No one knew she was here. Sure, she and Thomas had already crossed an invisible line. One she knew she couldn't come back from. In the end she'd get hurt again but that didn't mean she couldn't enjoy herself. Just for a little while.

The rhythmic thump streaming in from the speakers was hypnotic. Exhilarating. Using her gifts, she projected a tiny bubble of space around her to keep others at a safe distance. Technically she was just spreading her wings, but humans couldn't see them unless she allowed them to.

Closing her eyes, she let herself be swept away with the sounds. None of the music was familiar but it flowed through her like a rich wine, making her loose-limbed and relaxed.

One song bled into another. She wasn't sure how much time passed but when a harsh-sounding rap song blared through the speakers she slowed her movements. As she began to make her way off the dance floor she spotted Thomas.

He stood on the stairs that led to the VIP room. As he tracked her movements, his eyes were hungry. For her. She didn't know how long he'd been standing there but it

was obvious he liked what he saw. The gleam in his gaze was potent, needy. Like he'd bared his soul to her so she could see every little thing he wanted to do to her.

Years ago she'd given him many private dances. Something she'd never done for anyone else. Had never wanted to. Now she knew why. It was something special they'd shared together and even though she'd been so hurt by him, he'd always held a special place in her heart. Even if it killed her, she wanted to experience everything Thomas had to offer again.

Pulling her wings in, she strode across the floor. She wove through the masses of people, determined to reach him as quickly as possible.

Turning sideways, she tried to avoid a couple grinding on each other. When she swiveled, she spotted the blade first. Her gaze snapped up to find a man staring at her intently. The small dagger was gripped tightly in his shaking hands. She blinked as she saw the look in his eyes. They were glassy, unfocused and it was obvious he'd been influenced by one of her kind.

*Shit!*

He was on a mission. No doubt to hurt her.

An alarming tingle raced through her, telling her the blade was iron. She tried to take a step back but bumped into someone.

Without taking her eyes off the man, she moved to her right and tried to find another escape.

"Hey!" A drunk girl slurred something else at her but Nissa ignored it. The crowd had gotten too thick for her to bring her wings up to protect herself.

Sure she could zap this guy with energy but they were in a room full of people. And this was Thomas' club. She couldn't bring that kind of scrutiny down on him.

Quickly she glanced back toward the stairs. She needed to let Thomas know she was in danger. He wasn't there.

Fighting back the bubble of panic pushing up inside her, she shoved her way through a small group of people.

Glancing over her shoulder, she spotted the man still following. He looked even worse. As if he were drugged. Which in a way, he had been. His mind had been messed with.

She knew the influence on him wouldn't last forever but it could last long enough for him to hurt her or anyone who got in his way.

Nissa needed to get him away from these humans. If she had to, she'd protect herself with her powers, but she didn't think it would get that far. Mindless of the annoyed cries, she continued shoving her way through the crowd. Once she broke free she glanced around for Thomas again but he was nowhere to be seen.

Shaking her head, she hurried toward the bathrooms. They were down a long hallway. As she made her way she looked over her shoulder. Sure enough, the dark-haired human was still following. His movements were stilted and jerky but he was definitely following her.

And he wouldn't stop until the influence wore off. Depending upon how powerful the spell was, it could be a few hours. Possibly longer.

As she reached the hallway she frowned at the cluster of people standing around. There was no choice but to use her influence. She cleared her throat. "Go get a drink right now and don't come back to use this restroom for the rest of the night." Her voice was loud and clear. Command laced her words. Most of the fae had to make eye contact in order to exert their persuasion but since she was a member of the Gentry, she was more powerful. Her skills more tuned.

A few women turned to look at her as she spoke and did as she ordered. As they hurried away from the restroom, the dark-haired, wild-eyed man rushed past them.

"You have to die," he growled.

"Stop!" She put all the authority she possessed into the word. She didn't want to hurt this human but she wouldn't let him stab her.



He faltered and his grip on the blade slightly loosened. "You have to die?" Now his words sounded more like a question.

Relief surged through Nissa. The spell was wearing off. All she had to do was convince him to put the weapon down. "You don't want to do this. You don't want to be here. Why not put the weapon down and —"

She fell back a step as a blur rushed through the hallway and slammed the man against the wall. It happened so fast she blinked to make sure she was seeing correctly.

*Thomas.*

One of his hands was wrapped around the stranger's neck, and his other hand pinned the guy's weapon-toting hand against the wall with crushing force. Nissa could see Thomas' canines protruding from his mouth. "Did he hurt you?" The question was guttural, animalistic.

Hurrying toward them, she grabbed Thomas' arm. "Let him go. He didn't hurt me."

He didn't loosen his grip. "I saw him. The weapon. Tried to get to you. You moved through the crowd...too quickly." His breathing was labored and uneven.

She tightened her hold on him. Then she heard the sound of a blade hitting the floor. "He's under the influence. Someone did this to him. Let him go."

As if coming out of a dream, the man in Thomas' grip started to struggle as his eyes widened. He began clawing at Thomas' hand and arm. Nissa knew if Thomas had wanted to kill the human, he'd already be dead. It was a testament to how much control he was actually showing.

She brushed a gentle hand down Thomas' forearm. They needed to let this man go. Getting any information from him would be impossible. Whoever had influenced him would have wiped his memory. "Let him go. He's harmless now."

After a moment, Thomas' fingers loosened. The man slid down the wall and crumbled into a heap on the floor. Choking and coughing, he crawled away. "You're crazy, man," he muttered.

"Get. Out. And *never* come back here." Thomas bit the words out with barely concealed rage and Nissa noticed his canines still hadn't retracted.

Pushing to his feet, the other man stumbled away faster than she'd imagined possible.

She picked up the weapon by the handle and gave it to Thomas who quickly tucked it into his belt. Despite her better judgment, she smoothed her hands over his chest. When she did he looked at her. Really looked.

His dark eyes had started to turn a golden yellow.

She inhaled sharply. He was so close to shifting. This could be dangerous to everyone. Including him.

Running her hands up his chest, she encircled her fingers around the back of his neck. "Breathe, Thomas. Do it for me," she whispered.

Then she leaned forward and pressed her lips to his. With his sharp canines it was difficult to avoid the points but as she molded against him, she could feel the tension subside from him. Like the tide being pulled back out to sea, his animalistic side quickly abated.

Well, most of it.

As their lips meshed and his tongue invaded her mouth, his kisses became more dominating. He grabbed her hips and pulled her tighter. "What were you thinking?" he murmured against her mouth.

She pulled back slightly to answer. "I needed to get him away from the humans."

"You could have been hurt." Now his words were a growl.

Her lips pursed. No, she couldn't have. He should know that but his animal side had taken over. It hadn't cared that she'd been capable enough to take care of herself. It had seen her in trouble and had wanted to kill.

The fact that he'd shown so much restraint spoke volumes about his abilities. She'd known he was next in line to be Alpha and now she knew why. Some shifters couldn't control their instincts when it came to their females, but he definitely could.

She faltered at the thought. She wasn't *his* female. So why did it feel so right to be crushed to him now?

Her nipples tingled as they rubbed against him. There was too much clothing in the way though. She wanted to feel his chest against hers.

"My office, now," he murmured against her jaw as he nipped his way across her skin.

She didn't even think to protest. "Okay."

As they made their way through the club she felt as if she were floating. After they got to his office she thought maybe he'd offer her a drink or give some pretense of foreplay but she should have known better. He came at her fast.

She stepped back until she ran into the edge of his desk. Thomas didn't stop his advance. He caged her in with his size and strength.

Clutching the bottom of her dress, he pulled it over her head with quick efficiency. She hadn't worn a bra so the cool air rushed over her. But she barely had time to think about it before he lowered his head over one of her breasts.

The sudden contact jolted her straight to her core. He murmured something against her skin but she couldn't understand what. As he pulled one of her nipples between his teeth and tugged lightly, heat rushed between her legs.

She wanted to clench them together to ease some of that ache but Thomas positioned himself between her open thighs. She felt his hard length as he rubbed his cock against her with jerky thrusts.

It wouldn't take much for him to push inside her. Despite the loud voice in her head telling her how foolish it was, she desperately wanted him.

All of him.

Reaching between them, she tried to tug at his belt but he stilled her with one of his large hands.

Then he pulled his head back from her breast. There was something in his eyes but she wasn't sure what it was. Pain, maybe. But that didn't make sense. Did he want to stop?

She started to ask him but the pressure on her hands increased. He held on to her wrists.

"You're mine, Nissa." The words were guttural, strained.

She knew it. Deep inside her core the truth was there. While it might not change their future, she'd always be his.

"I know." Those two words made his dark eyes flash hungrily. Triumphantly.

Keeping her wrists captive, he slipped an arm around her waist and laid her on the desk. The smooth wood instantly cooled her back. Holding her wrists above her head, he began nibbling along her jaw toward her ear.

"If I was a more patient man, I'd wait until we got back to my place and tie you to my bed. Think of all the things I could do to you." In the past Thomas rarely talked when they were intimate, but his words lit her entire body on fire.

The thought of being at his mercy was wildly erotic. Years ago he'd been so dominating when they'd made love and each time it had been just as hot. She hadn't thought she'd like it but sometimes when he just took over it drove her wild.

He sucked her earlobe between her teeth and tugged. "Don't move your hands." His let go of her wrists but she did as he said.

Wordlessly, he held on to her hips and shifted her so that she was stretched out along the length of his desk. She heard something thud against the carpeted floor but he didn't seem to care and she definitely didn't.

He continued kissing his way down her chest and abdomen, until he reached the sensitive section of skin right above her mound. He flicked his tongue against her skin, teasing her just underneath her panties.

She instinctively arched her back. She wanted him to kiss and lick her the way she'd been fantasizing about for years. Chuckling against her, he grasped the thin straps and tugged them down her legs.

Blindly, Thomas tossed the flimsy scrap of material Nissa considered underwear across the room. He didn't know why she even bothered.

Inhaling her sweet scent, he bit back a groan. Jasmine and honeysuckle. It was so distinctive he could pick her out in a crowd of thousands.

He leaned forward until he was inches from her pink folds. They glistened lightly with her wetness. He'd barely stimulated her and she was ready for him. Even if he couldn't scent her, he could see it clearly.

When she sat up and threaded her fingers through his hair, he glanced up and shook his head. "Lie back."

She paused for a moment then did as he said. Right now he didn't want to push her too far too fast, but he did plan to tie her up eventually. He hadn't been joking about that.

The thought of seeing her bound to his bed made his cock ache. It felt like a heavy club pulsing between his legs. But this wasn't about him. Not right now. Not tonight. This was entirely about her.

If he had to use sex and pleasure to bind her to him, he'd do it. He couldn't let her walk away again.

Instead of stroking her pussy directly, he ran his tongue along the crease by her inner thigh.

She muttered something incomprehensible but her frustration was obvious. He continued a path with his tongue and teeth, moving higher over her mound but completely avoiding her clit and pussy lips.

Her skin was silky smooth and the small strip of blonde hair covering her mound was just as fine and soft as he remembered.

"Do something," she finally moaned. Her hips jerked again, pulling another smile from him.

Moving lower, he slowly dragged his tongue up the length of her folds, making sure he put more pressure on her clit. She tasted sweet and the sounds she made were even sweeter.

As he circled the small bundle of nerves, she tunneled her fingers through his hair. He'd been fantasizing about this for too long and couldn't bear to tear his mouth away from her.

More than anything he wanted to pound into her. To slide his cock into her tight sheath over and over until they were both sated. But he couldn't. He knew he didn't deserve her. After the way he'd turned on her, abandoned her, accused her of lying to him all those years ago, it was amazing she'd come to him at all. Now he had to prove he was worthy of her. That he could give her everything she deserved.

