



## *Of Wolf's Blood*

**Book One of the Vampire Domination Series**

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Amira Press  
Charlotte, NC 28227  
[www.amirapress.com](http://www.amirapress.com)

ISBN: 978-1-936279-80-7

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## Prologue

*Simone ducked just in time to dodge her sister's blow to the jaw. Seeing an opening, she delivered a powerful punch to Selena's midsection, which knocked the woman against a large tree, almost splitting it in half.*

*"You cannot escape your destiny, Simone. I won't allow it!" Selena rose and huffed in a fit of anger, and her breath formed billowy puffs in the crisp night air. "How can you deny us? You're nothing more than a traitor!"*

*"I'm not like you—or the others," Simone bit out. She watched as her twin sister's chest heaved uncontrollably. Selena's body shook in pure anger, and the evil vibrations emanating from her were almost too much for Simone's psyche to endure. She pitied her sister. The black aura surrounding her was proof of her allegiance with darkness. She could barely stand to be in the midst of her clan because of their greed and insatiable lust for power; therefore, she always knew when a clan member was near. The tingling sensation up and down her spine was a warning.*

*Every member had to face the inevitable—forced to choose between good and evil in their twenty-first year. Those with pure hearts who were strong enough to withstand the temptation were killed by clan members who willingly turned their lives over to the dark side. This last feat was to prove worthy of darkness, by taking a pure life. Along with this choice also came the horrific physical transformation.*

*"Let me go, Selena! This isn't what I want! Why can't you see that, or are you too far gone? By the gods, I'm your sister!"*

*Selena pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes. "Yes, we are sisters. We are like Fire and Water!" She glowered at Simone momentarily. "I want you to rule by my side and conquer those who are weak, even those who are strong, but I will need all resources. That's where you come in, Sis! I cannot do this without you!"*

*Simone shook her head. "I wish to coexist outside the clan. I want a normal life, not one such as this!"*

*A horrific smile curved Selena's lips. "Think about it! Paranormal creatures no longer have to live among the humans! We are free to show our true nature! The vampires dominate the humans; why can't we?" Selena's eyes darkened. "Together, we can wipe out the top covens, and I'll show you power you've never known!"*

*She paused before speaking. "You have my answer. I will speak no more of this madness." Simone chose her fighting stance. "We'll fight to the death." She felt the wind shift as loneliness and anger permeated the atmosphere. Selena threw her head back and screamed in the night, in a fit of rage.*

*"Mother and Father clung to the same weakness as you." A black mask of evil erupted over Selena's face, and she smiled grotesquely. "That's why I had to put them both down!"*

*A large knot formed in the back of Simone's throat, and pain drilled into her chest at learning the truth after many years. "You!" Rage coursed through the young woman like a locomotive. "You killed them!"*

*"Oh, Simone," her sister clucked. "They did not want to live in this world. I set them free, darling. Don't worry, though. I ripped their throats out without much difficulty." Her sister smirked. "They were sleeping. I don't think they felt a thing."*

*"Bitch!" The overwhelming grief dulling her instincts, Simone released a blood-curdling scream while charging her sister. Although seeing red at this moment, deep down she knew Selena had done this to her purposefully, knocking her off balance in an effort to make her endure these feelings of despair in hopes she'd choose darkness.*

*She was snatched back into reality as her sister gripped her around the neck, then flung her into the air, and finally slammed her into the frozen earth. The urge to surrender bubbled within Simone as Selena placed a boot-clad foot against her windpipe. Perhaps this would be the last night of her life.*

*Selena looked down at her pitifully. "You're so pathetic, but rest assured, I won't kill you on this night. Know this, though. In one year's time I will come after you with all that I have if you do not join forces with me and our clan. You must come willingly!" With a smirk, she pressed the sole of her foot harder against Simone's windpipe, causing her to thrash. She released the boot with a cruel laugh. "By the gods, I could kill you so easily!" Selena removed her foot with a smile. "I'm sorry. Is there something you wish to say?"*

*Simone sat up choking as her sister slowly backed up toward the forest. "You can't dominate what will cease to exist," she coughed out bitterly as a plan quickly formed in her head. She winced at Selena's harsh push against her psyche, but quickly threw up a shield so her thoughts could not be deciphered. "Stay the hell out of my head, Selena!"*

*She watched with a heavy heart as her dark sister clapped her hands together. "Oooh, you're making this so challenging to me, Sis. As you know, I'm always up for a good*

*challenge," Selena crooned before backing away into the forest. "It looks as though your mental powers are strengthening," she said with a sigh. Her jaw stiffened. "Be sure that you don't let your guard down, Sis." Insane laughter erupted into the night. "When you close your eyes to sleep, I'll be there. When you think you'll have a normal, so-called life, I'll be there. There's no escaping me."*

*Simone rose. "Only death will separate us, you twisted fuck!" she said bitterly.*

*"Yes, one of us must die. As it stands, you are no match for me, not until you embrace darkness. I was taking it easy on you, babe. I could have shifted into Hrothega form," Selena reminded her harshly before disappearing into the forest.*

*Simone exhaled sharply while eyeing the full moon and fighting to blink back tears. It was true. She'd never defeat her sister, not as a pure heart. Stifling the urge to cry, she tightened her hands into fists. Guilt coiled her insides at the thought of Selena snuffing out their parents' lives. She should have been there to protect them, but she'd been caring for her sickly grandfather who at two hundred years of age had died the night Selena annihilated their parents.*

*Selena's threat wasn't to be taken lightly. Currently, she had two choices. Embrace the dark path that plagued their clan or seek help from her old friend, and only ally. Veruca the sorceress. Most pure hearts were either killed or purposely slipped under the radar of their dark clan. She'd do the same.*

## Chapter One

*Two evenings later . . .*

“Perfect!” Simone murmured while studying her reflection in the gold-trimmed, full-length mirror. The black leather bustier complemented her generous bosom, as did the matching leather pants and knee-length, leather studded boots. “What do you think?” She turned to her long-time friend, Veruca, and smiled. “Well?” Excitement riveted through her veins at the evening that lay ahead.

“What you’re attempting is suicide, although whatever I say will fall on deaf ears.” The sorceress cleared her throat in agitation. “What am I to do if something happens to you, Simone?”

Simone quickly swept her long thick black hair in a bun atop her head and turned toward the mirror while casting her friend a reassuring smile. “I promise, I’m a big girl, Momma.” She laughed. Veruca was in a way like a mother to her. After all, the sorceress was five hundred years old, and wise.

She paused after pinning the thick strands down with bobby pins and turned to place her hands on her hips. “Please. You know I need to do this.” Slowly, she applied black lipstick, then a small amount of gold-flecked lip gloss to her full lips. “There,” she exclaimed, giving herself one final look.

“One last time. Please reconsider this.” The sorceress glared at the feisty young woman. “There must be another way. I cannot believe I allowed you to talk me into this nonsense.”

“Nope,” Simone quickly bit out. “My mind’s made up.”

“Aren’t you afraid of the vampires discovering you? You know how testy they can be,” Veruca huffed. Hesitantly, she handed the charmed ruby pendant to Simone.

Simone pondered her thoughts for a split second, then shook her head. “The transformation occurring should I embrace the dark side of my clan scares me more than vampires.” Her thoughts drifted to her sister. “My psychic shields are weakening; that’s why I need your help to shield me. She’s all but depleted my energies.”

“It’s okay. I’ve taken care of things from my end. She cannot know your intentions, so don’t worry.” Veruca’s eyes glared in anger. “Furthermore, you can never turn. That will never happen to you. You’re too pure of heart!” She held her head down. “Too bad your sister weakened!”

Simone bit her lip. “She told me years ago our parents were killed by wargs. I never thought my sister would succumb. I never thought she’d try to kill me. I’m no longer safe around any of my clan. Or should I say, what’s left of them.”

Veruca swore. “I’ve charmed this, at your request.” As she exhaled sharply, she clasped the necklace around Simone’s neck. “There. Shouldn’t have any problems going in undetected.”

“Thank you!”

“What if they won’t let you go,” Veruca asked. “What if you blend in too well. Then where will this leave you?”

“I’ll just go with the flow, that’s all,” Simone replied. “No vampire will suspect my true identity. I’ll be safe until I choose to uncloak myself, correct?”

Veruca nodded. “Selena won’t suspect either. All you have to do is say the words. Just one thing, never use magick to transport you. Vampires will pick up the trail. You know they have the ability to project themselves to various places as well and can follow you undetected.”

“I know. I’ve studied up on the vamps.”

Veruca shook her head. “Still don’t know why you insist on existing among them, especially since the changes. Why not search for others of your kind?”

“Why can’t you see, others of my kind are extinct—some hidden. There is nothing left in this world for me.” Simone wrinkled her face in disgust. “I’ve had just about enough of the darkness that has destroyed my kind.”

“So, you think the grass is greener on the other side? I’ll tell no lie, vampires can be just as harsh as your clan. Careful you don’t go get yourself in something you’ll regret later.” The sorceress rolled her eyes. “I can’t believe you’re getting a job as a bartender at Club Damnation! Of all places in Steeleheart City!”

"Yeah, but it's one of the best vampire clubs around these parts, mind you," Simone said with a grin. "I'll tell you this, vampires pay damned well and I could really use the money right about now. Maybe I'll get a single-family house in the outer city limits."

Veruca hugged her. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"I know exactly what I'm doing. "I want a home and some stability, and the possibility of moving on with my life."

"You can always live with me and the cheetah shifters. Between my magick and theirs, you'll be protected for the next hundred years or so."

Simone patted Veruca on the shoulder. "Thank you, and I will do that only if my plan fails."

"Just a reminder, you do know you could be killed? Why the pull toward this coven?" Veruca leaned against the wall and waited for an answer.

Simone shook her head. "My mate awaits me, too. I know this in my heart. Once my bond is formed with him, I'll be complete. I'll have a home and security." She hung her head. "I won't be alone anymore."

"So, your mate is a vampire?" Veruca inquired.

Simone shrugged. "Must be, or maybe even human. For some reason, I'm drawn to that city."

"All right. If you insist on this nonsense, carry on. You can summon me whenever you choose. I can easily cloak my presence and visit you, even in Steeleheart City."

"Thank you; I owe you big!"

"Yeah, you do," Veruca muttered under her breath.

"Wait, don't go yet!" Simone pleaded, slipping into her long black leather.

"What is it now?"

"Mind dropping me off in the city? I'd drive, but my car is on the fritz. Just transport us into an alley or something. The city is closely guarded by the warriors, and they'll wonder why a sorceress is entering city limits."

"Oh, all right already." Veruca smiled. "All this talk about vampires, you've got me curious now," she said, glitizing them to an alley not too far away from the club.

Simone looked around at the immaculate alley. “Wow, even their alleys are high-end.”

“You okay now?” Veruca toyed with her long white hair as she scanned their surroundings. Her silvery eyes glinted in the darkness of the alley. “I’ve got to go.”

Simone hugged her. “Yes, I’ll be fine.”

“Okay, but you better check in around midnight, just to let me know what’s going on.”

“I promise!”

Veruca vanished, leaving Simone in the alley. “Okay, girl, let’s get this evening started,” she said with a sigh. With confidence, she strolled around the corner and onto the sidewalk, taking in the lively scene as she inhaled the brisk night air.

The streets were buzzing with activity as vampires strolled alongside their humans into the clubs. On one side of the street were clubs and restaurants where Steeleheart’s warriors blew off steam. The city’s coven leader, Lazius, refused to have the city split up among aristocrats and warriors and preferred that everyone coexist peacefully.

The other side of the street harbored clubs for the aristocrats. Club Hellfire was such a place, and was by membership only. Only the most prestige of vampires frequented these types of clubs. Sometimes humans entered but discovered they couldn’t cope with the aristocrats’ snotty attitudes.

The scent of blood filled her nostrils, and Simone crossed the busy street and over to Club Damnation, which, as soon as she crossed the threshold, felt like home. The large bloodred double doors were propped open in invitation.

Rough-edged, screeching death metal met her ears as she strode inside. Oh, yeah, she’d love this place. Head-banging vampires from hell, she thought to herself with a smirk.

She laughed inwardly at the mirrored walls. Vampires *did* cast reflections. The place was like a high-end dungeon with its dark marble walls and floors.