Still teasing her with his tongue, he slid a finger into her. She was so tight, making his hips jerk. His cock had a mind of its own and he didn't blame it.

Slowly, he pulled his finger out then pushed it back in. Each time he did, she rolled her hips until they found a perfect rhythm.

She came so fast she took him off guard. Her inner walls clenched tightly as her hips began to move faster.

"Thomas." His name was a bare whisper on her lips.

Hearing it tore a growl from him. His name should be the only one she ever said. And he planned to make that happen.

Taking her clit between his teeth, he gently tugged. The action pushed her right over the edge.

Now it wasn't a whisper. It was more like a scream. Her orgasm rushed through her and he could feel every quiver and tremble of her inner walls.

Her fingers tightened on his head for a moment before she fell back against the desk, limp and satisfied.

The sight of her stretched out and naked on his desk was making it difficult for him to keep his original goal in mind. This was about her, not him. As her chest rose and fell and her aroused pink nipples taunted him, he was hard-pressed to remember that.

With the taste of her pleasure on his lips, he moved until he was an inch from her face. Her green eyes were wide and her pupils dilated.

A soft smile touched her lips. "Thank you."

He couldn't answer. His throat was too thick. When she reached between them and started grappling with his belt, he did something he hadn't thought possible. He stopped her. He might want her but he didn't deserve to sink himself inside her. To feel her tighten around him. No, he deserved the torment of a fucking hard-on that wouldn't go away.

Those perfect lips of hers parted and a frown marred her face. "What are you doing?"

He pressed a soft kiss to her lips. "We need to get back to my place. Whoever sent that guy is still out there." He wasn't worried about that but it worked as an excuse. If someone had tried to enter his office he'd have scented them coming.

"But—"

He covered her mouth again. Stroking his tongue over hers, he invaded her mouth until she was panting and breathless. Finally he lifted his head and quickly

disentangled himself. After he picked up her discarded dress, he fished his phone out of his pocket and called one of the valet guys to bring his car to the side alley. He wasn't going to risk taking Nissa through a crowded club after what had just happened.

As he finished his call he turned to find a dressed Nissa sitting on the edge of his desk with a confused expression on her face. The look in her eyes told him she didn't believe his excuse one bit. At least she wasn't pushing him. If she did he knew he'd toss his restraint and self-induced torture aside and take her right on the floor.



## Chapter Five

Nissa set her iced tea on the table that separated her from Thomas' sister-in-law, Carly. Her husband Nick was out patrolling the house and grounds while his redheaded wife kept her company. The woman was sweet and surprisingly at ease around so many supernatural beings. Thanks to Thomas, Nissa knew that she'd only been turned less than a year ago through the mating process. "I'm sorry your friend had to leave."

Carly smiled and waved a dismissive hand in the air. "She'll be back next month. I think I've almost convinced her to move here."

Nissa's eyes widened. "And she doesn't mind that you're all...werewolves?"

"Ah, she doesn't know...yet. I plan to tell her...one day." Carly chewed on her bottom lip for a moment. "Eventually I'll have to or she'll realize I'm aging a lot slower. I don't know how she'll take it. Some days I still don't believe it. If it hadn't been for Nick I don't know that I'd have handled the transition so well."

Having a supportive mate made all the difference in the world. Something she'd never get to experience. Nissa shoved the abrupt thought away. Dwelling on something that could never be was a waste of time. And if she allowed herself to think about it, the hole in her heart she'd patched up long ago would rip right back open. Before she could respond Nick appeared from around the side of the house.

The tall, multi-tattooed shifter nodded politely at her but when his gaze landed on his mate, his entire face softened. "Hey, sweetie."

Carly's cheeks flushed as their gazes clashed and Nissa had to look away. Seeing two people so in love was another reminder of what she'd never have. It didn't matter who she ended up mated to. That person wouldn't be Thomas. Maybe she'd eventually

learn to care for her intended husband but it wouldn't matter. Swallowing back a lump, she stood. "If you guys don't mind I think I'm going to take a quick nap."

Carly eyed her curiously. "Are you sure? I was about to make lunch."

Not trusting her voice, she nodded and strode inside. All morning Thomas' family had been stopping by to keep an eye on her and some just to meet her. Though he hadn't told her what it was about, he'd had to take care of some business with his father. He'd certainly made sure she was looked after though. Something that didn't surprise her.

As she hurried up the stairs, she found it easier to breathe. After the hot interlude in Thomas' office last night he'd been quiet and hadn't pressured her to share his bedroom again. The disappointment she'd experienced was sharp.

Even though she knew the memories would torture her later she wanted to feel him inside her just one more time. When she passed by his room, she paused. His door was cracked open and his sandalwood scent twined around her, drawing her inside. She might not have his extrasensory abilities but his whole house smelled like him. It was subtle and it drove her crazy. Even when he wasn't around, it felt like he was.

Nissa glanced behind her to make sure no one was there then nudged the door open farther with her foot. Pushing back the tiny twinge of guilt, she stepped into his room. Since the two large windows facing the ocean had the blinds pulled up she didn't bother with the lights.

Instantly her gaze trained on the king-sized bed. She couldn't stop the way her legs clenched together at the sight. The thought of letting him take her on that huge thing sent a quick rush of heat to her pussy.

Shaking her head, she took a step back, ready to leave, when the painting above his bed caught her eye.

She froze. *How did he have this? How had he known?* Tears pricked her eyes. Turning away she started to wipe them from her cheeks but jerked to a halt.

Thomas stood in the doorway.

She flushed under his scrutiny. "I-I'm sorry. I was curious what your room looked like."

He frowned and covered the small distance between them. With calloused thumbs, he brushed away her tears. "Why are you crying? Did someone upset you?" The second question held a surprising amount of underlying anger.

She shook her head and half smiled. "I was surprised by the painting, that's all. I can't believe you have it. No one, not even my mother knows I paint." Annoyed with herself, she swiped the rest of her tears away. "I can't believe I started crying. I'm just being stupid."

Thomas' brow knitted together. "*You* painted that?"

Her tears dried as his question registered. "You didn't know?"

He shook his head and his gaze trailed past hers to stare at it. For a moment, his eyes glazed over. "I bought it because it reminded me of you. Of us." His words were barely audible.

The scene was a simple one. A villa right on the sparkling Med with a black wolf playing in the sand. Maybe playing was a stretch, but the animal lounged on the beach, soaking up the bright sun. Using oils—her favorite medium—she'd painted it with *him* in mind. It had taken forever to get the mixed blues and greens of the Mediterranean Sea correct. Known for its deep hues, she'd struggled with so many drafts but it had been worth it in the end. In her mind it had been the last time they'd been happy together and she'd put all her effort and soul into capturing that moment on canvas.

To her horror, more tears pricked her eyes. This time it wasn't just a few stray ones. Giant drops rolled down her cheeks with abandon. Though she ordered herself to get it together, it was a fruitless endeavor. She tensed and quickly headed for the door. Letting him see her cry this way was the last thing she wanted. He was still looking at that damn painting anyway. She should have burned it. Seeing it only brought her more sorrow. After she'd sold it she'd never thought to see it again. It was amazing he owned it now.

"Nissa." His hand on her upper arm stopped her.

Keeping her gaze low, she refused to make eye contact. "What?"

He gripped her chin between strong fingers and lifted her head. Not hard, but with enough pressure to make her look at him. The expression in his dark eyes was so concerned it sent a tiny crack through the ice surrounding her heart.

Slowly Thomas leaned forward and brushed his lips over one cheek, then the other. As he kissed away her tears she had to fight back more of them. Why did he have to be so sweet, so gentle? She'd known she'd find protection with him but time should have buried or at least dimmed their attraction.

He started to step back but something primal inside her didn't want that to happen. Reaching out, she placed a hand on his chest. When he just stared at her she traced her fingers down the hard length of his body, feeling all those taut, lean lines until she reached the hem of his polo shirt. She started to grasp it with the intention of pulling it off him but he tried to stop her.

She frowned. "So you can touch me but I can't touch you?"

"I didn't say that." His voice was strained.

"You didn't have to." She still held on to the bottom of his shirt. When he didn't let go, her frown deepened. "My first night here you wanted me in your bed. Has that changed?"

He swallowed hard but didn't respond. That just annoyed her. He'd been all about this but now that she was offering he was acting like a mute. She swiveled away from him but instead of leaving, she shut the door and turned back to confront him.

His eyebrows rose slightly. Without giving him time to question her, she grasped the edge of her dress and lifted it over her head. The halter-style summer dress dropped to the floor almost soundlessly. Since she'd arrived in Miami she hadn't worn a bra much. To torture him or herself, she wasn't sure.

Slowly, she reached up and cupped her naked breasts. His breath hitched and his gaze narrowed on her hands cradling herself.

As he stared, he looked mesmerized. And the huge bulge in his slacks made her smile. She liked that she affected him so obviously.

"What are you doing?" he rasped out.

"If you have to ask..." Simultaneously, she rubbed her thumbs over her hardening nipples.

He tore his gaze away from her movements and focused on her face. "What..."

"I want you inside me." The invitation couldn't get any more blatant than that.

The movement was slight, but he shook his head. "I don't deserve you."

Sighing at his stupid comment, she slid her hands down her sides, over her waist, and moved to her hips. In a smooth movement, she pushed her thong down until it pooled around her ankles then kicked it away. If he wouldn't take charge of this, she would. "Take off your clothes."

He shuddered slightly, no doubt at the command in her voice. Her pussy ached so bad for him, she didn't care about much else other than feeling his hard length push deep into her. When he didn't make a move, she wielded a tiny amount of energy and zapped his shirt. It quickly disintegrated.

"Shit." Thomas ran a hand down his washboard stomach and her mouth watered. "I forgot you could do that," he muttered.

Instead of responding, she headed for his bed. "If you don't hurry, I'm going to start without you."

As she tried to move past him, he grabbed her by the waist and pulled her tight against him. Without pause she clutched his shoulders and lifted up, wrapping her legs around him. The feel of all that raw power and muscle between her legs made her moan. A man didn't have a right to be so toned.

His hands slid down her back until he cupped her behind. Clutching her tightly, he dug his fingers into her cheeks.

Thomas fought to breathe with Nissa's breasts pressed up against his bare chest. He'd tasted and licked them the past couple days but to feel them was heaven. A small part of him wanted to stop this. She deserved a hell of a lot more than him but he was selfish. Once she'd stripped off her dress and bared herself completely to him, he'd known he was lost.

Her desire for him was still as potent as before. The fact that she'd taken this step without any pressure from him meant they had a chance together.

He wanted to make her forget anyone else existed but him. If there was a chance he could bind her to him, he had to take it.

Right now all he wanted was to slide into her. The bed was too far away. As he covered her mouth with his, he took the few steps until they collided with the wall.

Keeping her up with the weight of his body, he quickly unhooked his belt and shoved at his pants. He felt a little foolish with his boots still on, but before his pants had even fallen all the way down, Nissa lifted up and impaled herself on him. He groaned at the feel of her closing around him.

She let out a sharp hiss as he thrust inside her. Her sheath was wet but still tight. So fucking tight.

The way her inner walls stretched and molded around him told him it had been a long time since she'd been with anyone. He shouldn't care but the most primitive part of him roared in satisfaction.

Nissa was *his*.

"Oh my...I'd forgotten how good you feel." She took a ragged breath as she lifted herself up and tried to adjust to him.

As he stared into her startling green eyes, he held her hips and kept her still against the wall. Then he pulled out until just the head of his cock was in her. He paused before sliding fully back inside.

The movement was slow and measured.

Her mouth parted slightly as he moved into her again. His chest tightened as he watched the pleasure play across her face. He could watch her all day and not get tired.

Nissa's hands splayed across his chest before her fingers traced over every inch of him. She looked like a kid on Christmas morning and he was her present. She'd always been like this when they made love. It touched him that at least this much of her attraction hadn't changed.

Cupping one of her breasts with his hand, he captured her nipple between his teeth while still slowly thrusting. Her moist heat and tight embrace made it damn near impossible not to come but he held back. He traced a wet path around her areola, loving the feel of it hardening under his tongue.

She arched her back, pushing her breast farther into his mouth. With each lick he could actually feel her inner walls tighten around him. Every part of her body was receptive. Something he'd missed, but never forgotten.

It didn't take much to stimulate Nissa. He'd already put that satisfied smile on her face twice but it wasn't enough. If he could, he'd keep her in that state forever.

They'd never leave the bedroom if he had his way.

When she let out a loud moan, his balls pulled up even tighter. Her legs tightened around him and it was all he could do not to come right then.

Thrusting into her hard, he held himself there, filling her completely. She tried to move against him but he stilled her with his free hand. He wanted to feel her contracting around him.

Her breathing was becoming shakier so he knew it wouldn't be much longer until he felt her explode around him. Having her come around his fingers was nothing compared to the experience of her on his cock.

When he switched breasts, she dug her fingers into his shoulders. "I'm so close."

He smiled against her soft skin. Lightly, he sucked on her pebbled nipple. She jolted and tried to grind against him.

Using his weight, he pressed her harder against the wall and lifted his head so that their faces were inches apart.

"Who's inside you?"

Her green eyes were bright with need. "You."

"Say my name." His voice was rough and uneven. He didn't know why it was important, but it was.

"Thomas." She said it like a prayer. Soft and reverent.

His throat tightened. Unable to say anything else, he reached between their bodies and rubbed his thumb over her clit.

The bud was already swollen, just begging for his touch. When he began softly massaging it, her eyes glazed over and her pussy began wildly contracting around him. With each contraction, she moaned. Each one was louder than the last.

Her fingers, which had already been digging into him, tightened even more. He savored it, knowing he was the one giving her the pleasure.

Finally he started moving. She was tight but so wet. And it was all for him. As he began rocking into her, she abruptly arched her back. With her eyes closed, her head fell back and sent her blond hair cascading around her shoulders.

As the climax tore through her, her eyes snapped open. Her expression was a little dazed but she didn't take her gaze off him as she came.

There was something so intimate, so real about the moment, he wanted it to go on forever. But he knew it couldn't.



As her orgasm subsided, she slumped against him. She draped her arms around his neck and nuzzled him sweetly. With her teeth, she nibbled and scraped across his skin.

The subtle action made his already taut balls ready to explode. But he couldn't come in her. With things so uncertain between them and after the way he'd treated her, he didn't feel like he deserved it. He didn't know that he ever would. He should just fucking suffer.

When he started to pull out she straightened and her grip around him tightened. "What are you doing?"

With his jaw clenched, he didn't say anything. His entire body trembled with the need to let go. To claim her. To mark her while he came in her. But he couldn't. He desperately tried to tame his inner wolf.

It was no use. Nissa seemed to understand. Somehow, she'd always seen right through him. Her legs constricted even harder around him. Holding on to his shoulders she began grinding against him.

With her pussy tightening around his cock and the feel of her breasts rubbing against his chest, it was too much.

All the good intentions in the world were nothing compared to Nissa naked and willing in his arms. He didn't bother biting back the curse that tore from him. Giving in to his need, he met her stroke for stroke. They fell into a raw rhythm that had him coming long and hard.

Hot jets of his come shot into her, filling her and soothing his most primal side. Even after his climax had subsided, his hips still blindly thrust against her. He hadn't realized how desperately he'd wanted that.

After what felt like an eternity, Nissa untangled her legs. Unsteadily, she leaned on him and kept her arms wrapped around his neck. "Do you realize that's the first time you've ever come inside me?"

"I know," he said, struggling to catch his breath. When they'd first gotten together she'd been fertile. He'd believed her to be human and had been working up a way to

reveal his true nature to her before he asked her to mate with him. There was no way he could have admitted he'd known she was basically in heat, so he'd used the excuse that he was being careful. In reality it hadn't been an excuse at all.

Back then times had been different and if she'd gotten pregnant before she'd been married she'd have been ostracized by her village. Of course she hadn't been a simple human living in a tiny seaside village like he'd assumed. She'd run away from her royal fae family. And she'd come to tell him just that the day he'd discovered her true identity.

But he'd turned on her.

A shudder rolled through him at the memories of their fight. It had been brutal. Even thinking about it now made him nauseous. He'd have erased those memories if he could have. Instead he was determined to show her how much he loved her. Shaking the thoughts away, he stepped back and pulled off his shoes.

She laughed lightly under her breath. "We made quite a picture."

Despite the intense emotions running through him, he grinned at her as he finished stripping off his pants.

She revealed a perfect row of white teeth as she returned his smile. She opened her mouth to say something else when she stepped back unsteadily.

Alarm jumped inside him. "Are you okay?"

When she nodded and smiled again, the light didn't quite reach her eyes. "I'm fine. If you'll excuse me a second." She nodded toward his bathroom before hurrying past him.

Instinct told him to go after her but if she wanted privacy he'd give it to her. It was the least he could do.

Nissa shut the heavy bathroom door and sagged against it. But only for a moment. She wasn't sure if Thomas would follow her. A brief but searing pain had shot across her right shoulder moments after they'd finished making love.

Walking to the full length mirror, she brushed her long hair back and turned to the side to get a better view of her shoulder.

A crushing weight settled against her chest and she fought to breathe as she stared at the intricate Celtic symbol that had formed on her skin. Though lighter in coloring than a tattoo, it was still visible.

She didn't know if she wanted to curse or cry. This was her own fault. She'd felt Thomas pulling out of her and she'd desperately wanted to feel everything he had to offer. Just once she'd wanted to experience him releasing inside her. Now she wanted to kick herself as reality crashed over her head.

*Mates.*

They were honest to God, *true* mates. Bondmates to be exact. *How was that even possible?* She was fae and he was a shifter. It didn't make sense. She knew his kind mated differently than hers. The male took the female from behind and marked her with his teeth as they climaxed. That bonded them for life and usually linked them telepathically. Even though most shifter mates recognized one another before bonding, there was always a choice. With her kind, however, bondmates were rare and oftentimes had no idea they were fated for a certain mate.

Reaching up, she ran her fingers over the symbol. It was raised enough that she could feel every line and groove. *The bonding symbol.*

The very thought was ludicrous but she'd seen it before on other mated fae so she knew exactly what it was.

A flash of cold snaked through her. Would he have one too? He hadn't reacted at all so maybe he didn't. The males of her kind developed an identical symbol but it usually appeared after the official bonding ceremony.

Something she'd never thought she'd have to worry about with Thomas. "Shit," she muttered. *Shit, shit, shit.*

Thomas had turned his back on her once because she hadn't been honest about what she was. What if he thought she'd lied about this too in some attempt to trap him?

Straightening, she turned away from her reflection. She wouldn't tell him. That was the simplest answer. Even if he loved her, they'd never have a future together. She was destined to be queen and her people would never accept a shifter as her mate. If they did mate, he'd become a target. Maybe not at first but someone would eventually come after him.

And he probably wouldn't be willing to leave his family anyway. Even if he was, she couldn't tear him away from his pack. He was destined to be Alpha and whether he admitted it or not, he couldn't live without his loving family surrounding him. No, she'd just keep this to herself. If he hadn't been marked with the bonding symbol then he'd never have to know. Now she'd never be able to mate with anyone else but maybe that wasn't such a bad thing after all.

## Chapter Six

Nissa slipped on her light cardigan as she descended the stairs. Thomas was in the shower, giving her a little time to decompress and come to terms with...holy crap, she was mated to a shifter.

She didn't know if she'd ever come to terms with *that*.

As she entered the kitchen one of the women she'd met the night before was pressed up against the center island by a very lustful-looking shifter. The woman's name was Caro but she didn't know the male's name.

Her head snapped up as Nissa faltered in the entryway.

"I'm sorry. I... Uh, I'll come back." She started to backtrack when the dark-haired she-wolf pushed against the male's chest.

"No, please come in. I was just leaving anyway. Please tell Thomas I stopped by." She ducked out from under the male who had his arms caged around her.

Nissa bit her bottom lip as she looked at the tall shifter standing almost bereft in the middle of the room. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt."

He shook his head and sighed. "Don't worry about it. We're just friends anyway," he muttered. "I'm Ethan by the way. I don't think we met last night."

Smiling, she crossed the distance and took his extended hand. "Nissa."

"Nice to meet you. At least now I don't feel like the only freak outsider."

Her eyes widened at his words.

Almost immediately he held up his hands apologetically. "Shit. I didn't mean you were a freak or anything. I just meant it's nice to have another outsider." He scrubbed a hand over his face.

She couldn't help the smile that spread across her face. "It's fine, trust me. You must be the human who was...turned?"

He nodded, but his expression was still wary. "Yeah. Maybe don't tell Thomas I called you a freak?"

A burst of laughter escaped. "Stop worrying. I won't say anything though I doubt it would matter."

Ethan's eyebrows raised in disbelief. "I'm starting to learn that mated males don't always think straight around their females."

Her throat seized upon hearing that word. "We're not mates."

"Right." The shifter snorted, clearly not believing her. He headed for the stainless steel refrigerator. "Want a drink?"

"Sure, a bottled water would be great."

He grabbed one for himself then slid another one across to her. "So what's the deal between shifters and the fae? I know there's a big treaty that's going to be signed in a couple weeks but I don't get what's so big about it. We're all supernatural right?"

Stark sadness filled her at his questions. There was no simple answer. "You were a soldier before you were turned, right?"

Frowning, he nodded. "Yeah."

"The 'deal' between us is probably the same deal between most humans across the planet. Hundreds of years ago there was a misunderstanding or a skirmish between a few shifters and the fae. One thing led to another and an all-out war started. To this day I don't know who officially started the Great War. I honestly don't think anyone does. There's more to it than that but if you want our history in a nutshell, that's the very condensed version." Which was why she'd hidden her true identity when she'd met Thomas. She had a gift for masking herself that most didn't. Immediately she'd known what he was but instead of fear, she'd been fascinated by the handsome shifter.

He hadn't been scary or terrifying or without conscience like she'd been taught from the time she was able to walk. He'd been sweet and considerate and he'd made her ache every time he looked at her.

The first time they'd made love had been seared into her mind forever. He'd been so careful, so gentle, he'd completely wiped out her previously conceived notions of shifters. A monster wouldn't treat someone the way he'd treated her. At the time he'd thought she was simply human of course, but it was too late for her heart. She'd fallen for him. She'd been taught that shifters just took what they wanted and didn't care who they hurt. It had all been lies.

Ethan's brows drew together. "That blows."

Nissa smiled at his vernacular. "Yes, it does."

He started to say more when his gaze trailed past her. "Thomas. I'm sorry to stop by unannounced but I really need to talk to you."

Nissa clutched her bottle of water tightly and turned to face Thomas. "I'll leave you two alone then. It was nice meeting you, Ethan," she murmured to the other wolf.

As she hurried past him, Thomas stopped her with a light touch on her arm. Before she realized what he intended, he leaned down and brushed his lips over hers. Not a searing, dominating move, but more of a gentle caress. Light and sweet though still somehow incredibly sensual.

It sent a shock wave through her entire system. Her nipples tingled against the soft material of her cotton dress. She knew both men could probably smell her desire so she hurried from the room. As she strode away she instinctively pulled her sweater tighter around herself. She wasn't cold but it was the only bit of protection she had right now. Thomas was sharp and if he saw the mark on her body he'd ask about it. Of course, that was if he didn't figure out for himself what it was.