Swiftly she dodged in and out of the crowd, finally making her way over to the bar.

A group of five warriors were just leaving as Simone sauntered over to the bitter vampire bartender, Raoul. At least two of the men shot her appreciative glances and nodded to her as they walked past her. "If you're the new girl, you're late!" Raoul, sporting short spiky blond hair, bit out, flashing his fangs.

"Uh, sorry. I—"

"Yeah, Ramses said he hired you a few nights ago before he left for vacation." The agitated vampire put his hands on his hips. "I'm the head bartender around here. Not a good way to make a first impression. Tomorrow night, be on time! I'm swamped here! We're supposed to have one more starting tonight, but I get the feeling she ain't showing up tonight. Hurry up and hang your coat in there." He gestured to an entrance beside the cash register.

Ignoring the bossy-assed vampire, Simone quickly shed her black leather coat while disappearing into the employee break room.

Raoul grinned. "Wicked choice of clothes, human. You're already fitting in."

"Thanks," Simone said while observing her surroundings. Damn if he wasn't right. The majority of the patrons wore black, human and vampire alike. No one wore bright colors.

"Play your cards right, and we'll both make a killing tonight," he said with a grin. All right, give me two Bloody Orgasms, a Bloody Mary, a Buttery Cock, and a Glamour Girl," the head bartender belted out as he shook the silver shaker. "I've got the Crimson Headrush, Bruised Bombshell, and the Flame Thrower," he concluded while moving at the speed of light.

"Got it," Simone chirped, quickly retrieving crystal glasses from the shelves. By that time, he'd finished preparing the drinks, delivering them to the patrons.

"Extra spice in the Flame Thrower for my human," a vampiress hissed at Raoul. "And hurry it up!" Simone watched in amusement as Raoul rolled his eyes.

Hours passed by as Simone meshed with her surroundings. Vampires appeared to be no different than their humans. Everyone was laughing, having a good time. The warriors sat around telling dirty jokes, in an effort to purposely offend a few of the aristocrats who'd chosen to enter the bar. Many tipped her well, occasionally sticking crisp five-dollar bills down her leather bustier.

She'd even had a few of the male vampire businessmen give her their numbers. "Be sure to call me," Dan, a business owner said, handing her a business card. "That's my cell and office number. I can be reached until the sun comes up." He snickered.

Simone smiled. "I'll keep that in mind; thank you." She rolled her eyes and ripped up the card as he glided away from the bar. "Asshole," she murmured.

"Yeah, he can be a bit of a pest, but he's harmless," Raoul said before taking a drag on his cigarette. "You'll notice our patrons range from warriors to executives and aristocrat alike." He studied her for a few minutes before dropping his eyes to her breasts. "You're a strikingly gorgeous woman. There's something about you, but I just can't put my finger on it."

"What do you mean?" Simone asked. She hoped he hadn't discovered her true nature.

"I mean, you don't seem like most humans. You have a certain, shall we say essence, about you."

"Hmm, don't know what you mean, but I'll take that as a compliment," she said with a smile. Suddenly, the atmosphere of the bar changed, and an invisible force caressed her cheek, sending bolts of pleasure riveting down her spine and to her core. Moisture clung between her thighs, and her nipples tightened against the leather bustier.

Two large vampires, one redheaded and the other white-haired, made their way over to the bar. The sea of writhing bodies seemingly parted just for them. The aura of power they exuded hung heavy in the air, causing the hair on Simone's neck to stand on end. As they approached, their eyes held hers in rapt attention. Both smiled at her, flashing their fangs.

## Chapter Two

Immediately she was intrigued and couldn't explain the sudden attraction to them both. "Who are they?" she whispered to Raoul.

"Lucius, the redhead, is brother to coven leader, Lazius, and first in command. The white-haired dude is second in command," Raoul said with haste as he prepared their drinks. "His name is Sax, and he loves Bloody Orgasms. Don't disappoint. They've known each other for over six hundred years."

"Ah, this little chocolate beauty could never disappoint," Sax said, as he sat on a barstool. "Pay him no mind, beautiful," he rasped. "We won't bite—much," he said with a grin as he extended his hand. "You are . . . ?"

"I'm Simone," she said in a firm voice, despite her body's sudden disobedience. What the hell happened that caused her libido and temperature to go crazy?

Lucius extended his hand. When she shook it, he rose, planting a smoldering kiss on the back of hers, sending tiny electric currents over her mocha skin. He sat down and smiled. "You're exquisite," he said in a gruff voice. "Why the hell are you working in here? Where is your male?"

Simone's pulse quickened. Did the vampires know her true nature? Sweat beaded her brow as her mind urgently sought an answer.

"My male?"

Sax laughed. "Yes, many human women have male vampire mates. Some have female vampire mates, if that is their choice." He glared at her with intense, glowing blue orbs. "You're too gorgeous to be without a male," he breathed huskily. "Or males." He added with a smile.

After breathing a sigh of relief, she answered quickly. "Oh, no, I . . . don't have a male," she confessed with embarrassment. Her heart raced as a sudden ache erupted deep inside her. Her alter ego eagerly scratched the surface of her human façade. The female needed to be released to mate. She wanted both like nobody's business, and as far as she could tell, they wanted her, too.

Lucius leaned his elbows against the black marble bar, his chin pressing against the backs of his hands. "Aren't you due for a break?" He cast her a look that sliced through her being like a knife cutting butter.

Raoul chimed in. "She is, but since the stroke of midnight, the crowd has peaked."

Sax turned slightly to shoot the bartender a disapproving glare. "Point being?"

Raoul fixed his lips to speak, but Lucius interrupted.

"Choose your words wisely, Raoul, or tonight shall be your last."

*So, this is what the attitude of a male warrior vampire was like.* She shuddered. Warriors were known for their fierceness. Perhaps they would make formidable allies against her clan. Just as quickly as the thought entered her mind, she dismissed it. Who was she fooling? If the vampires discovered her true nature, there was no doubt in her mind they'd unleash a fate worse than death upon her.

"So," Lucius pressed on with a quick nod of his head. "Come, sit with us. We'll buy you a few rounds of whatever it is you drink." Something gnawed at her soul. The look in his eyes—in both vampires' eyes—consumed her. The ruby vibrated against her skin. They sure as hell weren't using their powers on her. She was untouchable to vampires and to her clan.

She quickly glanced at Raoul, who had all but given up hope. As a blur, he quickly waited on patrons filling the overly packed bar.

The vampires treated her like no male had ever treated her before. They were soft-spoken, but she knew if given reason, they'd chastise her. Right now, she longed to know what it would be like sandwiched between both creatures.

"Give us a chance, and we'll show you," Sax said against the crook of her neck. She could have easily fallen into his strong arms. His gaze promised her hours of pure, unadulterated pleasure.

The bastard! What gave him the right to probe her thoughts? She'd put up a hell of a shield to keep her sister out, but hadn't thought to protect her thoughts from the vampires.

Before she could answer, Lucius spoke. "Ever been with a vampire before?" he asked while toying with the tendrils of hair hanging freely from the left side of her head. Lightly, his fingertips touched her arm, creating a spark of pleasure she'd never known before. She watched as he admired the contrast of his pale hand against her mocha-colored skin.

"So beautiful," he said in an appreciative tone.

"No, never," she said, feeling as though her body was about to explode. Heat flooded her face as she crossed her legs. She'd never been with a vampire or any of her kind, only two human males in her short existence.

"That's right, baby, take the edge off down there," Sax teased huskily. Deeply, he inhaled. "I can smell your desire for us." His eyes seemed to glare into her soul.

"You boys aren't shy, are you?" She laughed in an effort to stifle her embarrassment. They'd really thrown her off guard, but she was enjoying every bit of their compliments and the way they flirted with her.

"No, we're not exactly ones for tact," Lucius admitted. "I honestly don't know the meaning of the word," he joked. "When I see something I like, I pursue it."

Swallowing hard, she looked over at Raoul, who'd shot her an "I told you so" look. Obviously, the vampire was listening to their conversation, but Sax and Lucius didn't care.

Lucius leaned in, lightly kissing the length of her neck, allowing his fangs to graze her tender skin. "You smell so good, Simone," he purred. He ceased his actions to absorb her beauty. "You look just as good," he said in a gruff tone. "Gods, woman, you make me want to strip you naked and take you right here at the bar."

"No," she lamented. "You wouldn't; not here." The cards were on the table. They were testing her in an effort to see what hand she was playing.

Raoul brought over refills of their drinks. "Yeah, darling, they would. Don't tempt them."

Lucius belted out a deep, throaty laugh. "Good thing I like you, Raoul, but at this particular moment, you need to back off!"

Her thoughts ran rampant. Assessing the situation, Simone quickly ensured the vampires could no longer read her thoughts. Something was going on. She could feel it. She wanted so badly to ask Raoul his opinion.

"Why did you do that?" Lucius asked with a concerned look. He sat up straight, crossed his arms across his mighty chest, and squinted his eyes. "How is it that you can prohibit us from reading your mind? What are you?"

Simone straightened. "I'm nothing special. But know this. I'm strong-willed and not a weakling. I just don't like others digging around in my mind. My thoughts are private, and I wish them to remain that way." She had to stand her ground right here, right now. She'd read how vampires could bend humans to their will. She'd be damned if she would follow in others' footsteps and become a zombified vampire groupie.

"Gotta give her credit; she's got balls, I'll tell you that." Sax admitted before slamming down his fifth Bloody Orgasm. Impatiently he tapped the glass on the counter. "Raoul, c'mon, keep 'em comin'!"

Lucius studied her. "She's like no other," he said dreamily. "Beauty, brains, class, and courage. Most humans come to us on their knees," he added. "No; not you. You have so much to give this dark world," he breathed, leaving her to wonder if vampires could get drunk. She'd read they couldn't, but these two were becoming captivated over her. "You're a leader, not a follower."

"Leave with us," Sax insisted. "Tonight. Join us in our lair. We need to know more of you."

She felt her eyes widen. Had they fallen to their knees before her? She rose to her feet and cleared her throat, suddenly knowing the ball was in her court. "Gentlemen, as much as I'd like that, right now I have a job to do," she insisted, looking each directly in the eyes. "You should also know, I'm not going to immediately hop into the sack with either one of you." With that, she turned on her heel and soon joined Raoul behind the bar.

"Well, the little minx is going to make us work for what we want," Sax roared with laughter. By the gods, Lucius, she'll be the final death of us both."

Lucius frowned. "How so?"

“With that type of attitude, can you imagine how she’d be in bed?”

The redheaded vampire joined his comrade in laughter. “We’ll be back tomorrow night, beauty.” He leaned over the bar. “You’re not getting away from us. We’ll pursue you to the ends of the Earth.”

Fire licked her core at Lucius’s words and she felt her nipples swell and strain against the leather bustier. Simone was hoping she wouldn’t allow them to bed her upon their next visit, but as it was, her fever for them lingered in her soul.

“Promise?” she asked with a come-hither tone as she batted her long eyelashes at them. “I sure hope you boys will stay true to your word.” She’d stand firm, but she refused to deny her feelings for them.

### Chapter Three

*One year later . . .*

Simone grimaced inwardly as the limousine drove through the chilly, glamorous city of Steeleheart. Modern-day Gothic style buildings had been crafted in lieu of the once-human architecture. The city was home to vampires and their humans, and it was soon to be *her* home.

Beyond the city limits, the castle of Steeleheart Coven perched on a hill overlooking the entire area. Coven leader Lazius, other elders, and an army of faithful warriors dwelled within the ancient stone walls. Some warriors of his army opted to remain in the city, for a sense of normalcy and privacy. Simone's mates were such vampires.

Simone partially cracked the window of the limousine to inhale the brisk winter air that mingled with the salt of the ocean. Per Lazius's orders, the city and castle were built not far from the ocean.

She marveled at the beauty of the full moon and how the luminous rays cast a beautiful glow upon the granite buildings. Faces of vampire elders who'd been annihilated in the war were chiseled to perfection within the breathtaking buildings.

Much had changed in the past five years after the last of the resistance surrendered to the powerful vampire covens. Military in every country combined their power and came after the bloodsuckers with all they had—and failed miserably.

Her memory returned to the evening she discovered her mates. There was no mistake that she had been drawn to Steeleheart Coven. Her instincts had then been confirmed when she discovered not one, but two mates. In addition, she had been drawn to the coven in an attempt to slip beneath her clan's radar. Such was life, she thought with a sigh.