Once she was alone in the guest room, she pulled out her throwaway cell phone. She stared hard at it before trying to call her mother one more time.

Her sister answered again on the first ring. "Hello?"

Nissa started to hang up, but stopped. She couldn't run forever. "Why are you answering Mom's phone?"

"Nissa! Where are you? We've been worried sick! Your place has been trashed and you haven't been answering your phone. Where are you calling from? I don't recognize this number." Kassia sounded genuinely worried as she spouted off questions, but Nissa steeled herself against any emotions.

She ignored all her sister's questions. "Why are you answering her phone?"

"Because someone tried to kill her! Most of the Gentry have barricaded themselves in their homes and we've tripled security here."

Nissa's heart thumped wildly against her chest. "Is she okay?"

"She's...resting for now. I'm scared, Nissa." Her voice cracked on the last word.

The tone of her sister's voice set alarm bells off in her head. Kassia rarely worried about anything. Or at least she didn't show it. "What happened?"

"One of the new chefs tried to kill her. He put slivers of pure iron in her food. With her already being so weakened it's amazing she survived at all."

Nissa gripped the phone tighter. "Who did this?"

"We think it's Venetia. She's gone missing and the man who poisoned her had been influenced. The spell was very powerful and I can't imagine who else would be able to wield that kind of energy."

"Venetia," Nissa growled. Why hadn't she thought of her before? Her cousin was a power-hungry dissenter. She'd been causing trouble within the Gentry for the past decade. But she'd never been to her house so Nissa hadn't suspected her of being part of the break-in. If she was determined enough, though, anything was possible.

"A few members of the Gentry have come forward and admitted that Venetia has been trying to start a coup. She wants the throne and she doesn't want the treaty to go through."

Nissa sat on the edge of the bed. "And you don't know where she is?"



"No. Are you sure you're safe?"

Nissa laid back and covered her face with her arm. "Yes. I'm safe," she muttered. As safe as she could be. If anyone could protect her, it was Thomas. She wouldn't have come to see him otherwise. After the attempted attack last night she felt more uneasy than before, but she didn't want to worry her sister. The one thing she did know was that at least Kassia hadn't been behind it. Even if she'd influenced someone into trying to kill her, the spell wouldn't have lasted for the length of time it would take someone to fly from London to Miami. "Can I talk to Mom?"

"Let me check... She's awake. Hold on."

Relief swelled inside Nissa when she heard her mother's voice. After her mother confirmed everything her sister had said, potent relief surged through her. Despite their differences and her mother's almost Draconian view of their laws, she was still her mom. She wasn't sure what was going on with her cousin but she knew she had to get home.

And soon.

The strain in her sister's voice had been apparent, even though she'd tried to hide it. Their mother had been sick for a while and if she'd been poisoned, it was a miracle she was still hanging on.

No matter what else was going on, she had to get to her mother.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thomas stared out at the ocean as if it could somehow give him the answers he wanted. He'd spent the morning with his father and had laid out his intentions to offer to mate with Nissa. Even if she was too good for him, he was too much of a selfish bastard to let her go.

He couldn't let her walk away from him. Especially not after what they'd shared last night. There could never be anyone else for him. Even if he had to give up his position in the pack and move across the ocean, he'd do it.

Hell, he figured it was the only way for them to stay together. Of course, that was if she accepted him. Which was why his father had decided to hold off on naming his replacement. As next in line to be Alpha, he'd have to step down and Nick would likely take his place. Something he knew his brother would hate. But that's the way pack law was sometimes.

The sound of the sliding glass door opening caused him to turn, though he knew who it was before he looked.

Nissa stepped out onto the lanai wearing another one of those silky summer dresses that swayed around her hot body with each step she took. Unfortunately she also wore a sweater, which covered too much skin. Hell, anything covered too much. He wanted her naked and underneath him.

"Hey." She took a tentative step toward him so he moved over on his lounge chair and patted the seat.

"Sit with me."

The elongated chaise lounge was made for one person but he didn't want any space between them. As she started to sit on the edge, he grasped her hand and pulled her into his lap.

Instead of tensing, like he expected, she stretched out on him and settled between his open legs. Turned on her side, she laid her head on his shoulder and began tracing small circles on his chest. Something he remembered her doing when she was nervous.

His cock was rock-hard but there wasn't much he could do about that. If he was honest, he didn't care all that much. It was simply enjoyable to hold her like this. After so many years of missing her, having her in his arms was a small pleasure he'd missed more than he'd admit to anyone.

"What's on your mind?" he murmured against the top of her head and tightened his embrace around her.

She sighed and the sound was so heavy, a band tightened around his chest. "I finally spoke to my sister and mother."

He straightened at her words but didn't lessen his hold. "What did they say?"

"To make a long story short, my cousin Venetia is likely the one behind the attacks. They think she influenced a human to poison my mother and she's probably the one who sent someone after me. The spell cast on the human in my home was strong. Whoever did it has to be a member of the Gentry. My money is on her."

He frowned as he digested her words. "Is your mother okay?"

"I-I don't know. That's what I want to talk to you about. I'll be leaving soon. With my mom sick and Venetia probably stalking me in Miami, I need to get away from here. I'll be going tomorrow morning if I can get a flight."

Full-blown panic set in. It wormed its way directly into his bloodstream and coursed through his system with lava-like intensity. Even if she was leaving to get back to her ailing mother, he felt fucking pathetic. His muscles tightened and he had to fight to breathe at the thought of her gone. "I'm going with you."

She stiffened in his arms and stopped tracing designs on his chest. "Thomas—"

"I'm going, Nissa, so save any argument."

She pushed up to look at him and her blonde hair spilled across his chest. "Don't do this."

He could barely control the anxiety roaring through him. "Do what? Admit that I love you and want to protect you? That I fucked up once and all I can do is promise not to repeat the past? Why won't you let me in your life, Nissa?"

"That's not it!" She shoved up fully now, her eyes blazing. "You're next in line to be Alpha of your pack and I'm next in line to be queen. On what planet could this ever work?"

He started to answer but she continued with her rapid fire argument. "It wouldn't. Even if you decided to give up your life here, you'd *hate* living with me. Treaty or not, my people would *never* accept you. You'd have no friends, no family nearby, and you'd constantly be looking over your shoulder. And when you weren't, I would be. I'd tear

myself up with worry that one day, one of my own people would try to kill you. I'm sorry but I love you too much to put you through that."

The band that had been around his chest for so long snapped. "You love me?" He squeezed the question out.

She pushed out an exasperated sigh. "Did you hear anything I just said?"

"Only the important stuff." If he was with her he didn't give a shit about anything else. Let someone try to come after him. He could handle himself. He'd spent a century without her and it hadn't dulled his love and need for her. Living without her again was a hell of a lot worse than worrying some asshole might try to kill him. "At least let me come back with you to London. You shouldn't be traveling by yourself. Especially not right now." If he managed to convince her to let him travel to London with her to see her mother, he'd never leave. He reached out and fingered a lock of her thick, blonde hair. When he did, he trailed a finger down her cheek.

She closed her eyes at his touch and swallowed hard. "Thomas." The word was barely a whisper.

He'd won. He could feel it straight to his core. She'd let him go with her. Not that it mattered at this point. He'd just follow her either way. Pride be damned.

As he started to lean forward, ready to capture her lips, a loud explosion from the direction of the beach jerked him back.

Nissa whipped around at the sound and started to get up but he grabbed her and rolled her under him on the chair. "Stay here."

He didn't bother to see if she'd obey him. Jumping up, he strode toward the beach with tensed muscles. Flames licked into the sky behind a sand dune but it was obvious someone had torched a few of his Adirondack chairs. If someone had done it to scare him, they'd only succeeded in pissing him off *and* announcing their presence. Yes, this would likely be the fae female after Nissa. Any sane shifter would have crept up on them using more stealth.

Breathing deeply, he scented the air. In addition to the smoldering fire, he scented something or someone foreign. Piney, earthy, with a slight mix of patchouli.

He quickly scanned the area. He didn't see any of his pack nearby but that didn't mean shit. If one of the younger members was out jogging or just playing they could become an unintended target.

Slowly, he took a step back only to run into Nissa.

She sidled up directly next to him, which only infuriated him more. "She's here," Nissa whispered.

His logical side knew she was capable of taking care of herself but his most primal side didn't care. It just wanted her safe. "How do you know?"

"It's got to be her," Nissa murmured as she clutched his arm. "We should go inside."

He ignored her. Running and hiding wasn't in his nature. "Does she smell like patchouli?"

"Yeah, why?"

"She's here then." Stepping in front of Nissa, he began moving back toward the sliding glass door. Their feet were silent against the stone patio but they were in plain view of anyone. He needed to get Nissa to safety then he was going to take care of this problem. "Go inside and call my brothers using my cell."

"But —"

A burst of light flew past them. It crashed through the glass door, sending an explosion of shards flying everywhere. Without pause he grabbed Nissa and practically tackled her. He used his body as a shield and his arms to soften the impact as they slammed against the concrete. They rolled behind one of the stone columns on his porch, blocking them from view.

On instinct, he changed. His inner wolf took over in an instant, ripping his clothes to shreds. With the breaking and shifting of his bones, inescapable pain swelled through

him. His muscles and tendons strained under the pressure. Just as quickly, it subsided as his body realigned.

In his animal state, everything was intensified. The salty ocean was potent but more than that, the danger nearby invaded his senses with perfect clarity. His wolf now associated that patchouli scent with the unknown threat and he knew exactly where it was coming from.

Growling low in his throat, he pawed the stone ground as he looked at Nissa. To his undying relief, she nodded and stayed crouched low.

If she followed him he couldn't focus on what he had to do. Whoever this bitch was, she was going to pay for putting his mate in danger. He and Nissa might not be technically bonded but she was his. Someone was going to suffer for this attack. Not to mention a faerie attacking them on a werewolf's turf so close to the treaty signing was insane. This was the kind of shit that could start another war. That all ended here and now.

With lightning speed he darted behind the next column. Just like vampires, his kind had impressive speed and agility. Since he was a born alpha, he was faster than most.

Peering from around the column, he saw a flash of movement behind one of the lounge chairs lining his Olympic-sized pool. At that moment, he wished it was a little darker. As it was, he didn't have many angles of approach.

Their would-be attacker could obviously harness energy as a weapon but she wasn't very good at controlling it. If she had been, she'd have hit them earlier.

"You stupid whore! I can't believe you're here with a shifter!" The loud voice was definitely female.

Thomas looked toward the other column where Nissa still crouched behind. In his shifted form he could see her wings clearly. She had them pulled in tight against her back. By the tense lines of her body it looked like she might be contemplating doing something stupid.

This non-communication thing sucked. He howled loudly and her gaze snapped in his direction.

"It's Venetia," she whispered.

He knew what she was doing. Her cousin wouldn't be able to hear Nissa and any human wouldn't be able to at the distance they stood, but Thomas' extrasensory abilities were even stronger as a wolf.

"You're both trapped but if you give my whore cousin up, I'll let you live, lycan!"

If he'd been in his human form, he'd have laughed. Drawing on his strength, he darted to the next column. The patio wrapped around the pool in a giant L shape. All he had to do was get to the other side.

Then he'd be able to attack her. Sure he might get zapped, but he was strong enough to withstand more than a few blows.

"Have you lost your mind, Venetia? Trying to kill me and my mother?" Nissa's voice was loud and strong.

*Good, keep the bitch talking.* Thomas lunged toward the other column. Only two more to go.

Then he'd have the crazy faerie in his sights.