A smile curled the edge of her lips as she remembered meeting Sax and Lucius at Club Damnation. The well-renowned bar over on Fourth and Black Seton Avenue provided her with much security, and despite their protests, she still worked there. However, reality was a double-edged sword.



The aftermath of the fallen human race forced her to observe the harsh reality that the world had indeed changed.

When humans ruled, poverty was everywhere. Now that vampires ruled, there were no homeless in the streets. At least not in Steeleheart City. The vampires found a use for every human, young and old.

When the spotlight was cast upon vampires, other unusual creatures surfaced as well. It went without saying that humans sought protection against these creatures, some which were of a vicious nature. It was not uncommon for the creatures of the night to protect humans. Legions of vampires sought to protect humans from creatures such as wargs, werewolves, and other creatures that lived among them, in this new world, undetected.

Upon the vivid discovery of the vampires, humans had launched an outright war upon the undead, thus forcing them to retaliate. The famous news reporter Cathy Sultare insisted that vampires existed, and even wrote a book of what she had thought vampires were like.

The reporter's numerous visits to Goth bars, witch covens, and other places where there were traces of vampire activity unleashed a great deal of trouble on her meager human existence. It was bad enough she'd risked her own life, but two other reporters had been drawn in as well. In a vital effort to cast attention upon vampires who lived among the human race, Cathy and her cohorts met with a vampire contact in their studio, casting ultraviolet light upon the poor, unsuspecting creature while filming it nationwide.

Much of society had thought this to be a hoax, while many believers knew their eyes weren't betraying them as the vampire's fangs descended and his face changed. This was the act that propelled the vampires to take action against the humans.

Since this dreadful event, vampire nations were divided about how to treat humans. While many covens despised humans with a passion, a small fraction, like Steeleheart Coven sought to protect them.

Simone tensed as her mind continued wandering to the past scenes of chaos that had erupted in almost every part of the world. Should the vampire

council of Steeleheart City discover her secret, she'd be sentenced to death, much like Cathy and her partners.

She knew damned well her mates would take no part in her destruction, but Lazius wouldn't hesitate to spill her blood.

Many human women adapted to being willing blood slaves to one or more vampires, depending upon the vamps' relationships with one another. First, the coupling had to be cleared with the covens. Simone frowned as she remembered how hard she'd fought for her life the first week they'd brought her into the coven. Following Steeleheart Law, she was pitted against a female vampire, Felicia, to prove her strength.

She hadn't banked on any of those things, she thought solemnly. Veruca warned her that the vampires were different in every way imaginable. She'd thought they were no different from humans. Obviously, she was wrong. They held firm to their strange customs and beliefs. Prejudice was strong in vampires, too, she discovered.

The ruby vibrated against her chest, which distracted her. As she stroked the medium-sized stone, she tensed once more at the thought of the vampires discovering her secret.

This coven had their specific ways of separating weak humans from the strong. Fighting. Lazius existed in Rome during the time of the gladiators and enjoyed the bloodlust of the arena.

He incorporated a ritual into receiving humans and pairing them with the best vampires of Steeleheart Coven. Aristocrat or warrior, it mattered not. Simone closed her eyes in remembrance of Lazius's discovery of their coupling. To see if she was worthy of a Steeleheart vampire, she was pitted against other females in the arena. Eventually, after defeating five other human females, she was pitted against Felicia, Lazius's human-turned-vampire mate.

The human driver, Victor, looked in the mirror as he turned down the posh street of Bloodwing Avenue. "You're quiet tonight, Ms. Simone," he said with a snaggletoothed grin. "Somethin' on your mind?"

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "I'm just taking a walk down memory lane. Also, tonight's the evening I'm supposed to pledge my loyalty to Sax and

Lucius.” She folded her arms and leaned her head against the black window. “I’m not sure I want this. If I pledge my allegiance, then they’ll have dominion over me. I’ll—”

Simone choked on her words. What had she’d gotten herself into? Veruca had warned her from the beginning. Damned if she hadn’t jumped out of the fire and into the frying pan.

“Be turned into a vampire,” Victor finished her sentence for her.

“Yes,” she said with a whisper. “I believe a true death would be kinder. The world has changed. While I know I must adapt, I can’t accept the fact that I’ll never see a sunrise again.” She thought of her sister’s threats. It was quite possible she’d never see a sunrise if Selena had her way.

“I understand,” Victor said in a low voice. “Nor can I.”

“So, you understand my situation.”

“Yes, I do, but yours is different. Survival is of the utmost importance,” Victor chided with a sad expression. “Also, I don’t know why, but there is more to you than meets the eye.” Simone gulped as deafening silence filled the limousine. Had Victor discovered her secret? If so, how? So far, she’d been careful to not let anyone know her true heritage.

“Humpf!” Simone snorted. “Survival! Hard to believe we were once at the top of the food chain.” She waited a few moments for him to answer. “No, I’m nothing more than a mere human; you know that, Victor.”

“You know, according to certain laws, they have the right to pass you on to another if they choose to—perhaps someone worse,” Victor reminded her. “You’ll bear their mark and will forever and foremost be under their protection as a human. Looks to me like you’ve got it made. Not all vampires spoil their humans with carnal pleasures and pricey possessions.” He paused momentarily. “Surely you do not wish to remain needy?”

“True,” Simone said with a shudder. “But, I’d be forced to give up my heritage, and—”

“Heritage?” Victor’s voice was questioning. “What exactly do you mean, Simone? An ancient, evil tribe of wolves is running amok and seizing human women for their sadistic pleasures. The covens all work to protect us humans; you know that.”

If she wasn't careful, she'd tell Victor more than he should know. In an effort to protect him, she'd have to lie to him. "I'll simply lose myself," she scoffed. "Also, vampires despise wolves as much as they do humans," she added.

"No, Simone," Victor said softly. "I've seen to Sax's and Lucius's comfort for years, and they aren't the harsh monsters some vampires can be. I can't think of anywhere else I'd rather serve," the man continued as he pulled in front of the posh high-rise. "You'll never lose your true nature; I can assure you that."

"Yes, but what about wolf shifters that wish to exist in peace and to be left alone. What of the ones who have lost their entire families?" she shot back, as a heavy ache filled her heart.

Victor shrugged. "I haven't seen any of that nature around in such a long time."

Simone sighed. "Vampires have exterminated all the good ones probably. Furthermore, don't you even miss the way things were . . . you know, before the vampires? You didn't give up your human self."

Victor parked and turned. "Don't ever let Lazius hear you say anything like that," he warned. "I fear Lucius and Sax won't have any power over his actions, should he see fit to punish you." Victor's eyes softened. "You're a real nice lady, and I don't want anything bad happening to you." Victor frowned as he pondered a thought. "As for crossing over, I'm old to begin with. Lucius and Sax allowed me the choice of remaining human. The thought of living out eternity in this wrinkled shell of a body was not at all appealing."

"So, becoming a vampire means—"

Victor interrupted. "Becoming a vampire for *you* means possessing the power to defend yourself on your own, against the one you battled with months ago."

"Felicia," Simone said with a sigh.

"Yes. You know as a human, you're more of a target for female vampires. It is—shall we say—an issue of dominance with some?" Victor chided. "As a vampire, you'll be their equal and can fend them off much

more easily. Not to mention you may have to face other paranormal creatures outside of Steeleheart City. How do you think you'd fare coming face-to-face with a gargoyle?"

Simone exited the car with a smile. "You don't have to worry about me; I know what I'm doing."

"I sure hope you do," Victor said with a smile. "Whatever secret you're fighting so hard to cover up, I sure hope the vampires are willing to accept it," he added.

"No secrets here," Simone lied.

"All right then," he said, pulling off.

"Good evening, Ms. Simone," Dumas, the vampire doorman, greeted her with a smile that made her blood run cold. "Pleasure to see you again," he said almost in a whisper.

"Good to see you, too," she said, as Dumas opened the door.

## Chapter Four

“Well, isn’t she beautiful,” Lucius said with a smile as he ushered Simone into the elaborate condominium. “Allow me to take your coat,” he said in a husky voice. His eyes glinted a hint of sexual desire as the glowing orbs dropped to her chest.

Simone smiled as she handed him her long black leather jacket. She lost her breath and her nipples tightened when she saw his fangs descend, which signaled his need for her.

“Yes,” Sax whispered in her ear as he appeared by her side, causing Simone’s hand to fly to her chest. His fangs had descended as well. She wanted nothing more than to become entwined in a steaming pile of sex with both lovers. She sensed their need for her was great, as was hers.

“I told you to stop startling me like that!” Simone giggled before swatting Sax on the arm. “Are you trying to make me jump out of my skin?”

The vampire’s eyes danced with lust. “We’re just trying to get you out of those clothes as fast as we can,” Sax replied in a husky tone. He looked over to his comrade. “We should make her stroll around naked for the rest of the evening.”

Lucius laughed. “Besides, you love it.” He snaked an arm around her waist, pulling her against his throbbing steel. He wrinkled his nose at the ruby pendant. “Allow me to replace this with a diamond,” he said with a smirk. “Why do you wear such a simple stone?”

Simone held up a hand in defense. “My simple ruby will do just fine,” she chastised. “I’m rather attached to it,” she breathed as his gaze held hers in rapt attention. Fear coursed through her veins at the possibility of her being separated from the pendant.

“Suit yourself,” Lucius murmured before planting a fierce kiss on her lips.

Sax slipped behind her, pressing his raging hard-on against the small of her back. Moisture danced between her thighs as the vampires’ hands roamed along her curvy body. “You burn for us,” he murmured. “I can feel and smell it,” he growled.

"Do you know what today is?" Lucius breathed as they sat her down in front of the roaring fireplace.

She bit her lip as Sax nibbled her earlobe while sliding the expensive silk from her shoulders. She gasped as Lucius unclasped her red lace bra, allowing full milk chocolate breasts to spill into his hands. She knew she could no longer put them off, as they'd been very patient with her. Sax's head dipped to taste her plentiful breasts, causing her to throw back her head as she moaned.

"Simone?" Lucius arched a red brow in question.

"Yes," she said breathlessly.

"Have you changed your mind?"

She tensed when Sax ceased his actions and frowned. "Simone," the white-haired vamp's voice deepened.

"I can't do this," she confessed. "You've both been so good to me, but I can't live out the rest of my life as a vampire."

Lucius put his fist through the glass coffee table. He curled his lips and bared his fangs. "Now, what are we supposed to do? My brother is expecting us to turn you."

"Here we go," Sax muttered. "Look; she doesn't want that!" Simone watched as his eyes turned a silvery blue hue. "There is nothing wrong with the fact that she wishes to remain human."

In a flash, Lucius and Sax were face-to-face, baring fangs. Their hands hung by their sides, with claws elongated, ready to battle.

"She must!" Lucius spat. "It's the only way she can be protected!" His voice had become gruff with anger.

"There's got to be another way," Simone rose and slipped between the large vampires. "And"—she pushed them as hard as she could—"you two need to stop this foolishness!" She looked at them simultaneously.

Lucius gripped her chin in his large hand, forcing her to look at him. "How do you expect me to be calm when your life hangs by a thread?" She watched as flames seemed to dance in his eyes at her possible dark fate.

"I'll be fine," Simone snapped and pulled away from Lucius's grip. Anger rushed through her like a locomotive at the thought of Lazius condemning

her to darkness. Who the hell was he to do so? She'd rather die. Veruca had warned her of matters such as this, but it was far too late. "Did I not show my strength in the arena?"

"Yes, you did, but you still can be sentenced if you don't adhere to coven rules," Lucius said as he strode over to her. "Beautiful, your best interest is what matters to us. I'm sorry you feel this way, but there are no other possibilities."

"Then I'll die." Simone lifted her head up in defiance. Surely, she could sway them in her direction, she thought to herself.

"Are you challenging me, little one?" Lucius asked in a gruff voice. "You will obey, or—"

"Or what?" Simone shot back before gritting her teeth and placing her hands on her hips. She loved it when Lucius dominated her in bed but loathed it when he tried swaying her mind. Even though he was pushy, she was grateful that neither vampire used his power of persuasion on her.