"Your mother is too weak to lead and you're just as pathetic. If I'd known you liked to slum it with these animals, I'd have killed you decades ago."

"Even if you kill me, Kassia is next in line, not you."

"She's easily disposable. Your entire family has gotten weak these past few years. You're hurting the Gentry... God, how can you stand the stench of these animals? After what they did to our people?"

Thomas guessed someone she loved had been killed during the Great War. Undeniable pain laced her voice. Even though she was obviously unhinged, Thomas could sympathize with anyone who'd lost family during that time. Hell, if the enforcer

could mate with a half fae, everyone else should be able to get over their own bullshit. The war had ended centuries ago and no one from this generation had started it.

“That was a long time ago,” Nissa called out.

Thomas made it to the next column. He was fast and sometimes indiscernible to the human eye when he moved, but another supernatural being should be able to see him. Not to mention the column didn’t exactly hide all of him in his wolf form and he was a giant black animal. Hard to miss if someone was looking. But so far she hadn’t tried to fire at him again.

Even if she did, her fire wasn’t laced with silver. He’d burn but he’d heal. As he inhaled again, he noticed she was a lot closer than he realized. Peering around the column, he froze for a moment.

She wasn’t hiding behind anything anymore. Standing boldly out in the open, all her attention was solely focused on the column Nissa stood behind. The faerie was tall like Nissa. Maybe a little taller, probably six feet one.

Her long blonde hair was pulled back into two tight braids and she wore a pair of cargo pants and a tight tank top. She looked like a fierce Amazon warrior. In her left hand a flaming red ball of fire hovered. Her entire body was tense, ready to spring.

Thomas crouched back on his haunches. Using all his lower body strength, he darted out from behind the column and lunged.

Gasping, she turned and threw the ball of fire at him. Flames singed the back of his coat as he sailed through the air but it didn’t stop him.

She dodged out of the way as he landed on a solid wood lounge chair. It cracked under the impact but he used it as a springboard.

His front paws slammed square in the middle of her chest, knocking her on her back. A scream tore from her throat and she raised her hand to strike him but he snapped down on her wrist. He tasted blood and felt tiny bones break beneath his grasp.



She screamed again, this time louder and more shrill. When she did, he raised back, ready to tear her head off.

As he went in for the kill, an incredibly powerful gust of wind knocked him off her. He rolled to the side, ready to strike again but stopped when he saw Nissa.

She was the one who'd pushed him off.

With her hands held out in front of her, a bright green flame—the same color as her eyes—burned in both her hands. It was like fire but somehow different. Like pure energy.

Venetia scooted back against the concrete. “No, please don’t—”

But Nissa didn’t listen. Her eyes were glassy as she concentrated on Venetia. Before her cousin finished her plea, the powerful stream of energy burst from Nissa’s hands.

Thomas stared in shock as Venetia turned to stone. She held up her arms as if to protect herself but it was too late. Her body transformed rapidly, posed with an expression of utter anguish.

He snapped his attention to Nissa only to see her collapse into a rumpled heap. Without pause he shifted back to his human form. His muscles and bones strained under the pressure until he found himself on all fours trying to catch his breath. Shoving his discomfort aside, he hurried to Nissa’s side.

Her eyes were closed and her skin unnaturally pale. Lifting her into his arms, he held her tight against him and checked for a pulse. At least her heartbeat was strong. It was a miracle because she looked like death.

“Nissa. Please wake up.” He shook her lightly as he hurried inside, desperate for her to open her eyes. Mindful of the glass shards, he didn’t stop until he’d stretched her out on the center island. Seeing her this way was like déjà vu. Barely half a year ago his friend Paz had been injured and laid out just like this.

But she’d survived.

And Nissa would too. "Nissa, God, please wake up." He cupped her head and held one of her hands.

When she lightly squeezed, some of his panic subsided. But not much. *Wake up, wake up, wake up.* He chanted the words over and over in his head.

Her eyes flew open so suddenly he had to stop from stepping back. "What the hell was that?" The words came out harsher and louder than he intended. He cringed but a ghost of a smile played across her face.

"I didn't have time to warn you. I'm fine, I promise. Just really tired. I'll need to rest for a few hours." She sounded strained as she spoke.

Scooping her up, he headed for the stairs. "What was that?"

"I can only turn other fae to stone. It won't kill her but she'll be stuck like that until I change her back. I'm going to let my mother judge her."

He'd known she was gifted but he'd had no clue what the extent of her powers was. "Why did you collapse? And are sure you're okay?"

There she went with that smile again. Soft and loving, as if she hadn't just turned someone to stone then passed out looking like she had a date with death. "It takes a lot of energy to wield that kind of power. I've only done it once before and I was knocked out for a day. It's not something I can do on a whim."

His throat seized at the thought. If she'd been unconscious for a day he'd have gone absolutely mad. "Then why did you wake up now?"

She frowned for a moment and he saw the moment the answer registered with her. But she shook her head. "I-I don't know."

She was lying. He didn't know why, but he could read it clearly on her face. "Nissa..." He trailed off when her eyes drifted shut again.

Sighing, he laid her on his bed then slid in next to her and pulled her back tight against his chest. He needed to call his Alpha and clean up the aftermath of Venetia's destruction, but right now all he cared about was holding her close.

## **Chapter Seven**

Nissa stirred as she felt the soft brush of something—lips—tease against her neck. With her eyes closed, she smiled. Thomas' spicy, masculine scent was unmistakable. "What are you doing?" she murmured.

"If you have to ask, I must be doing it wrong." His voice was directly next to her ear. He was so close she felt his hot breath caress her skin like a soft breeze. When his teeth tugged her earlobe gently, she didn't bother to bite back a moan. The nip of his teeth made her inner walls clench with need. She desperately wanted to feel him inside her.

The bed dipped and Thomas' hard body stretched out next to hers. When his muscular chest rubbed against her bare arm and the side of her breast, it registered she was naked. She opened her eyes and looked down. "When did you undress me?"

"While you were sleeping." That deep voice should be illegal it was so hypnotic.

She stretched her arms above her head and turned slightly to face him. Lying on his side, one elbow was bent as he propped up and looked down at her.

"Pervert," she said, trying not to smile.

"I never claimed to be otherwise." Pulling the duvet back farther, he placed his big hand on her bare stomach in a proprietary manner. "How do you feel?"

Testing her motor functions, she wiggled her toes and rolled her ankles for a moment. "Fine. Still a little tired though. How long have I been out?" Drapes covered the windows, keeping the room plunged in a muted dimness. She could see it was still light outside, but it was impossible to tell how late it was.

"A few hours." He trailed one of his fingers over her abdomen and teased her bellybutton.

Under his touch, her muscles clenched.

When he ran his finger over the sensitive area above her mound, she tensed even more. She didn't want his finger or much foreplay, she just wanted to feel him inside her.

Spreading her legs in invitation, she started to push the cover completely off when abruptly he stilled.

His hand tightened against her stomach but then he quickly withdrew it. Sighing, he said, "I'm sorry, I know you need to rest."

She might be tired but she was also incredibly turned on. When he started to get up, she reached out for his arm. "Stay with me for a little while?"

With a clenched jaw, he nodded.

She didn't know why he was holding back, but she didn't plan to let him. Turning away from him, she smiled against the pillow as he pulled her tight against his body. She loved the feel of him holding her, didn't know if she'd ever get tired of that strong embrace.

With her marked shoulder against the bed and her hair draped across it, the Celtic marking was hidden. And she didn't think he'd be looking for it anyway. Not when she could practically smell the lust coming off him.

His muscular chest pressed against her back and the feel of his erection was unmistakable. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't deny how much he desired her right now. He only wore a pair of boxers, but he'd taken the privilege of completely undressing her, panties and all.

And she planned to take full advantage of that by teasing him. Wiggling her bottom over his covered erection, her smile grew even wider when he groaned under his breath.

"You okay?" she asked quietly while trying not to laugh.

"Fine." It sounded as if his jaw were wired shut.

One of his hands was thrown across her middle so she placed her own over his. Threading her fingers through his, she slowly slid his hand lower until he cupped her mound.

"Nissa, I'm trying to let you sleep. You've been through a lot." His voice sounded strained even as his middle finger slowly began to rub over her clit.

In response she pushed back against him and didn't bother to keep her movements subtle. She rubbed her butt over his covered erection slowly and seductively. "Take your boxers off."

After a moment, he withdrew his hand. Behind her she could feel him rustling around and knew he was doing as she'd said. While her body mourned the loss of his touch, she smiled in triumph when he pressed up against her and this time all she felt was his hard cock.

She tried to move against him but he placed a dominating hand on her hip. "Don't move, Nissa."

Though her body strained to writhe against him, she did as he said. She was already wet but the underlying note of command in his voice sent another rush of heat between her legs.

She was slick and wet and willing. "Please touch me."

Since she couldn't see him she couldn't be sure, but she thought she felt him smile against her hair.

The firm hand on her hip slid up to her breast and cupped it. But he didn't make an attempt to do anything else. "I *am* touching you," he murmured.

She growled in frustration. "You know what I mean."

"Hmm." He didn't say anything else, just held her like that.

Gritting her teeth, she decided not to give in. Instead she slightly lifted her leg and placed it on top of his. When she did, she opened herself up to him. The head of his cock inadvertently breached her opening.

Barely.

What she wouldn't give to have him push fully inside her.

Thomas chuckled against the top of Nissa's head. "You're an impatient little vixen."

Without warning, he thrust into her. She gasped at the intrusion but he didn't give her time to get used to it. He drove into her again and again. She was slick and tight and he knew it would take all his restraint not to come right away.

The sensation of her clenching around him raced through his entire body, making it difficult for him to think about anything else but her tight sheath.

He actually had to clamp down on the need to come. His balls pulled up so tight it bordered on painful.

Nissa panted and moaned as he thrust in and out of her. Her inner walls clenched tighter and tighter, letting him know how close she was.

Maybe he was being selfish. He knew how tired she was, but he wanted to prolong this. He stopped moving and kept himself buried inside her, all the way to the hilt.

If he could, he'd stay like this for hours, deep in the pure essence of her. Even after the time they'd spent together he kept thinking that somehow this was a really messed-up dream. That Mother Nature was just screwing with him and he was going to wake up and she'd be gone again.

"You're such a tease," Nissa groaned testily.

No, this wasn't a dream. In his dreams Nissa never had an attitude. Which made real life that much better. He loved it when she got feisty with him.

Reaching over her, he began teasing her clit again. She sighed contentedly when he did. "Touch your breasts," he whispered into her ear.

He felt her shudder at his words.

While he tweaked and slowly rubbed his finger over her sensitive bundle of nerves, she cupped one of her breasts.

Thankfully he had excellent vision in the darkness. Despite the dim room he watched as she gently held the perfectly rounded globe. As she started rubbing her thumb over her hardened nipple, he nuzzled her neck. Seeing her like this brought out his most animalistic side.

When he raked his teeth over her sensitive skin, her inner walls tightened around him. The small action made his inner wolf roar. What he wouldn't give to be able to mark her right now.

To sink his teeth into her just enough to claim her. To bond them.

But he couldn't do that. Even if his inner animal wanted to, his human side could never take that choice from her. Things were still too fresh between them. He wanted to take things slower, prove he'd always be there for her.

Then he'd mark her and bind them forever. Everyone would know she belonged to him. And vice versa.

Suddenly her back straightened and she jerked against him. Her climax came fast and hard and was totally unexpected.

Her inner walls clamped around his dick, milking and squeezing him relentlessly. Increasing his rhythm, he rubbed her clit faster. As he did, she shouted out his name. Reaching out, she clawed against the sheet as he slammed into her.

The sound of his name on her lips had always made him crazy. Now was no different.

"Yes, yes." She repeated it as her orgasm rippled through her.

Without giving her time to react he pulled out and flipped her on her back. She opened her mouth but to say what, he'd never know. Slanting his mouth over hers, he pushed into her once again.

Immediately her legs wrapped around his waist.

He increased his rhythm, pumping and pushing until finally he exploded inside her.

As he released into her, he pulled his head back and let out the groan clawing at his throat. Filling her this way gave him a primal satisfaction that almost scared him.

He continued driving into her and she met him stroke for stroke until he collapsed onto his elbows above her.

Smiling, she reached up and cupped his face. The gentle action took him by surprise. The expression in her eyes was filled with satisfaction and happiness, exactly the way she used to stare at him after they'd made love.

His throat clenched, knowing that he'd put that look on her face.

Leaning down, he kissed her again but this time it wasn't hungry or needy. He feathered light kisses all over her face. Her forehead, cheeks, then finally her mouth.

As his tongue danced with hers, his cock started to harden again and her inner walls once again tightened around him.

Chuckling, she pulled back a fraction. "I think I might be too tired," she whispered.

Gently, he withdrew from her and pulled the covers tight around her. But he didn't leave her. He just gathered her in his arms and waited for her to fall asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nissa opened her eyes and stretched her arms above her head. The room was empty and when she rolled over and saw the time, she winced.

It was almost seven. Good Lord, she'd slept most of the day away.

After showering and changing into jeans and a T-shirt, she went in search of Thomas.

In the kitchen she found Caro and a young girl bent over a textbook and open spiral notebook at the center island. She thought she'd met the girl at the party, but couldn't remember her name. Nissa hovered in the doorway as she watched the two of them, unsure if she should interrupt.

Caro looked up first and smiled. "Hey, I was wondering if you'd sleep the whole day through. Thomas told us about what happened."



The giant stone statue outside had probably invited a lot of questions so she didn't blame him. Nissa took a few steps inside. "Hi. Uh, where's Thomas?"

The older woman's smile didn't falter. "Meeting with his father and brothers. Pack business. He left not too long ago so he'll probably be a few hours."

"Do you mind if I grab something to eat?"

Caro laughed at her question. "Athena wanted to do her homework over here and I just wanted to see my nephew. Trust me, you have more business being here than we do. Take whatever you want."

Nissa wasn't sure how to respond so she ignored it and hurried toward the fridge. After losing so much energy earlier she was beyond famished. As she stared at the contents of Thomas' fridge, she couldn't help but overhear Caro and the young girl's conversation. They were talking about perfectly mundane family stuff but it made her ache.

While she loved her mother and sister, they'd never been a particularly warm family. Not even close. After she'd run away—and subsequently met Thomas—her mother had kept a much tighter rein on her. She'd been convinced Nissa needed more discipline in her life.

Sighing, she pulled out a couple containers and peered inside. When all she found was different meat products, she frowned.

"Uncle Thomas probably doesn't have anything you'd like but we can order takeout if you want," the young she-wolf said as she slid her book away from her.

"Athena," Caro murmured, "leave her alone."

"It's fine. I'm sure I'll be able to find something." She smiled reassuringly at the young girl who only blushed and returned to her book.

Nissa slid the containers back into the fridge and ignored the emptiness filling her. The sensation had nothing to do with hunger, either.

It was sadness. Plain and simple.

Thomas' family was hanging out at his house for no other reason than they wanted to spend time with him. No one in her family ever simply stopped by. And she didn't either. Her family always called first and there was usually a purpose to the visit. Never just to say hi.

It made the differences between their families suddenly and blindingly clear. What had she been thinking? She'd known from the start this could never work.

Swallowing back the lump in her throat, she mumbled an excuse and hurried back to her room. Since she hadn't technically unpacked, it didn't take long to gather her things.

No matter what Thomas said, she couldn't stay here and she couldn't drag him back to Europe with her. His family meant too much to him.

It was so obvious. No matter what he said she couldn't tear him away from his pack. They were the only family he'd ever known and the thought of bringing him to meet and live with her distant family was almost laughable.

If it wasn't so heartbreaking.

She had to get out of here before Thomas came back. No way would she be able to go through with this in front of him. Fighting back tears, she fished out her cell phone and called a taxi company. Leaving this way would piss Thomas off but in the end he'd thank her. Maybe not now, but eventually he'd get over this and realize how right she was.

Love and attraction weren't enough sometimes. Not when the real world was glaring so bright in her face. Besides, real love shouldn't result in making her mate sad or endanger his life.

Cutting ties now would be so much easier than dealing with years and years of resentment. In the end, she knew that's what would happen.

When the taxi company told her they could pick her up in twenty minutes, she allowed herself a small moment of relief. By the time she got to the airport and left,

Thomas would just be getting home. She'd be able to send someone to pick up Venetia later so that wasn't even an issue.

Hating herself for leaving this way, she quickly wrote him a note, then fled the house like a thief in the night. She knew it was totally the coward's way out but the thought of facing him and having *the* conversation with him was too much. At least this way she wouldn't have to take the memory of another argument with her. Or the agony in his expression before she walked away.

Not that the knowledge was much of a consolation. Her heart was shredded to ribbons at the thought of never seeing Thomas again.

## **Chapter Eight**

### *Two Weeks Later*

Nissa smoothed her hands down her black pants as she exited the elevator to the fourth floor of the designated building for the treaty meeting. They'd picked New York City as their destination and chosen neutral ground in the form of a perfectly bland office building. Located in the middle of Manhattan, it was owned by humans none of them knew. Despite the cool temperature in the hallway, her palms were clammy.

Today was the day.

With her mother dead, she was the interim queen and would soon be meeting with The Council. Technically only two out of the eight Council members would be at the meeting, but they'd been permitted to bring Alphas from four of the strongest packs. That meant Thomas' father would be at the meeting. Hence her ridiculously damp palms. She was so ashamed at the way she'd left Thomas, then ignored all his attempts to contact her.

"You okay?" her sister whispered as she gave her hand a small squeeze.

Swallowing hard, she flicked a quick glance in Kassia's direction but she was mindful of the six other Gentry members walking with them. She couldn't appear weak in front of them or she'd have to deal with the fallout later. Even if she hated all this political crap it was unfortunately her life now. "Of course."

But she wasn't. Nausea swirled inside her mercilessly. She'd skipped breakfast in lieu of three cups of steaming hot, black coffee. Now the bitter liquid swirled around in her stomach like acid.

After the way she'd sneaked out of Thomas' house in the middle of the night weeks ago, the thought of seeing anything or anyone related to him made her shiver. Her

traitorous nipples hardened at the thought of his callus-roughened hands or sensuous mouth teasing them.

He'd been so insistent that everything between them would work out and he'd make a place in her life but she knew better. Instead of arguing or dragging things out, she'd simply left. Yes, she was the worst kind of coward but she'd needed to get to her dying mother and she hadn't had the energy to go up against a dominating man like Thomas.

And no matter what he said, she couldn't allow him to suffer throughout the rest of their life together. She loved him too much and she knew he'd eventually resent her for taking him away from his family. His resentment would be worse than anything.

She steeled herself as one of her men opened the heavy oak door to the conference room. Entering before her sister, she nearly stumbled in her heels but thankfully caught herself.

Thomas sat at the table with five other shifters. And they were all hulking. No wonder her people had lost the war all those centuries ago. All these men were giant predators.

Her throat tightened as his dark eyes narrowed on her. Oh yeah, he was pissed. Beyond angry. And she didn't blame him.

Forcing herself to breathe, she looked at the two Council members she'd held a video conference with the week before and smiled at them. "Gentlemen, it's nice to finally meet you in person."

Both Adama and Brenner nodded politely at her as they stood. "Nissa," Brenner said first. Then he motioned toward the other males. "This is Calder, Haki, Isandro, and you've already met Thomas. We heard about what happened with your cousin and since the Lazos pack gave you protection, we granted the request that Thomas come in place of his father even though he is not yet an Alpha. We hope this is acceptable?"

She nodded stiffly. "Of course. My people are very grateful for the protection afforded me by the Lazos pack." Nissa couldn't believe her voice didn't shake. Her

insides felt like jelly yet somehow she managed to sound completely unaffected. Or maybe that was just wishful thinking on her part.

At her words the two Council members visibly relaxed. One of them motioned toward the seats across from them at the long, rectangular table. "If you're ready to start, we are."

Gratefully she took a seat and barely refrained from collapsing onto it. Her sister and four of her men sat, but two stood back guarding the door.

Brenner lifted a briefcase from the floor and spread a handful of papers on the table.

Even though she was doing her best to avoid looking at Thomas, she could feel his heat-seeking gaze searing into her. Her underarms dampened and beads of sweat popped up across her forehead. Inwardly cursing him for being here, she slipped off her slim-fitting, two-button jacket.

As she turned to drape it across the back of her chair, her sister gasped. Nissa's back went ramrod straight as she swiveled back to face the shifters.

Under the table, Kassia grasped her leg in a death grip. "You have the bondmate mark? When did this happen?" she whispered.

Gritting her teeth, she slightly shook her head. The shifters could all hear her no matter how quiet she tried to be. "Not now," she said through gritted teeth. She'd been wearing sweaters and jackets the past couple weeks. *How could she have been so stupid?* She wanted to put her jacket back on, but couldn't without looking obvious or crazy.

But her sister didn't listen. "I didn't know you'd *bonded* with anyone. Holy shit, Nissa. *Who?*" Her voice was so low Nissa could barely hear her, but she knew the others across the table could. Even if they pretended to ignore them, they'd just heard every single word.

Thomas loudly and obnoxiously cleared his throat. "Permission to speak, Council?"

The two older wolves looked at each other, then him curiously, before nodding.

"I thought the queen was to be married soon. I'm just curious where her mate is. If we're all signing this treaty shouldn't *he* be here?" The others might have missed it but the slight cut of sarcasm wasn't lost on her. Neither was the heated stare he sent her way.

"Nissa will not be taking a mate anytime in the near future. She's called off her impending nuptials," one of her councilors answered for her.

"Then why does she bear the bonding mark on her shoulder?" His question silenced the entire room.

She could feel everyone's eyes on her but she kept her gaze trained on Thomas. "How is that important to this meeting?" To her horror, her voice shook.

He paused for a moment, as if weighing his words. "If you're mated we should know his politics and views on shifters. We have a right to know who he is."

Brenner, Adama, and the three other Alphas nodded and murmured their agreement.

Traitorous tears pricked her eyes. She couldn't answer him in front of everyone. How could he do this to her now? Embarrass her like this? She would not cry in front of all these people. Her mother would have never showed such emotion. Or any emotion at all. Neither would her sister. More proof she was just an imposter and had no business as queen. Feeling sick, she abruptly stood. "If you'll excuse me for a moment, I need to confer with my sister."

Let them all think what they wanted. She needed to get the hell away from him so she could think straight. Or simply breathe. As she strode down the hallway she felt Kassia fast on her heels.

She turned to speak to her, but came face to face with Thomas instead.

"Where the hell are you going?" he growled.

Without looking at him, she tried to yank away, but he just pulled her tighter against him until she was flush against the length of his body and there was nowhere for her to run.

"Hey!" Kassia shouted from down the hall as she raced toward them. "Get your paws off her."

Nissa held up her free hand. "It's fine."

"Damn right it's fine," Thomas muttered. He glanced around, then dragged her toward another door. They'd rented the entire floor but she didn't like being manhandled.

"Get your hands off me." She tried to pull away but he only released her once he'd dragged her into another bare room with the same style conference table as the one they'd been in.

"You're mated?" His words were a low, feral growl.

*He didn't realize it was him.* She didn't know if she should be relieved or not. "What do you know about my kind's mating rituals?"