"I think we all should relax," Sax said as he strolled over, uncaring of the bulge pressing against his light blue faded jeans. His eyes possessed a hint of sadness as he reached out to caress her cheek. "I, for one, don't like this any more than you," he said regretfully. "But I fear it is for the best. Lazius insists upon females being equally powerful as heir warriors; you know that. The same goes for human males. They must be equally matched with their female vampire counterparts.

"I need more time," Simone insisted as Sax began exploring her body. She wavered, and became lightheaded as the vampires began to salivate. They were hungry, and her body's pull to them would no longer be denied.

"You've denied us," Lucius teased while pressing his hardness against her flesh. "We need you," he whispered, pressing her against the wall and spreading her legs.

"Let us take you right here, right now," Sax replied. Before her eyes, both vamps were in the buff.

"I haven't denied either of you," Simone said with a chuckle as her hand slid between her thighs. She toyed with her swollen button as both vampires stroked their hardness.



Before she could say anything else, Sax pinned her arms over her head, planting a possessive kiss on her lips. She moaned as his tongue invaded her mouth, erotically dancing with hers.

All the while, Lucius had ripped her panties off her, balling them up in his large fist. Still kissing Sax, she watched out of the corner of her eye as the redheaded vampire's nostrils flared while inhaling her womanly scent. The fire between her thighs danced higher at the sight of Lucius with her panties and Sax's greedy tongue.

With a growl, the vampire tossed the flimsy material to the floor and shoved his face between her drenched thighs, eliciting a high-pitched squeal from Simone. He paused only for a few minutes to stroke the pulsating pink button. Smiling, he circled his index finger over her clit, then licked her from top to bottom.

"Mmm," he spoke in a husky whisper. "It pleases me to see you so slick with want," he continued, before slipping a finger inside her tight cavern.

"Oh, sweet, merciful God," Simone cried out as the vampire increased his sinful actions on her wanton flesh.

"God can't help you now," Sax replied before sinking his fangs deep into her breast. Hungrily, he sucked while continuing to hold her arms above her head. With his other hand, he tweaked her nipples into utter submission, reminding her of who was the bringer of pleasure.

After finger-fucking her, Lucius swiped at her clitoris a few times before suckling it like a juicy peach. Gently, he nibbled on the engorged nubbin, forcing Simone to cry out again. "That's it, my darling Simone." He paused for a few moments to observe the ebony beauty writhing in exquisite pleasure. Swiftly, he lapped at her arousal dripping down her inner thigh before sinking his fangs into her femoral artery.

"Uh, *Lucius!*" she screamed as both vampires greedily feed upon her aching body, her hips undulating back and forth. Their tongues and fangs were almost more pleasure than she could bear. Simone's knees wobbled as they unlatched their mouths from her.

"We're going to fuck you by the fire," Sax confessed before scooping her up in his strong arms. Lucius followed them over by the fire and smiled as he

watched Sax lay her gently on the large black and silver pelt while stroking his cock.

“Mmm,” Simone moaned. “Hurry, I need you both,” she breathed.

“And we need you,” Lucius said before spreading her thighs. Gently, he played with her hot cunt as he continued stroking his dick.

Sax moaned at the sight of the contrast of their flesh against hers. His hand roamed to her dripping sex, gently pulling apart her thick, sugar-coated lips.

“That’s right, Sax,” Lucius growled. “Hold those juicy lips open for me.” His nostrils flared as he rubbed the head of his cock against Simone’s clitoris a few times. Through hooded eyes, she observed him. His pale body was chiseled to perfection. Long, thick red hair framed his strong features. His eyes were no longer their natural green color but burned a deep reddish-orange hue as he salivated at the sight of her juice-laden pussy. They appeared to glare into her soul. “Tell me what you want, Simone.”

Breathing escaped her, and she parted her lips to speak. “Need you to ride me hard,” she replied huskily.

“Are you ready?” Sax tweaked her nipples, doubling her pleasure.

“Oh, God, yes,” she groaned. “Don’t prolong this. I need you now!”

Lucius let out a moan as he sunk balls-deep into her tight pussy. Hands on either side of her waist, he delivered powerful, swift strokes, tearing forth high-pitched squeals from Simone.

Sax massaged her breasts, his cock lightly brushing her lips. “Suck me,” he demanded softly. “Want to feel my cock down your throat?”

Obliging, she allowed his large cock to slip between her lips. The salty taste of his precome awakened her taste buds, and she moaned while circling her tongue around the swollen head, then sank deeper. Lightly, she grazed her teeth against his shaft.

“Oh, yeah; fuck, yeah!” Sax hissed.

Lucius propped her legs over his shoulders, quickening his pace. His incisors grazed against her delicate flesh. While moaning, she dropped a hand between her legs and began to squeeze and pinch her clitoris.

Sax's cock twitched and expanded in her mouth and seemed to harden with each passing moment. He fisted her hair as he flexed his hips back and forth. The head of his dick gently nudged her tonsils, and he slid deeper into her throat. The feel of his white pubic hair tickling her nose and the sight of his heavy balls slapping against her face, mixed with Lucius's demanding thrusts, caused her pussy to tighten.

Lucius slowed his pace, gently easing his cock in and out of her slippery cavern while worshipping her legs with his mouth. "Gods, you're gonna be the final death of us," he murmured, while peering at her with fiery orbs. He looked like a madman, the way his body glistened with the sheen from his appeals. Red hair hung past his shoulders, mingling with the sweat, giving him a crazed look. He bared his incisors before sliding his hands down the front of her thighs, forcefully impaling her further on his rod.

Sax gritted his teeth and held her head against his steel. "Ah, fuck! Getting so close. Need to come," he rasped. "By the gods, Lucius, let's trade places." He glared at his comrade. "Don't be so damned greedy!" He thrust his hips forward a few more times before easing himself out of her mouth.

"No," Simone pouted.

"Aw, babe, I'm going to fuck that tight pussy," Sax assured her as he stroked her hair. "Be patient."

Lucius withdrew from her body, despite her protests.

"Umm, not fair, I was close to coming again!" Simone panted several times. "Damn you both to Hell!" She sat up and glowered at her lovers.

"You won't be complaining soon," Lucius said as he slipped behind her. Wasting no time, he lay on his back and pulled her on top of him so his cock was nestled between her plump cheeks. "Once Sax is inside you, babe, hold on tight; he'll lift you up and I'll slip in through your back door. Sound nice?" he cooed, as he eased a finger against her back entrance.

"Oooh, yes," she exclaimed. "Yes, yes, do it now!" She held up her arms to Sax as he settled between her thighs. "Give it to me Sax, baby," she moaned. "I need both of you to take me, hard and fast. Lucius's hands roamed to her front, caressing her aching breasts.

One hand slid down to stroke her bare stomach. Her pussy clenched, and her breath escaped her as she rested her head against Lucius's chest while becoming lost in Sax's silvery eyes. Impatiently, she turned to look at Lucius, with a pleading look. Smiling, the vampire gyrated against her succulent ass while reaching down to spread her swollen cunt lips. He slipped a finger in to gather her juices, then swiftly stuck it in his mouth.

"Sweet!"

"Ah, so beautiful, so wet," Sax breathed. His muscles flexed with each movement as he rubbed the thick head of his cock along her opening. Gently, he rubbed her clit before invading her weeping slit.

She moaned in appreciation as he stretched her. She felt her eyes roll in the back of her head as he sank deep inside her while delivering powerful strokes until he was sheathed deep in her cunt. Tremors racked her body, which forced her to cry out. The tension escalated, coiled in her belly, and centered in her clitoris.

"Oh, fuck!" She bit her lip at the intense pleasure the vampires were subjecting her to. The cloaking spell kept her true identity at bay, or both vampires would have discovered it months ago. She could feel her true self lurking dangerously close to the surface.

"By the gods' balls, I'm gonna come soon!" Sax moaned, throwing his head back. The fire's light glinted off his fangs and illuminated his alabaster skin, making his white hair appear to glow. His thrusts were powerful and demanding. As Lucius had instructed, she wrapped her legs around Sax's muscular body, clinging to him as he lifted her up enough for Lucius to tease her back entrance.

"Don't you dare; not yet." Lucius's voice was almost demonic as he slipped a lubricated finger deep inside her ass. When had he summoned a bottle of lubricant? The vampire's powers to summon objects at will never ceased to amaze her. Lucky for her Veruca's powers outmatched theirs by far.

"Fuck me in the ass; what are you waiting for?" She was demanding, and her patience was nil.

She felt Sax's body tremble. "Impatient little wench." He panted while thrusting hard inside her quaking body. "Lucius needs you to relax before entering your ass. You know that."

In retaliation, Simone tightened her muscles, massaging his dick with the walls of her pussy, causing Sax to growl while jerking deeper inside her.

"Ooh, you little wench," Sax gritted his teeth. "You're gonna pay dearly for that, wicked woman."

She fisted white strands, giving them a gentle tug. His cock swelled inside her, threatening to wash her cunt with his seed. "I'd love to see you try and make me pay," she dared. "Love to see what you'll come up with next," she said with a giggle.

Lucius's cock found its way inside her tight back entrance. It burned, so good. Their thick, long dicks always pleased her in more ways than one. "Deeper, Lucius," she pushed. "Deeper; take it deeper, please!" She grunted against Sax's chest.

She breathed a moment of satisfaction when Lucius pushed his cock balls-deep inside her ass. This is what she'd craved, the feeling of being filled. She felt she'd burst at any given moment. As she moaned, she closed her eyes as both cocks seemed to expand inside her. A high-pitched squeal escaped her lips.

They held her tight, Lucius thrusting upward as Sax slid his cock back, almost pulling out when Lucius stroked her deep, holding her hips firmly so they weren't rushed.

Sax's lips crushed hers, and soon his tongue slipped between her lips. Hungrily, their tongues entwined, and he bit her. Simone enjoyed the tangy taste of her own blood. Sax grunted, lapping greedily at the wound. From behind her, Lucius growled as he thrust violently in her backside. She knew the smell of her elixir further excited him. Their demands for sex and blood heightened.

"Feed us," Lucius demanded, as he palmed her breast with his large hand. "You've tamed us with your delicious cunt, now allow us to sate our bloodlust with your sweet elixir once again, goddess Simone." His voice was animalistic, as he pounded away at her backside.

His words and their actions meshed. They were close, she could feel it, and she wasn't too far behind. Sax's hips slammed against hers. One more stroke made him come, setting off a wave of tremors inside her. She tightened her grasp around his body, the balls of her feet digging into his taut buttocks. His muscles rippled with his howls of pleasure as his body shuddered from his climax.

"Oh fuck!" Lucius called from behind as he unleashed his seed into her backside. His head dipped, and he latched onto her neck, pulling her essence from her body. Sax had eased himself out of her, slid down the length of her body, and helped himself to her femoral artery.

Simone howled in pleasure, as a foggy mist entered her head. All she heard were the crackle of the fire and the vampires' greedy slurps reverberating throughout the living room.

"We've got company," Lucius grunted. Suddenly, a knock startled her, jarring her from the midst of sleep that called her forth.

"Um, yeah, they've been outside the door for a few minutes now," Sax retorted. "Aw, shit," He hissed his displeasure. "I think you're brother's summoning us." With a quick wave of his hand, he dressed them all in clothes.

"Oh, damn, I wanted to bathe," Simone joked.

"No time," Lucius insisted as he rose to his feet and drifted toward the door. Shaking his head, he opened it. "I suggest you be more serious. Lazius will want to know why we haven't turned you yet."

Simone sighed and tensed. Right now, she wished she could disappear. Facing Lazius was the last thing she wanted, especially after a good fuck session with her mates.

Warriors Dwar and Kahn entered quickly. "Your presence is required," Kahn said, peering over at Simone. The vampire sniffed the air, and closed his eyes as he savored the scent of blood and sex. "Mmm, so sorry to tear you away."

Dwar, the short, dark-haired vampire smiled impishly. Both vampires' fangs had descended. Sax shot them warning glances as a low growl developed deep in his chest.

“Hey, can’t help it!” Kahn defended them both. “We waited patiently outside the door for you to finish. We knew you sensed us. We’re only here because Lazius sent us!”

“Can’t this wait,” Lucius suggested.

“No; you know better than that,” Kahn shot out.

“Oh, all right already,” Sax huffed, as they all followed Dwar and Kahn out of the condo. “Your brother really needs to relax,” he said in a gruff tone.

“Why don’t you tell him so,” Lucius said with a laugh.

## Chapter Five

Simone tried to swallow as she fought to obtain a certain level of calmness beneath Lazius's scrutinizing gaze. The vampire was unsympathetic toward her dilemma, and if it weren't for the fact that she was Lucius's mate, she knew he would have disposed of her months ago.

Simone knew Lazius's way of determining the strength of humans was by pitting them against one another. He'd become quite taken with the way she'd handled herself against several human females larger than she. Eventually, he pitted Felicia, his newly turned *Abrhoremeaga*, against her.

Simone watched as Lazius swept his long black mane over his shoulder and narrowed his eyes as he calmly perched his elbows against the marble table. When he spoke, a death chill climbed up her spine.

"How dare you insult Steeleheart Coven and not abide by our laws?"

Simone parted her lips to speak until Lucius mentally reminded her not to. Heat seared her face, and she spoke anyway, forcing a stern look from her vampire lovers. She knew she'd deal with their punishment later. "Forgive me, Lazius, but it was not my intention to insult—"

"*Human!*" Lazius's voice boomed throughout the council chambers. "One more outburst of this nature, and I will turn you into a bleeding fountain of flesh and display you on the outskirts of the city for all vampires to drink!" Eyes glowing a feral red, he glanced at Lucius. "Why have you not taught this human whore to respect the elders of this coven?"

"Lazius!" Lucius rose. Simone knew he sought to bare fangs with his brother but did not want to disrespect him in that fashion. Coven members were to respect other coven members at all times. Even temperamental Lucius knew this. "With all due respect, Brother, you are not to address Simone in such a fashion! She is our *Abrhoremeaga*, and she will be respected!"

Sax stood as well, his eyes flashing with anger.

"So, my second in command wishes to disrespect me as well?" Lazius seethed.



“I do not warrant the harsh tongue of our *Abrboremeaga*, but, no, I wish no disrespect of you, Lazius.” Sax held his gaze as the other council members looked on.

Lazius sighed. “This travesty has wrought nothing but needless aggravation to our way of life. I should have had her drained of all her blood the night you introduced her into the coven.” His gaze fell upon her once more. “She forgets too soon how grateful she should be for Steeleheart Coven accepting her the way we have. Even more, she’s been allowed to exist among us for months, as a human! I’ve even invited her to stay in the castle among us.”

He paced the floor some more before casting a warning glance in her direction. “I would have no difficulty in turning you over to a pack of wolves. Let’s see how you could deal with that!”

Simone felt her face flush and her heart beat so hard against her chest, she knew the vampires could hear it. Fresh blood coursed through her veins as she was made to feel as though she were a sex treat for Kahn, who looked at her with intense desire. Perhaps Veruca’s cloaking spell worked too well. She attempted to speak once again but held her tongue as she sensed the negative vibrations Lucius and Sax sent her.

A few of the females smirked in an effort to taunt her so she’d be punished by Lazius. Felicia initiated a silent challenge.

“Is there something you wish to say to me, human?” Felicia said with a grin. Her black lipstick contrasted greatly with her white teeth. Dressed in all black, she leaned against the large black chair and crossed her arms, damn near baring her ample bosom.

“You forget you were once human!” Simone said as her hands became fists in her lap. Their fight was a draw, leaving many of the vampires to ponder how a puny human managed to hold her own with a vampire. Felicia had been embarrassed, especially since Lazius had been impressed by her survival skills. Satisfaction coiled inside her gut because of the secret she harbored. *If they only knew.*

Felicia cocked her head to the side. “What did you say to me?” She turned to face Lazius. “Put us in the arena again, and I’ll demonstrate the difference between a human and vampire,” she demanded.

“We were in the arena months ago, and you couldn’t best me,” Simone shot back defiantly.

“Hold your tongues!” Lazius said in a low warning growl.

“But—” Felicia was fuming.

In no time, Lazius was beside his *Abrboremeaga*, his great hand clasped around her throat. “One more word, and I will forget why I made you vampire.” He lifted his chin and narrowed his eyes. “Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Felicia hissed with much difficulty.

He released her. “Say your peace, human.” Lazius said with a wave of his hand. “Explain to us why you reject our vampire ways in the manner you have.”

Simone cleared her throat and rose. “In an effort not to disrespect you or the coven, please know I wish to hang on to my humanity because I’m unsure I wish to live for an eternity.” She lowered her gaze to the marble table. “I would feel—too alone.” She lifted her gaze once more to meet the eyes of the rest of the council.

Lazius paced the floor with his arms behind his back. “Sax and Lucius would assist you into adapting as a vampire. What more could you possibly ask for?”

“As coven leader, I bid you provide me with more time,” she said firmly. Her mind raced to find a suitable solution to her dilemma. It’s a good thing the vampires could not sense her true nature lurking beneath her human façade.

Simone’s breathing slowed as Lazius stroked his chin, signaling his thought to her plea. He glanced at Sax and Lucius, then back to her. “Very well,” he said with a nod. “You have a week, then your fate shall be decided for you.” He arched a dark brow as he dismissed the meeting. “Is this in any way clear to you?”

“Yes, and thank you,” Simone said with a whisper, giving silent praise to her personal protector. “You will not regret this.”

Lazius's gaze felt like it pierced her soul. "See that I don't. I will not accept any more of this turmoil," he said as Felicia strolled over to him. He glanced at Sax and Lucius. "You better school her. Next time, I will not be this patient," he added before strolling out of the council chambers with Felicia by his side.

"What the hell were you thinking, woman?" Lucius scolded her gently as he grasped her hand. Sax flanked her left side, shooting her displeasing looks, which she noticed out of the corner of her eye as they left the chambers and found their way to the limousine.

"I told you," Simone said through gritted teeth, "I will not relinquish my humanity!"

"You're screwing around with a law put into place for a very good reason. Do you have a death wish?"

"In a way . . . yes! I don't want to be a vampire!"

Both men hissed. She'd done it now. They were insulted.

"So, you look down on us, do you?" Sax said with a fierce gleam in his eyes.

"No, you don't understand." She sighed. How could she explain her situation to them? For the longest time, she'd lied about her true nature. "Just—take me home," she said in an agitated manner.

"No, you will remain with us for the next few days," Lucius stated in a firm tone as displeasure shone on his face. The vein between his eyebrows danced, and a growl resonated deep in his throat. She knew he was minutes from chastising her and she'd lose the battle. She looked at Sax, who appeared to wholeheartedly agree with Lucius.

"Fine!" Simone belted out.

"Watch that sharp tongue of yours," Sax warned with a growl.

"I'll fix her little red wagon tonight," Lucius said with an emotionless expression. "I'll take away the thing she loves the most."

Simone's chest tightened. No, they couldn't. They wouldn't. She feared the worst. If they separated her from the ruby, they'd discover her true nature for sure. Sax confirmed her suspicions were wrong as his hand gravitated toward the apex of her thigh. She relaxed when she realized they

were speaking of depriving her of her favorite sexual acts. Her pulse quickened as Sax toyed with her pussy through the fabric of her clothing.

The drive to their home seemed longer than what it should have. Simone continued pouting as she glared out the limousine window. Finally Victor pulled up in front of the high-rise. Although she ignored them, she was felt their searing gazes fall upon her, making the hair on the back of her neck stand on end.

Once inside the condominium, the vampires circled her as though she were prey. They continued to gaze at her in a harsh way. The dim light reflected their irises, giving them a sinister look.

“Undress,” Sax said in a firm tone, rendering her helpless.

“If you refuse, we will use our power on you,” Lucius added, as he flashed himself out of his clothing. Sax followed suit until they stood before her, their cocks jutting out from their bodies, making her mouth water. She knew they lacked the power to control her mind because of her strong will and Veruca’s magick, so she relented.

Lucius scooped her up and carried her off to his bedroom with Sax following close behind. Growling, he tossed her on the bloodred satin comforter of his large four-poster bed. Both vampires flocked to her side, their hard cocks bobbing freely in front of her face.

“Your punishment for the evening is sucking us both off,” Sax whispered while fisting her coarse curls in his hand and guiding his cock through oval willing lips. She watched as he thrust his shaft balls-deep into her mouth. If this was punishment, she longed to see how they would reward her. Her pussy clenched at the thought.

“Your cunt burns with desire for us,” Lucius chortled, sniffing the air. “Pity we must punish you, but remember this, you’ve brought this upon yourself.” He began fingering her slickness, making her moan in delight. Her hands gravitated to Sax’s taut buttocks as he plowed his cock in and out of her mouth.

“Damn you, Lucius,” Sax huffed as he continued pumping in and out of Simone’s needy mouth. “If you punish her, you’re punishing us!” He gasped

for a few moments, sinking in the delightful pleasures of her mouth. "For the gods' sake, allow us to fuck her!"

"Denied," Lucius said with a straight face, as he lightly brushed the soft folds of her pussy. His deep laugh angered her as she bucked her hips against his teasing hand. "She'll learn her lesson and will become a vampire."

Anger rose inside her as Lucius shot her a sly grin. She'd show him. Sax's cock twitched in her mouth and pulsated. She'd deal with Lucius later. Grasping Sax's huge balls, she kneaded them as his body shuddered. Sax exploded inside her mouth as he threw his head back in the glorious delight. Greedily, she lapped at his come-laden cock until she'd licked him clean.

"Ah, babe," Sax breathed, lowering himself beside her to bury his nose in the crook of her neck. "Oh, you service us so well," he said, possessively pulling her against his still-hardened cock. He shot Lucius a grim stare. "This does not satisfy me," he said defiantly.

"Well, it'll have to do," Lucius sneered as Simone rose to her feet.

"Where do you think you're going?" Sax demanded.

"I prefer to sleep by myself," she said, strolling toward the large double doors.

"You will sleep with us," Lucius stated.

"Look, I need time to myself. There's so much for me to think about," she said, studying both vampires' faces. "I . . . You guys just can't comprehend the pressure I'm under right now."

"Pressure?" Lucius arched a brow. "My brother is coven leader, and usually a bastard to boot. We're lucky that he's been lenient with us." He folded his arms and tightened his jaw. "Do not force his hand, Simone. Even I will not be able to sway his decision once he's settled. Keep that in mind."

She sensed their leniency. "I understand. But . . ."

Lucius frowned. "But what?"

"Why does he push to have humans cross over?"

Lucius tightened his jaw before exhaling his annoyance. "He has his reasons, none that are of any concern of ours."

"Oh, so big brother hasn't told you what truly plagues him."

Lucius snarled. “Little one, you overstep your boundaries. I should put you across my knee and paddle that ass until you can no longer sit.” He bit his lip when he saw her disappointment. “Why do you make things difficult?” He reached out to cup her delicate jawline.

She pushed his hand away. “Is it a crime to question authority? I’m not a vampire, and unfamiliar to your ways. Vampires’ hatred toward wolves.” She shook her head. “I’ll never be able to fathom that one.

“Then you need to learn,” Lucius shot out. “Don’t even mention wolves in my presence. You don’t know half of what they’ve done to our coven, centuries ago!”

She parted her lips to argue, but Sax quickly intervened, shooting Simone a displeased look. “*Stand down.*” He arched a white brow. “We need to talk,” he said, setting his sights on Lucius. “I told you long ago, there were other ways we can deal with the coven.” He leaned closer. “Do we really have to exist within the coven city limits?”

“There is a rising threat,” Lucius bit out anxiously.

Sax’s facial expression turned cold. “They’re close, aren’t they?”

“Too close!” The muscle in Lucius’s jaw danced, signaling his displeasure.

She was at a loss now. “Who’s close?” She searched the vampires’ faces for an answer, but it was nothing they would share with her.

Lucius looked over at Simone. “Leave us, now,” he said on a growl. He only had to tell her once, and Simone quietly abandoned the room.

## Chapter Six

Standing before the large gold mirror in her private bedroom, Simone studied herself. Chocolate-brown eyes returned her stare as she grasped the ruby pendant in her hand and focused on her secret spot beneath the full moon. She earned this private time and had not run free in such a long time.

*"Moonibre Ulehtultre."* Suddenly, she was standing beneath the large silver moon in a place unknown to vampires. Well, hopefully, they wouldn't shimmer after her. The ruby pendant would cloak any magic trail she'd left behind. Vampires possessed the power to project themselves to any corner of the Earth they desired. Veruca's words replayed in her mind.