"I heard what your sister whispered to you. You've become fucking *mated* in the past two weeks? How could you do this to me? *To us?*" His voice rose with each word and he advanced on her fast.

Retreating, she kept going until the backs of her legs hit the table. He just kept coming until he caged her in. "Who is he?"

She couldn't hold his dark gaze. Looking at his chest, she bit her bottom lip. He was already pissed and she knew he'd freak when she admitted the truth.

"Who. Is. He." His angry words sent a chill through her. She'd never heard this particular tone from him before and it actually frightened her.

"Why?" Anything to delay the inevitable.

"Because I'm going to kill him." He breathed out the threat so low she wasn't sure she'd heard him right.



"You don't mean that."

His jaw ticked and he still didn't back up to give her space. "Why'd you bond with someone else, Nissa?" Raw pain laced his words and she realized he truly had no clue about the fae's mating process.

"The fae don't have a choice who our bondmates are. Mates, yes, if we so choose. But we can technically leave—or divorce—our mates. With bondmates, there's no choice." She turned slightly to the side and pushed her hair out of the way to reveal the small Celtic knotting symbol on her shoulder. "This happens once we bond with our destined mate. I didn't have a choice."

He glared at her shoulder. "You chose to fuck him though, didn't you?"

She almost jerked back at his words, but more than anger, she could actually feel his physical pain. Reaching out, she placed a light hand on his chest. Despite the tension in the air, she felt the overwhelming need to soothe him. He tensed but surprisingly didn't pull away. She racked her brain, trying to find the right words. There weren't any so she just blurted it out. "This is from you, Thomas. I got this after we made love."

"You haven't been with anyone else?"

She shook her head.

A ragged sigh tore from him and he cursed under his breath. For a moment he just stared at her. "Why didn't we..." He trailed off as if answering his own question. "We didn't bond before because I never came inside you."

Still afraid her voice would shake, she simply nodded at his words.

Relief filled his expression but just as quickly a frown marred his face as he stared at her. "Did you know we'd bond?"

Her eyes widened. "Of course not."

"But you left Miami *knowing* we were bonded." It wasn't a question.

"Yes." Even if she wanted to, she couldn't deny the obvious.

"Why'd you leave without even a fucking goodbye then? And that letter was pathetic." The words came out raspy and angry.

Shame filled her because he was right. She should have stayed and stood her ground, but deep down she hadn't been sure she could actually leave him. The most selfish part of her wanted to bring him home with her but it wouldn't have been fair to him. "Because I don't want you to give up your life and family for me. You'd eventually resent living with me and constantly looking over your shoulder."

"Don't you have any faith in this treaty?"

"Of course I do. But being mated to the queen—before or after the treaty—would make you a constant target."

"So *you're* a constant target?"

"Sort of. I mean, not always, but if Venetia's attack on me is any example, do you really want that kind of life?"

"I want the choice, Nissa. And I choose you."

Her throat tightened. "What about your family? I see how close you are to them."

"You'll be my family. I'm a big boy, Nissa, and I know what being away from them will mean. I still choose *you*."

Unbidden tears rolled down her cheeks. Even though she tried, she couldn't control them. Why did he have to say the perfect thing?

"Ah, shit." He reached up and cupped her face, using his thumbs to brush away the wetness. When his lips pressed softly against her cheeks, she shut her eyes tight and tried to pull away. To block him out.

"Why do you have to say all the right things, Thomas?" she muttered.

He ignored her attempts and wrapped his arms around her waist. When he did, she gave in and laid her head against his chest. She savored his strength and warmth.

His chin rested on top of her head as he stroked her hair and down her back. "Were you ever going to tell me we'd bonded?"

She was silent, not wanting to admit the truth.

He sighed against her. "It's okay, I'd have found out anyway. The world is only so big and I'd have found you wherever you went. I'm not letting you – *us* – go that easily, sweetheart, so get used to having me in your life."

She smiled against his chest, but didn't respond.

"How...have you been since your mother's death?"

*Awful.* She shrugged instead of telling him the truth. "I haven't had much time to mourn. There's been too much to do." Political, mind-numbing stuff she had no interest in. But duty required it.

As if he read her mind, he said, "Do you even *want* to be queen?"

Pulling back slightly, she looked at him and shook her head. "No." Not even a little bit. Being queen had never been her dream. She was an artist and that's all she'd ever wanted to be. Even that aspect of herself she'd hidden from most of her people.

"Then why don't you step down?" His gravelly voice wrapped around her, sending delicious shivers rolling through her.

"I don't have a choice."

"You *always* have a choice." His heated statement made her head snap back.

"You don't –"

"Understand? I'm stepping down as next in line to be Alpha of my pack, Nissa. I do understand. Don't force yourself into a life you don't want. I'll be happy anywhere I'm with you, but will you be happy as queen?"

No. Actually, it was a big, fat no. She hadn't even been able to judge her cousin. That had been handled by her mother. The last order she'd given had been for the statue of Venetia to be destroyed. Nissa knew her mother had wanted her to give the order but sentencing someone to death—no matter how evil—wasn't something she wanted to live with.

Nissa had hated every single day of the last two weeks and not because she'd been separated from Thomas or because she'd been mourning her mother. Where her sister took to politics like a fish to water, she felt wildly out of place in all the meetings and dealing with the Gentry and their petty demands. She missed her quiet townhome in Dublin, she missed painting, she missed her peaceful Sunday mornings, and more than anything she missed Thomas.

"You make it sound so easy," she whispered.

"It is easy." He lowered his voice to a dark whisper at the same time he bent his head.

His lips covered hers in a hungry fervor. As their tongues danced and intertwined, a loud bang sounded on the door.

"Nissa? Are you okay?" It was Kassia.

"Go away!" Thomas shouted and she didn't stop him.

It was the wrong time and totally inappropriate but she didn't care. She'd never thought of herself as animalistic but at that moment she embraced her most primal side.

She desperately needed to feel Thomas inside her. Needed to feel his hot, naked skin against hers.

And she wanted him to mark her, to take her the way she'd fantasized about for decades.

Arching her back against him, she scooted back on the table and spread her legs wider before wrapping them around him.

Thomas' breathing was erratic as he looked down at her. "Why didn't the bonding mark appear on my shoulder?"

"I have no idea," she said truthfully. It could be because he was a shifter or it could be because they hadn't undergone the fae's traditional bonding ceremony. Or more likely, it could be because he hadn't marked her. There was no science to this and it was

a mystery that a full-blooded fae had bonded with a full-blooded werewolf in the first place.

"Will it eventually?"

"Does it matter?" she whispered.

"I want it." His voice was just as low as hers.

The admission surprised and touched her. She'd expected him to be adverse to the marking. Before she could respond, he kissed her again. This time it was deeper and there was nothing tender about it. This kiss was a soul-searching, primitive one that took her breath away.

Clutching his shoulders, she used him to balance as she tightened her legs around him even harder.

His hands slid under her silky sleeveless top and gently held her breasts. He pulled the cups of her bra down and lightly rubbed her nipples in a teasing, erotic manner.

Feeling like an animal in heat, she arched and writhed harder against him. Her inner walls clenched and heat built low in her belly with the need for him to fill her. She wanted his cock to slide deep into her. Was dying to feel that thickness already.

When she felt her shoulder tingle and almost burn, she knew this time they'd complete the bonding process.

Thomas jerked his head back abruptly, leaving her dazed.

"What?" Her gaze narrowed on him.

"I can feel my canines extending."

"What's the problem?"

"I'm ready to mount and mark you," he muttered, sounding disgusted with himself.

She blinked once. "Don't you want..." She trailed off, not understanding.

"I want to mark you so much I ache, but I'm not going to take you on a conference table with a dozen people waiting next door."

"I don't care."

"I do."

Before she could respond the door swung open and Kassia stormed in. Her sister faltered as she stared at the two of them. Whatever her sister thought about them, it was obvious their embrace was mutual.

Nissa's hands still dug into his shoulders and Thomas' hands were shoved high up her top.

"Shit," Kassia muttered. Instead of leaving, she popped her head back out. "We'll just be a moment." Then she shut it and leaned against it. Her green eyes were almost a mirror of Nissa's, just a little darker. Right now they were wide with shock. "I take it you and Thomas are more than just 'friends'?"

Nissa nodded and fought the heat creeping across her cheeks. She'd lied to her sister about why she'd gone to Miami for his protection. "Yes."

Her blonde eyebrows arched. "So is this who you bonded with?"

"Yes."

Kassia shook her head, sending her long blonde hair swishing around her shoulders. "Holy shit. I didn't even think that was possible."

"Well it is," Thomas growled.

Kassia held up her hands in a gesture of mock surrender. "I don't care who or what you are as long as you treat my sister right. If that ever changes, I'll kill you myself."

At the deadly edge in her sister's voice, Nissa glared. Kassia was definitely the stronger of the two, at least physically. Her sister had trained with the fae warriors from a young age. Since she was royalty she'd never been inducted into the private sect. And Nissa didn't like anyone threatening her mate, no matter how harmless. "Stop it, Kas."

Ignoring her, Kassia sauntered over to the table and leaned against it. "Think you two could untangle for a few minutes so we can talk?"

Thomas actually looked uncomfortable for a moment as he glanced down at their bodies. Withdrawing his hands, he smoothed her top down but didn't move far out of her embrace. Nissa tried to subtly adjust her bra but finally gave up the pretense and pushed the cups back into place. Thomas threw an arm around her shoulder as they turned to face Kassia.

"Everyone's getting a little restless in the other room. Is this treaty still going to happen?" Kassia looked back and forth between the two of them with raised eyebrows.

Nissa nodded as she melded tighter against Thomas. "Yes, but —"

"You don't want to be queen?" Kassia finished.

Her shoulders relaxed. "Not even a little bit."

"I know. I've known for a while."

"Why didn't you ever say anything?"

Her shoulders lifted slightly. "I'm the youngest. It's not my place."

"So...*you* want to be queen?"

Kassia nodded tightly. "Yes. So many changes need to be made right now and I don't want to miss an opportunity to bring true peace between our kinds. I think I could implement..." She trailed off, suddenly looking unsure of herself. "I don't mean to speak out of place."

Shrugging off Thomas' embrace, Nissa stepped forward and grasped her sister's hands. "You're not. I've always admired how well you stand up to the Gentry and immerse yourself in our politics. Sometimes I feel guilty because all of it doesn't mean more to me."

"Well you'll be taking a big step toward bringing our races together by bonding with him." She nodded slightly back toward Thomas. "A member of the royalty bonding with an alpha is the perfect alliance to solidify this treaty."

A ghost of a smile touched Nissa's lips. "Always the diplomat."

Kassia smiled and blushed. "I can't help it."

“What do you think the councilors will say?”

“I think they already have a pretty good idea what was going on in here between you two and truthfully, I think the only thing anyone cares about is having this treaty signed *today*.”

“Do you want to sign it?” Nissa asked.

Kassia jerked back slightly. “I have no right.”

Nissa slid off the ornate, platinum ring her mother had given her. The marquis-cut emerald stone in the middle of it twinkled brightly under the fluorescent lights of the room. There would be an official induction ceremony later – probably as soon as Kassia returned to London – but all she truly needed was the ring. It signified her role as leader and truthfully, she didn’t need the ring anyway. Nissa, the Gentry and Nissa’s own councilors usually looked to Kassia for important matters. Just like their mother, she had a gift for diplomacy and could make those impossible decisions without questioning herself later. She was a lot harsher, more Draconian in her views of the world than Nissa, but most of the fae were. Placing the ring in her sister’s palm, she closed Kassia’s fingers over it. “You do now.”