Peace enveloped Simone, and she held her arms up in worship of the silver globe. The longing she'd stifled so much would be denied no longer. Concentrating, she began to run, shedding the sheer garments the vampires had bestowed upon her. Fur erupted along her smooth dark skin, and in seconds, she was on all fours, dashing playfully in the mountainous terrain of California.

For half an hour or so, the she-wolf trotted through the brisk woods, her problems seemingly forgotten; for now. Suddenly, her keen senses detected a familiar presence. She stood, with her nose to the wind, ears perked high. She thought she'd detected movement out the corner of her right eye.

Instinct warned her to run as the female Hrothega charged her. Her deadly assailant halted before her, then transformed into its human form. She shifted as well.

*"Selena."* Simone stared at her mirror image. Her sister's black eyes seemed to shoot daggers at her. She could sense the evil rolling off her in waves.

"Simone. I see you've torn yourself away from your vampires long enough to embrace your true nature." A growl slipped past her sister's lips. "Why do you run from the inevitable? Embrace the power! There is much to be had!"

*"Never!"* Simone stood firm. "I'm not like you, and I have nothing more to say, Selena."

“Very well. You deserted us,” her sister shrieked. “I’ve held off on killing you because I didn’t think you’d disappoint me. I was more than fair in giving you enough time. But now I see I was wrong!” Immediately, Selena shifted, as did Simone.

The Hrothega lunged after the small wolf in an effort to grip Simone around the neck. Instinct navigated her from her sister’s jowls. Simone latched on to the Hrothega’s leg and clamped down as hard as she could. Savagely, she shook her head, ripping at her sister’s flesh.

In a fit of fury, Selena batted Simone away with a large clawed hand. Hrothegas walked on two feet, whereas wolf shifters were four-legged creatures. Simone yelped in pain as the claw sliced through her snout. As she landed on her back, instinct warned her to retreat. A simple wolf shifter was no match for a Hrothega. Quickly, she scurried to her feet and tore off across the land.

Simone ran as fast and as hard as she could until a searing pain in her left flank made her wobbly. The bitch had nipped her on the hindquarter! Feeling lethargic, she fell snout-first into the earth. Hrothegas harbored a certain type of bacteria in their saliva that weakened their prey. Simone’s mind drifted toward her mates, and fear gripped her when she thought she’d never see them again.

A shot rang out, then she heard a familiar voice. She whined as the pain filtered through her body.

“Hey, girl.”

She lifted her head up, but her vision was blurred. The figure clad in black towered over her, and for a fleeting moment she feared for her life. Suddenly, blackness shrouded her like a veil.

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“That’s a girl. There, there. You gonna be just fine,” Victor said in a soothing voice.



The familiar voice was soothing, and she knew she was no longer in danger. Pain filtered through her body like arrows as she tried to move. Two figures stood over her.

“Awaken, wolf.” The pull of Veruca’s voice forced Simone’s eyes to flutter open. She stared in disbelief as Victor pulled her blanket over her. Relief filtered through her when she observed the familiar surroundings of her small apartment.

“You gave us a scare there, lady,” Victor said, pulling a chair up to the bed. Veruca handed him a small bowl of piping hot beef stew. Simone inhaled deeply as her mouth watered. Hunger consumed her, and as Victor usually said, “her stomach was gnawing on her backbone.”

“Victor,” Simone slowly sat up with Veruca’s assistance. She stared shamefully into the old man’s cloudy blue eyes.

“I can’t believe you couldn’t trust me enough to confide in me,” Victor said in a hurtful tone as he spoon-fed her the stew. He waited until she sipped on the broth, then chewed a generous portion of beef.

“Victor, how did you know where to find me?”

“Veruca came to me,” he insisted. “Sure as you’re sitting here in front of me, she appeared out of nowhere to me. Scared the living *shyte* out of me, but, hey.” The man’s expression changed, and his snaggletoothed smile disappeared. “Somethin’ bad gonna happen,” he said with a frown.

The sorceress smiled and clasped her hands over Simone’s. “The Hrothega that attacked you last night was Selena.”

Shaking her head, Simone stifled a tear. “If I kill her, I fear I’ll turn into a Hrothega,” she confessed. She’d loved her sister a long time ago, but now she felt numb. She fought hard to not allow the rage and hatred to consume her.

“There is no hope for her. No hope for *any* wolf shifter that embraces darkness,” Veruca confessed. “Many Hrothegas are hell-bent on annihilating certain vampire covens, and Steeleheart is on the top of their list.” The sorceress’ smooth caramel complexion broke out in tiny beads of sweat. She stared at Simone. “Selena’s plans are deadly.”

“What am I to do?” Simone asked with trepidation. As soon as she ended her sentence, Sax appeared. Thankfully, he hadn’t heard the conversation about Selena.

“Sooner or later, you will have to inform Lucius of your deceit.” Sax’s voice boomed throughout the room. The perplexed look carved on his masculine features twisted her stomach into guilty knots. He didn’t approach.

“Sax, I can explain!”

“Oh, really?” Sax’s tone was a low snarl, cutting her to the quick. “I can’t believe after how hard we fought for your rights, you’d deceive us using magick! You’re nothing but a common—”

“No, you don’t really mean what you say!” Simone tried to get up, but the searing pain held her prisoner.

“Easy now,” Veruca lightly restrained her, then set her sights on Sax. “Do you really think it’s right of you disturbing her in this manner? She could have died out there had it not been for—”

“Don’t justify her betrayal!” Sax seethed, baring his fangs. “Wolves are nothing but enemies to all vampires! My comrades and I have hunted them for centuries!” Sax spat out. “They’re beasts, only worthy of destruction!”

Simone’s heart dropped. She dare not tell him that Hrothegas were simply wolf shifters who’d embraced darkness. Apparently, he didn’t know that. “They? I’m of wolf blood,” she bit out. “This cannot change the fact that I belong to you and Lucius.”

Sax hung his head. “Why?” He looked up at her through piercing slits. “Didn’t you ever think what your betrayal would do to any of us? Lazius . . .” Sax closed his eyes. “Lazius won’t hesitate to slay you.”

“What of you?” Simone sat up. “Would you snuff my life out simply because I’m of wolf’s blood?” She waited for an answer as Sax dodged her gaze. “Can you honestly slay me right now, this minute?”

Sax looked at her and shook his head. “Don’t lay this on my shoulders, deceiver!”

“Apparently, you ignorantly exterminated good and loyal clans over the centuries, leaving the Hrothegas free to do as they please, in your quest to dominate the humans! Unknowingly, you allowed the most dangerous,

bloodthirsty pack on Earth to exist!” Veruca rose to challenge the vampire. “Leave us now!” she demanded. “Leave us, or I’ll—”

Sax stepped forward, baring fangs. “Or you’ll what, witch?”

“I’m a sorceress, not a witch.” Veruca lifted her chin defiantly to the vampire. “Watch your step, vampire, or I’ll cast a spell you won’t soon forget!”

The flow of energy in the room shifted as the sorceress’s temper rose. It didn’t matter that Sax was a warrior. This Simone knew all too well. She’d put him in his place if her hand were forced.

Victor stepped in between the two. “Sax, please.”

“Know your place, human!” Sax sneered.

“Now, Sax,” Victor bit out. “You can’t allow your hatred to blind you. I’ve served you and Lucius for many years. Never have you fixed your tongue to speak to me in such a harsh manner.”

Sax’s nostrils flared. “You betrayed us as well, old man.”

“No!” Simone interrupted. “I assure you, Victor knew nothing of my secret.” She blinked for a few moments then glanced at Veruca.

“Go away, vampire.” The flow of energy slowed as her temper ceased.

Sax shot her a venomous stare with his blue glowing orbs before fixating his gaze upon Simone. “Lazius will hunt you down like a filthy animal.”

“You would inform Lazius of my true nature?” Simone cocked her head to the side. Deep down inside, she’d hoped he wouldn’t, but as it was, she had wronged both men. They would never forgive her, especially since centuries’ worth of hatred had been instilled into all vampire warriors.

Sax parted his lips to speak, but nothing came out. As he shook his head, his form dissipated before their very eyes.

“You rest now,” Veruca said, as she adjusted the pillow beneath Simone.

“No, I must speak with Lucius,” she insisted.

“Why?” Veruca demanded. “You saw Sax’s reaction, and his temper is nothing compared to Lucius’s.”

Simone sat back, her jaw tight and muscles tensed. Her heart resided in her throat, and her stomach churned. “It’s over,” she murmured. “It’s all over.” She glanced at Veruca and Victor. “What will I do now?”

“You can stay with me,” Veruca said. “We Hanemeagas are rare. I was hoping I wasn’t the last, but as it stands . . .” The sorceress choked up, and tears formed in her silvery eyes.

Simone put a hand on top of her old friend’s. “As are the cheetah shifters. I’ve had the privilege of only laying eyes on two: Chetiera and Silhura,” Simone said with great disappointment. “They live among dhampyres, and Krulnick, who is now their coven leader, has taken Chetiera as his Corselene. Tell, what will become of us all? How far into the future can you see?”

There are a few more handfuls of cheetah shifters that retreated to Africa before the war took place. The sorceress shook her head with disappointment as a lone silver tear plummeted down her cheek. “All that I see for the future is blackened,” she confessed wistfully. “I’m so sorry I don’t have better fortunes to tell you.

“It’s all right,” she moaned. “Victor, do you think you’ll be okay returning to Steeleheart?”

“Yes, and I’ll see what I can do about Sax. He’s stubborn, is all. Don’ you worry none, Simone.” Victor patted her on the shoulder as he rose to his feet. “Sax will come around, and all will be okay,” he said, as he slipped his plaid cap over his full head of gray hair. He kissed her on the top of her head before exiting the room, leaving Simone and Veruca to plan for the gloom that lay ahead.

## Chapter Seven

Sax stood out on the balcony, overlooking the city, losing himself in the sparkling night lights. From afar, he could hear the crashing sound of the waves as though they were right next to the castle. His chest tight with hurt, he sighed sharply. Anger bubbled inside him as he replayed the new knowledge in his head.

"*Simone.*" The name wrought pain deep in his soul. He closed his eyes momentarily. The overbearing weight in his chest refused to lighten. Her betrayal deeply wounded him, like an athame through his heart. Something else threatened him. Like a creeping plague, dread cast its dark shadow upon him. *Lucius.* His comrade would not be so forgiving.

"What of Simone?" Lucius asked calmly as he strode onto the balcony, taking his place beside his old friend. He leaned against the black railing, and a small spark of joy glinted in his eyes as he spoke of the woman. "What has the little minx gotten herself into now?" he asked with a chuckle.

"She's shopping," Sax quickly lied. No way in hell he could tell Lucius; not now. Not with the threat of the wolves so close. Perhaps he should sever all ties with her, for their own sake. Maybe, if he could bring it up to Lazius .

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"Let her shop. She needs to get her head together. She'd better be ready, too. Lazius's patience is nonexistent." Lucius scratched his head and smiled with amusement.

"I cherish her so much. She brings light to our rather dark world, eh, Sax?" He poked his friend in the ribs with an elbow.

"Yeah," Sax sighed, feeling the burden of Simone's secret upon his shoulders. His heart had melted at the hurt look in her sparkling brown eyes when he'd spoken to her so harshly. He hadn't meant anything he said. Although angry at her, he'd found out how much she truly meant since he discovered her secret. The pain of her not trusting him enough to share that information from the beginning plagued him. As if that wasn't enough, there was the other dilemma. Wolves were viewed as the lowest form of life on Earth. How the hell would they ever coerce the coven to accept her now?

“What’s eating you?”

Before Sax could answer, Lucius’s cell phone rang. Sax stiffened as he heard Lazius’s voice on the other end. “You’ve captured a wolf? Yes, we’re on our way.” Lucius ended the call. “A wolf was caught lurking along the city limits,” he said as his fangs descended. “I personally want to maim the filthy beast,” he said, retreating into the condominium. “Let’s go!”

Feeling his friend’s hatred reverberate through his own body, Sax swiftly followed. “What kind of wolf?” Sax asked as he strode alongside Lucius.

The redheaded vampire peered at him through narrowed slits. “Does it matter? They’re all filthy and deserve death!”

Sax nodded and swallowed hard. Would he bestow the same treatment upon Simone? Dread settled over the warrior like an unwanted mist. Sooner or later, he’d have to tell Lucius the truth about their she-wolf.

## Chapter Eight

Sax's heart dropped when he witnessed the ebony form strapped to an electric chair in the middle of the council chambers. Fear struck him hard at her treatment because at first glance, her body reminded him of Simone's. With the exception of her petite frame, this shifter had the same smooth, brown skin. There was just one more detail. He hadn't noticed the small black tattoo on the left side of her chest. He tensed.

A bloodred sack had been placed over the creature's head. He released his breath. The fierce tension in the air was so thick, one could cut it with a dagger.

Kahn strode alongside Lucius and Sax. He rubbed his hands together and smiled. "I'm curious to see this wolf," he said with a smile before swiping his long blond hair over his shoulder.

Lucius wrinkled his nose. "Filthy stinking beast."

"Hmm, I hear she's very pretty, though," Kahn said with a husky overtone as they turned the corner. He lowered his voice as they neared the larger crowd of aristocrats entering the great hall. "I, for one, wouldn't mind bedding a wolf shifter. I hear their sexual appetites are insatiable."

"You're sick! You'd actually stick your prick in a wolf?" Lucius wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Still your tongue before someone overhears you."

"You've actually bedded a wolf shifter," Sax asked Kahn. The vampire shook his head in disappointment. Sax set his sights upon Lucius. If only he knew he'd bedded a wolf shifter many times. "Obviously you don't share the coven's views," Sax said solemnly.

"Should I decide to leave the coven, I'd take a wolf shifter as a mate." Kahn paused for a few minutes, to ensure no one would hear. "I've been a warrior for centuries and have never once stumbled across 'the one' I'm meant to be with. Do you really think if she were a wolf shifter that made me feel complete I'd turn her away because of the difference?"

"I suppose not," Lucius muttered. "Even so, I wouldn't voice my opinion if I were you."

Sax gulped at the emotionless stare Lucius cast at the wolf. His heart sank, and his mind raced at the thought of having to confess Simone's secret to him. He took his seat in the front row, next to his comrade. Venomous hisses echoed throughout the chambers when Lazius removed the red hood.

"Quiet!" Lazius's voice boomed throughout the chambers, and immediately silence followed. With a stone face, he spoke to the creature. "What were you doing, lurking around Steeleheart proximity, beast?"

Sax folded his arms across his chest. At first glance, he thought her to be a damsel in distress, for she was a tiny thing. Her bone-straight, shoulder-length raven hair was messed up from resisting. But soon, he discovered he was sadly mistaken. The beast snarled, and a grotesque mask of horror changed the seemingly angelic appearance of her face. Then, she shifted into Hrothega form, then back to human, eliciting gasps and loud talking throughout the hall.

"A Hrothega!" Lucius spat. "But how?"

"You'll receive no information from me." The woman continued staring straight ahead, as if into an unseen abyss. Her jaw muscle twitched in agitation.

"Bring me the prod," Lazius smirked as another vampire, Marcos, handed him a cattle prod. "One more time, beast! What were you doing on the outskirts of the city?"

Sax sucked in a breath as he witnessed Lazius's fangs descend and his eyes seemingly burst into reddish-orange flames. It was no secret how much he despised wolves. Deep down he could see the pleasure Lazius derived as he tortured the female. Her tormented cries carried throughout the chambers.

"*Arrgghbaaa!*" The Hrothega spat at Lazius in disgust. Her breathing became erratic, and her eyes turned silvery. She thrashed about in the chair as Lazius continued delivering painful shocks to various parts of her body. "*Arrggggghhh!*"

Sax averted his gaze. True, Hrothegas were bloodthirsty and cruel. Sometimes, they would even turn on their own packs. Cruelty was bred into



their race, and he knew Lazius was only matching that cruelty for the sake of the coven.

“Do you have a death wish, beast?” Lazius’s jaw tightened as he awaited the creature’s answer. “If I don’t get the answer I seek, I’ll lop your head off right here, right now.”

“*Lazius the Great.*” The female mocked the clan leader before casting her glance to the coven. “Really, now. Your ignorance shocks me.” Her laughter angered the entire coven. “You’ve all been made fools of,” she said with a snarl.

Lazius pressed his lips together in utter fury, and his eyebrows furrowed. “What the hell are you talking about?”

The female shook her head and clucked her tongue, teasing and taunting him. Sax could tell she enjoyed toying with the leader. She exhaled sharply and rolled her eyes. “Hmm.” She cocked her head to the side as though in deep thought. “First of all, I need to speak my piece.” She looked up at him. “Did you really think Hrothegas were easily destroyed? Do you know how many centuries it took to replenish our clan?”

“How many?” Lazius grasped the creature around the throat. “How many more packs are there?”

She simply laughed. “More than you’ll ever know. Hrothegas will be pursuing Steeleheart Coven for the next millennia. Doesn’t it strike uneasiness in your soul to ponder whether you’re setting sights on wolf or Hrothega?” She turned to face the crowd.

After releasing her with a shove, he raised a clawed hand in the air. “Now you die, filthy fucking beast!”

“Wait!” The female yelled. “Would you like to know a secret?” She smiled, baring her fangs. She shook her head softly. “C’mon, a teensy-weensy secret,” she said in a squeaky voice. Obviously, she was getting off on vexing Lazius’s temper.

“What secret?”

“Ha-ha, this is going to be the icing on the cake. You high and mighty vampires think you know everything, but you can’t even tell when a wolf has been living among you!” She held her head back, howling with laughter.

The coven erupted with a buzz. Someone in the crowd voiced their disbelief. What, a wolf among us?" Sax's throat knotted up, and he glanced over at Lucius. Flames appeared to dance in his comrade's glowing eyes. There was no denying it. He was pissed. He prayed for Lazius to kill the female Hrothega where she sat, for fear of Simone being discovered.

"You lie!" Lazius spat.

"Oh, no, Lazius the Great." Her sarcastic voice filtered through the chambers. "A wolf has been living in this coven for, hmmm, many months I believe." She laughed at the outraged vampires. "I really can't figure out how sooo many great vampires were ignorant to the presence of a wolf shifter."

"A Hrothega, among us?" Lucius rose, his fists clenched tight.

"Oh, no, not a Hrothega, cutie; just your regular, harmless female shifter." She paused. "But then, we all start out as harmless shifters until we embrace the darker side." She howled one last time before Lazius swiftly decapitated her with his claw. The head sailed through the air and landed on the stone steps.

Sax frowned, wondering why the beast's last comment caused Lazius to end her life so swiftly. Something was amiss. What had she meant by wolf shifters embracing the dark side? Why did Hrothegas piss him off so badly?

Claws dripping with Hrothega blood, the clan leader stood in silence for what seemed like hours. "This is an outrage!" His voice reverberated through the chambers. A hush swept over the crowd as he turned, his eyes gleaming with anger and hatred. His fangs dripped with saliva. "Find this wolf, and bring her to me now!" He balled his hands up. "She shall pay for her betrayal!" He shouted commands to his warriors. "I want every inch of this city covered. Search human and vampire homes! Newly turned vampires are much more likely to harbor wolves. I want her found!"

Lazius plowed over toward Sax and Lucius. "You two, where's your mate?"

"She should be home, but why?" Lucius asked with a bewildered look.

"Find her now!" Lazius bellowed. "I want her turned, immediately! She can fight against the female Hrothegas."

“I’ll get her.” Sax volunteered. Seeing the seething hatred in the brothers’ eyes had forced him to make a hasty decision. He had to protect Simone by sharing the truth with Lucius. The bond between the three had grown. He gambled on the fact that Lucius’s love for her was as great as his own. Now it was time to test that theory.

## Chapter Nine

"Is this all you're packing?" Veruca gestured toward Simone's suitcases. "The journey to Africa will be long. I so hate Fang Airways," the sorceress muttered. "I don't see why you just don't let me transport us there. Besides, we'll only be there for a few weeks."

Simone pulled her hair back with a black scrunchie and smiled at her old friend. "I don't want to leave a magical trail for the vampires to follow.

"Well, you didn't think about that when you popped over to California, now did you," Veruca chastised.

She swore softly to herself when Simone's eyes hit the floor. "Sorry. I'm on edge. Lazius will have your head, should he learn of your betrayal."

She shook her head. "I should have never assisted you in cloaking your true nature. I knew it was suicide the day you came to me. What the hell was I thinking?"

Simone placed a hand on Veruca's shoulder. "Don't blame yourself. Me and my scatterbrained ideas." Simone shook her head, and parted her lips to speak, but words escaped her.

"What?" Veruca asked with concern.

"I just . . . Honestly, I felt like I fit in perfectly when working at Club Damnation. No one ever saw the wolf, you know?" Simone shamefully cast her gaze to the floor.

"Wolf shifters on my level are few and far between. I tried to blend in with the vampires because my pack started turning on one another. Survival was paramount in this new world." She closed her eyes in memory of how badly she'd been treated in her pack.

"Do you think the vampires are less cruel," Veruca asked, as she motioned for Simone to sit on the daybed. "I mean, look how many wolf packs they've destroyed over the centuries. Not to mention they pitted you against a female vampire. That never bothered you?"

"No, it actually made me stronger. In my pack, fighting one another was daily. At least the vampires test your strength, and that's it."

“Didn’t you say they were going to pit you and Felicia against one another again?”

“Yes. But that’s different. At least, among the vampires, I’m viewed as an equal.”

Veruca’s eyes narrowed. “You still wish for the past—before the vampires and others made themselves known.”

“Well.” Simone paused. “Yes, of course I do. When the world was seemingly normal, I lived among humans, who didn’t know the difference. It wasn’t like they could sniff me out or anything. Not like vampires and wolves.”

Veruca nodded. “Understood. I just wanted to see where your head was, that’s all.”

“I had never come into contact with any other shifters besides my own pack, until all paranormal creatures started crawling out the woodwork,” Simone said with a laugh.

Veruca smiled and said, “Then you and I met. . . .”

“So thankful for that,” Simone said with a grin. “If it weren’t for you—”

“Supporting your harebrained scheme—” Veruca began.

“Lucius and Sax would have never taken a liking to me.”

“Would that have bothered you?”

“Well, after knowing them and becoming close to them . . . yes.” Simone bit her lip. “I knew in my heart and soul that the three of us were meant to be together.”

“I see.” Veruca observed her friend. “You don’t really want to come to Africa, do you?”

Simone shook her head.

“So, what are we going to do about it?”

“We?”

“Yes, we,” the sorceress said with a sigh. “I see how much you care for the vampires. It’s safe to say you’ve found love with them.”

“If anything were to ever happen to either one of them, it would destroy me.”

“It would destroy us, too, babe.”

They heard Lucius's voice before he and Sax appeared in the living room. "What are you doing here?"

The vampire strode over to her, slipped his fingers in her hair, and planted a passionate kiss upon her lips while Veruca and Sax looked on. When he let her go, she saw a gleam in his eyes.

"I promise, I'm going to punish you severely once this dilemma is over with," Lucius said with a growl.

"Yeah, me, too," Sax said as he crossed his arms. "Little one, do you know how much of an uproar you've caused?"

"A Hrothega was discovered snooping around the city limits," Lucius said with a sigh. "At first sight, Lazius thought she was a self-sacrifice sent in by her clan to destroy the coven."

Veruca and Simone quickly glanced at one another. "What happened?" Simone asked, knowing the Hrothega wasn't Selena.

Sax frowned. "Lazius killed her."

"Only after she told him about the wolf among the coven," Lucius said, his eyes never leaving Simone's.

A chill slithered down her spine. "Does he suspect me?" Simone inquired as her instincts warned her that Selena was still alive. The knowledge was like a dark cloud hovering over her.

"Um, no, but that's going to change because he wants to turn you vampire." Sax glared at her with great intensity, then shot Veruca a silent plea. "You cast this spell, what do we do now? I'm not spending an eternity keeping an untruth from my coven."

"So, it doesn't matter to you that Simone's a wolf?" Veruca asked with trepidation.