## **Chapter Nine**

Thomas wiped sweaty palms on his pants as he ascended the stairs. He was almost two hundred years old and he'd made love to this woman countless times. When he closed his eyes at night, her naked body was what he dreamed about.

But this time was definitely going to be different. Shifters were very superstitious and if the bonding didn't go right, it could set the tone for their whole relationship.

On a logical level he knew it was bullshit, but his inner wolf was terrified he'd fuck this up and Nissa would leave again.

It didn't matter that she'd practically moved in with him. After the treaty signing she'd opted to return with him instead of going home. She'd promised her sister she'd return to London for the official induction ceremony and then she wanted to head to Dublin to spend a couple weeks packing up her stuff—and he planned to be right by her side the entire time. Partially to ensure her safety, but mainly because he loved her.

Until then, she was living under his—their—roof. Somehow he'd forced himself to keep his hands off her since they'd gotten back from New York. It had only been a few hours but it felt like an eternity.

Part of him still feared this was a dream. Until he marked her, he feared that feeling wouldn't go away.

When he pushed the door to his bedroom open, he froze at the sight before him.

Nissa sat up on her knees in the middle of his bed wearing nothing but a seductive smile.

His heart actually stuttered as he drank in the sight of her. With her silky blonde hair spilling over her breasts she looked like Aphrodite come to life. Only more beautiful. Those perfect pink nipples were rock-hard and begging for him to touch and kiss.

As his gaze tracked down the flat planes of her abdomen to the soft patch of blonde hair covering her pussy, he could feel his canines throb. His abdomen muscles pulled taut and his arms tightened as he clenched his fists to keep steady. The instinctive need to mark her was overwhelming.

Her long, lean arms rested gracefully against her sides. When she twisted her hands nervously in front of her he realized he'd been staring too long.

Quickly he averted his eyes to hers. "You're so fucking beautiful." Immediately he cringed. He'd wanted to be smoother, more charming and he wasn't off to a great start.

When her lips pulled up into a smile some of his apprehension faded. "You don't look so bad yourself."

For the past few hours he'd been dealing with unavoidable pack business but all he'd been thinking about was getting back to Nissa. He hadn't expected her to be waiting for him like this. He'd known tonight was "the night", but damn.

This was the best way to come home. "How long have you been waiting like this?"

"You'd like me to say hours, wouldn't you?" Her nose crinkled as she laughed lightly. "I heard you downstairs so..." She placed her hands on her hips and her green eyes brightened as she looked him over. "You're wearing too many clothes." The sudden, sensual drop in her voice made him ache.

Without wasting time he stripped off his polo shirt, shoved his jeans down and stepped out of them. He wasn't wearing any boxers. With Nissa living here now, it seemed pointless.

As he strode toward her, her gaze zeroed in on his rigid cock. When she licked her lips, he groaned. The sight of her running her tongue over her pink lips brought back too many memories of her licking and sucking his cock.

But that wasn't going to happen tonight. At least not at first.

Tonight he had to claim her. If he waited any longer he felt as if he'd combust.

Once he'd had his fill of her a few hours from now, maybe he'd be able to think straight again. Right now his inner wolf was howling in demand that he mark his mate. "On your back."

She looked surprised at his abrupt demand but she quickly complied. Soon he'd have her on her stomach and he'd be driving into her but for now he needed to taste her.

Spread out on his dark sheets, her golden hair was a sharp contrast. Since it was night, the drapes were wide open and the moonlight streaming in was their only source of illumination.

It bathed the bed and her in a soft bluish glow. Thanks to his extrasensory abilities the effect made her eyes that much brighter and intense.

He could drown in that gaze if he let himself. Right now he didn't actually care if he drowned in Nissa's arms. All he wanted was to wrap himself up in her and never let go.

As she lay before him, her thighs fell open invitingly. Lifting one of her legs, he pressed a kiss to her inner ankle. When he did, she shuddered lightly and an unexpected tremble rolled through his own body. It was as if he could actually feel her pleasure curling through him.

Moving a couple inches higher, he scraped his teeth over her calf then followed with his tongue. Blowing on the moist area earned him a moan at the same time a potent burst of lust rolled off her. He remembered exactly what turned her on. Since the bottom of her feet had always been sensitive, he lightly massaged her instep with his hand as he continued tracking kisses along her leg.

Her desire was stronger than anything he'd ever scented. Unlike his kind she never masked her need and he loved that. All her emotions and hungers were right on the surface.

Her fingers tightly clutched the sheet underneath her as he trailed higher. As soon as he reached her inner thigh he was nearly bowled over by her sweet scent. Clenching his jaw tightly, he paused and tried to rein his inner wolf back in.

He wanted her panting and pliant and so fucking needful for him all she could think about was that final release. He couldn't just pound into her like he wanted. It took all his control to stop at her thigh then start on her other leg.

When he kissed her other ankle, she arched her back and moaned lightly. "Why do you have to keep teasing me?"

Breathing heavily, he paused and tried to find his voice. "After I'm inside you I'll be staying there for a long time. This is all the foreplay you're getting tonight, Nissa." Even to his own ears his voice was raspy and uneven.

A mischievous smile played across her face as he ran his tongue along the inside of her other leg, up toward where he planned to bury first his tongue and then cock for hours.

His hips jerked at the thought. It was taking all his strength not to flip her over and start pounding into her from behind. Sometimes his wolf and human side played havoc in his head and now was one of them.

As he moved higher, her hands splayed across her stomach then gently cupped her breasts. His throat tightened as he watched her. Slowly, seductively, she began strumming her nipples with her thumbs.

When she pushed the soft mounds together and began caressing herself more insistently, he didn't hold back anymore.

Burying his face between her legs, he stroked his tongue along her pussy lips. Tasting her sweet essence, he licked and laved relentlessly. A low growl tore out of him. As he delved deeper into her core she moved against his face and moaned her excitement.

For a moment her legs squeezed around his head but when he started to pull back they loosened almost instantly.

He knew she was getting worked up and forcing herself to relax. In a hundred years, some things still hadn't changed, especially her sensitivity and reactions.

Tall, lean and so hot she made him ache, the woman was like a box of TNT.

Utterly combustible.

Slowing his strokes to drag out her pleasure, he shifted until his tongue zeroed in on her clit. All it took was one flick of his tongue and she jolted against him. Smiling, he added pressure and began sweeping over it in a rhythmic dance.

Her fingers tunneled into his hair and held his head tight. As she dug in, her breathing became more shallow and unsteady.

The sweetness of her arousal was stronger. And her hips were writhing faster and faster against him.

She was close.

He could feel it. And he didn't want her coming until he was buried deep inside her.

Abruptly he pulled his head back.

"Wha—"

She didn't get to finish. Roughly he grabbed her hips and flipped her over. Immediately, and before he had a chance to do anything, she wordlessly stretched her arms up on the bed and pushed her ass back toward him. Part of her hair spilled down like a silky curtain. It highlighted the long lines of her back, the sleek bands of muscle outlining her spine.

The action was so submissive it made his inner wolf absolutely crazy. Seeing her splayed out like this was his darkest fantasy come true. Taking her this way and finally being able to mark her made something deep inside him howl with satisfaction.

Shuddering, he ran his palm along the curve of her spine and down until he cupped one of her firm cheeks.

She tensed under him but only for a moment. He slid both his hands back up her sides and waist until he reached under her and cupped her breasts.

Leaning forward, he pressed lingering kisses along her back as he fondled and massaged her hardened nipples. She moaned at his teasing and began rubbing her ass against his cock.

He moaned in turn but didn't give in yet. He wanted her worked up and ready to come when he finally pushed into her.

As she continued squirming, he continued his stroking. Trailing one hand between her breasts and down her stomach, he didn't stop until he cupped her mound.

Using his middle finger he lightly rubbed over her clit. Her moans turned to incomprehensible mumblings and he knew she was ready.

Without giving her warning, he fisted her hips roughly in a dominant grip and plunged into her.

She gasped and her sheath tightened around him with no mercy. As he pulled out then slammed into her again, he felt his right shoulder start to burn.

*The bonding symbol.*

He knew he shouldn't care whether it appeared on him or not but his basest side desperately wanted it. Satisfaction roared through him as the burn spread, heightening his gratification. He wanted her mark as much as he wanted to mark her pale, soft skin.

Her inner walls clenched tighter around him. The sudden fluttering was his sign she was ready to come. Grasping her hips tighter, he knew he was going to leave bruises. Some logical part of his brain told him to ease off but he couldn't hold back. Not now.

"Come for me, Nissa." Command saturated his voice and he knew it would push her over the edge.

It always did.

Feisty as she was, she loved to be dominated. Nissa's back arched as she clutched the sheets underneath her. He could feel her slickness and climax as she found her release.

His own orgasm was a loud drumroll in his head. "If you want to back out say it." Somehow he managed to growl the words. His inner wolf shouted at him to shut the hell up but he needed to make sure she wanted his marking.

"Want...this," she panted as he continued to pummel into her in a barely controlled frenzy.

God, yes. He'd been waiting over a century to hear those words.

His canines lengthened fully. Bending slightly, he reached under her and palmed her stomach. After he lifted her to meet him, he scraped his teeth against the side of her neck.

Hard enough to break the skin and mark her forever. When he punctured her sensitive neck she let out a low yelp but arched again and he could feel her inner walls contract even harder.

That's all it took for his own control to snap. The orgasm ripped from him violently and he didn't bother trying to rein in his shout. Shuddering, he emptied himself as she continued milking and taking everything from him.

After what felt like an eternity he finally forced his hips to still and gentled his grip. He'd been blindly thrusting into her even after he'd climaxed. His cock didn't want to leave her warm embrace.

Nissa's head was bent forward against the bed, laying in between her outstretched arms. While he could watch her in that submissive position forever, he needed to take care of her.

As he pulled out of her, he reached under her and gently rolled her onto her back. She smiled at him as he stretched out next to her. Before she could say anything, he leaned forward and nuzzled her neck where the tiny markings were. "Did I hurt you?"

"Hmm, a very good hurt," she murmured as she threw a leg and arm across him.

Wordlessly she reached over his shoulder and gently circled his new bonding mark. The subtle action sent an unexpected punch of pleasure through his entire system.

His cock started to throb again and he just gritted his teeth. It would be a little while before she was ready for more. As he pulled her close and stroked a gentle hand down her back, another thought occurred to him. If he had the same bonding mark as her it stood to reason she'd likely acquire some of his gifts.

Both his brothers could communicate telepathically with their mates but he wasn't sure if he and Nissa could since she was full-blooded fae. Since her eyes were closed he decided to go for it.

*Are you hungry or thirsty?* he projected with his mind.

"I don't know how you can even think about food," she muttered.

It soothed him to know they were true mates in every sense of the word. He didn't laugh out loud but she must have heard his laughter in her head because she opened her eyes and regarded him curiously. "What's so funny?"

*Looks like you're not going to be able to keep secrets from me anymore.*

Her eyes widened for a fraction of a second but just as quickly she grinned. *That works both ways, buddy.*

His heart stuttered at her contented smile. She was like a miracle to him. After all the time they'd been separated he didn't want to keep anything from her ever again and he was relieved she felt the same. All that mattered was that they'd finally found their way back to each other's arms again. He knew they'd likely face prejudices and danger again because of their union but as long as they were together, they could handle anything.



## About the Author

Savannah Stuart has been reading romance for as long as she can remember but she didn't always know she wanted to be a writer. After graduating with a degree in psychology and working too many jobs she hated, she finally figured things out. When she discovered erotic romance, she knew she'd found her niche. Her stories have a touch of intrigue, suspense or the paranormal, but the one thing she always includes is a happy ending.

She lives in the south within walking distance of the beach with her very own real-life hero, their dog and a couple of turtles who have adopted them.

Savannah welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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