"Not going to lie. I was pretty damned pissed off," Lucius shot out quickly as he nonchalantly strolled around the room to look at pictures. He stopped to stare out the window, crossed his arms behind him, then turned to face them all. After Sax told me, it occurred to me how strong you were when fighting Felicia. Humans can't compete against vampires. Honestly, I felt guilty for deeming wolves filthy beasts. I know you, Simone. Your kindness has helped me to change my opinions of wolves as a whole."

Simone cleared her throat.

“Yeah, that had me going as well, but I never really gave it much thought until we spoke about you.” Sax grinned, as he sat down on the sofa.

“What about the Hrothegas? Why couldn’t we sense them?” Lucius frowned.

“Because they’ve kept themselves hidden very well,” Simone said. “If a Hrothega chooses to show themselves, that’s one thing. They are used to lurking within the shadows of forests, especially when they are intent on killing their prey.”

“Humpf.” Sax snorted. “I see. So, clearly they plan to make war with us.”

“Yeah, that’s what the female said before Lazius killed her.” Lucius looked at her with concern in his eyes. “My brother believes you to be human and wants to turn you into a vampire.

“You need to tell us why you deceived us,” Sax insisted.

Simone sighed. “There is more to the Hrothegas and wolf shifters,” she said while glancing in Veruca’s direction.

“You should tell them,” Veruca said with a nod. “They really need to know.”

Lucius sat down beside her. “What do you mean?”

Simone bit her lip and crossed her arms while simultaneously looking both vampires in the eyes. “Hrothegas are nothing more than former wolf shifters.” There, she’d said it. Something shifted in their eyes, almost causing her to shudder.

“What?” Sax glared at Simone. “You’re kidding me, right?”

Her eyes meeting his, Simone shook her head. “I wish I were. You see, when lust and greed overtake a wolf shifter, they transform. Their hearts are no longer pure, and they must take a life in order to embrace the dark side. Once they choose to take a life, the wolf shifter is transformed into a Hrothega.” She exhaled sharply and looked at them both. “My sister is such a creature.”

“You’ve spoken of your sister before, saying you barely knew her because of her actions. Now I understand what you mean,” Lucius added.

Veruca spoke up. “Neither of you knew that?”

Lucius shook his head, then quickly rose. "I bet Lazius knows!" He paced the floor, deep in thought.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Sax stood as well.

Lucius turned to face his comrade. "Big brother may be harboring a secret. Something he's carried with him for centuries. Now I know why he exterminated the wolf packs." He turned to Veruca. "He knew the Hrothegas were once wolf shifters."

Sax breathed a sigh of relief before glaring at Veruca. "Why did you give me hell over our coven exterminating regular wolf shifters when you knew this, sorceress?"

Veruca rose and walked toward Sax. "Because. You vampires follow without seeking answers. Many covens follow centuries-old rules, never asking who, what, why, and how."

"Coven rules are set into place for good reasons," Lucius glowered at the sorceress. "My brother has never led us astray."

"Maybe so, but haven't you ever wondered what his reasons were? Don't you think it's time for a change?" Veruca put a reassuring hand on the vampire's large bicep. "Lucius, be a leader, not a follower. I see this occur in so many vampire covens."

Lucius hung his head. "I wonder what it is that plagues him so—and why he's kept it from me all these years?"

Simone wrapped her arms around him. "Well, I think it's high time you both find out. I know I'm dying to know." She looked at Veruca. "This does put my mind at ease now. I had hoped Lazius didn't kill innocent wolf shifters in vain."

Lucius grunted in agitation as his cell phone rang. "Yes, Lazius. What? Yeah, we're on our way!" Eyes flashing red, he quickly ended the call. "We've got to go. Our coven is under attack!" His claws and fangs descended, as did Sax's.

"I'm coming, too!" Simone bit out.

Sax backed her against the wall, growling. "You'll do no such thing," he stated. "Do not follow us, understand?"



Lucius cocked his head to the side. "Veruca, look after her. I don't want her in any danger." He glared at Simone. "Betray us this time, and you'll suffer horrific punishment for the rest of your days," he said before disappearing with Sax.

Simone growled as her wolf slowly rose to the surface. Caught in between human and wolf, she glanced at Veruca.

"I didn't think you'd listen to them," Veruca belted out. "What do we do?"

"We assist the coven. Selena is leading the pack into Steeleheart. She's been tapping into my psyche all along. She sent the Hrothega warrior. She was testing me! Now, she seeks to destroy me through them!"

"Calm down," Veruca insisted. "Make no mistake, the vampires can handle their own."

"But if something happens to Lucius and Sax, I'll never forgive myself." Her breath evaded her, and she felt as though she were hyperventilating.

"You don't understand. I know what she plans to do. She slipped up, too. Selena knows how protective they are of me."

"What the hell do you think she has planned?"

"I don't know. I can't penetrate her psyche. We've got to hurry!"

"Take this!" Veruca tried handing her the ruby.

"No! It's time the entire coven know my true nature."

"You fool! What if they try to kill you?"

Simone shook her head. "I'll give Lazius more credit than that. I've got to trust my gut instinct. Like you told Lucius, it's high time for a change!"

Veruca nodded before transporting herself and Simone to Steeleheart City.

## Chapter Ten

After dodging a sword from an angered vampire, Selena attacked a defenseless human to send a message to the leader of the clan. She grinned after sniffing the air. Sea salt. Lazius's lair was close. Soon, she'd bring down the entire city. Humans ran every which way to avoid the Hrothegas' deadly wrath.

She howled. Then her pack eagerly joined her in the Hrothega death song. This was a warning to vampires, as well as the humans. The sound of clashing waves came closer. She rose, walking on two legs instead of all fours.

"Die, filthy beast!"

"Drive them over here!" Another voice cut through the air.

Selena clenched her teeth. What was this? Suddenly, black netting appeared through the air, entangling hordes of Hrothegas. Death soon followed as a handful of warriors quickly disposed of the beasts, their dying howls piercing the night sky.

The bloodsuckers had set a trap! Cursing herself for underestimating the coven, she knew she had to move quickly. She needed to find Simone and finish the job she started evenings ago. Smiling inwardly, she'd known how Sax and Lucius felt toward her. They'd seek dawn should Simone be ripped from their grasps. That would bring her great satisfaction—and more power. Claiming a pure, innocent wolf soul would forever more cinch the deal with darkness.

She grinned as she approached Lazius's castle. There, perched on the hill overseeing the entire city, the black stone castle stood proudly.

They'd never suspect. In a flash, Selena shifted into a seductive vampiress, like the one she'd killed earlier. This would gain her entrance into the castle. She sauntered through the large double doors that were soon to be barred.

"Imani!" The gatekeeper snapped, clutching the sword tighter within his grasp. "What are you doing out here? Hrothegas are attacking! This is no time for leisurely walks!"

“Entering now,” Selena purred as she crossed the threshold of the castle. *Ah, the lovely wonders of embracing the darkness!* The only form she could shift in as a lowly shifter was wolf. Hrothegas could transform into any creature they deemed necessary.

The hall was large and free of coven members, with the exception of warriors thundering past and out the door to join in the battle. Outside, war cries and howls raged. Uncaring as to how many of her pack were slain, Selena picked up her sister’s scent and followed it. Soon it would be over. Her dark power would be strengthened. Nothing and no one would be able to stop her then.

\* \* \* \*

Simone froze in her tracks as her sister’s scent infiltrated her nostrils. “She’s here.” She glanced over at the sorceress. “This should end, now!” Simone said gently.

“I’m with you.” Veruca shoved a small trinket into her hand. “We’ll need to bind her powers. You can’t kill her. Surely you do not want to become a Hrothega.”

Accepting the small jewel with a sigh, Simone shook her head. “No, I don’t. If that ever happens, promise me you’ll destroy me. I’m so sorry for ever dragging you into this mess.”

Veruca smiled. “I wouldn’t change a thing.”

“You should leave.”

“But—”

“Leave. I know you’re powerful, but there’s no telling what Selena has up her sleeve.” She hugged Veruca. “Go, please.”

Just as her old friend disappeared, a vampire entered the bedchambers. Simone sniffed the air and crossed her arms. “Did you really think your disguise would fool me so easily?”

The vampire laughed and instantly turned into Selena. “What are you trying to prove? Do you wish to remain the same for the remainder of your days? Humans no longer rule! We can take what we want!”

“I’ll have no part of the destruction of others,” Simone said stubbornly.

“Oh, just your pack members.”

“If I remember correctly, Selena, you were the one who destroyed the majority of our pack.”

“Enough talk, Simone. It’s time for you to meet your maker.” Releasing a bloodcurdling howl, Selena charged her sister.

## Chapter Eleven

Lazius, Sax, and Lucius fought together, assisting the rest of the warriors in slaying the Hrothegas.

“You mean to tell me, Simone is the wolf shifter? You wait, I’ll—”

“Brother, you’ll not harm one hair on her head.” Lucius was only mere inches from his brother.

“You didn’t reprimand her, did you?” Lazius arched a brow.

“Why should we?” Sax asked. “She was merely protecting herself.”

“She betrayed us!” Lazius growled. “She should face punishment!”

“Hasn’t she been through enough?” Sax halted. “Don’t you think it’s time to make a change?”

Lazius turned to glare at Sax. “Are you challenging me?”

“No, I’m challenging the old ways. “Times have changed, and we must catch up.”

“I agree, Brother.” Lucius released a sigh. “We were both angry with the little minx. I’ve come to realize all wolf shifters aren’t the same.”

“At first, I thought I’d never forgive her,” Sax chortled. “But we both have come to develop so much emotion for her.” He paused a few minutes to thread his white hair through his fingertips. “Truthfully, I cannot imagine my life without her.”

Lucius bit his lip and rolled his eyes. “Don’t go there.”

“Look, if I can admit it, so can you.” Sax laughed. “Actually, actions speak louder than words. She’s tamed both of us,” he continued. “You know it in your soul.”

Just then, a loud thud in one of the bedchambers caught their attentions. The scent of two female wolves fighting roused the vampires’ senses.

“Simone.” The name died in Lucius’s throat as he rushed through the first door to their right. All three vampires halted at the sight before them.

“Sax, help me!” Simone was pinned against the wall by her mirror image.

“No, Sax; it’s my sister, Selena,” the other twin retorted hastily, before delivering a blow to the chin of her adversary. “We’ve got to dispose of her; she’ll return to Hrothega form if we don’t act now! She’s out to destroy the

entire coven! She sent the female Hrothega to infiltrate the coven the first time!”

“What the hell are we to do?” Lazius grunted. “One of them is a Hrothega. One of them must be destroyed!”

Sax stiffened before withdrawing his sword. Lucius followed suit. “I—I can’t tell either of them apart,” Sax said weakly. “What do we do, Lucius?”

“By the gods’ balls,” Lazius thundered. “If neither of you can tell the difference between your *Abrboremeaga* and a filthy Hrothega, then we’re all fucked!”

They continued staring as the female against the wall delivered a blow to her sister’s chest, sending her hurtling across the room. When she stood, they both collided with one another, delivering skilled blows to the most vulnerable spots no mortal could endure.

“I’ll kill you for this, I swear it,” the one clone sneered to the other. “You will pay for what you have done, I promise you!”

“No, you’re the one who shall take her last breath on this night!”

Lazius stalked toward them. “The ruby! Simone always wears a ruby!”

Lucius cursed. “That was the object cloaking her true nature. Veruca, the sorceress, charmed it.”

Sax wrinkled his nose. “She’s not wearing the ruby!”

Lazius’s jaw tightened. “Brother, I don’t wish to kill Simone, but the Hrothega cannot be allowed to escape. She’ll bring forth terrible destruction on this coven. That, I cannot allow! I was betrayed by a shape-shifting Hrothega centuries ago, and I will not be deceived again!” The vampire’s eyes blazed.

Sax swallowed hard, for he knew Lazius spoke the truth. The beast’s sister would bring legions of Hrothegas into the city during the day, while vampires slumbered.

The twins locked with one another, eventually tumbling to the ground. “I loved you, and all you ever did was betray me!”

One twin rose while the other remained kneeling, bowing her head in shame. “Is it true? Is my sister forever lost to me?” She looked up with

pleading eyes and held out her arms. "Come to me. Forgive me for what I've done."

The vampires looked at one another in silence. "It's a trick," Sax snorted.

"Do you mean it," the standing twin asked.

"Yes, with all my heart," the kneeling twin murmured. "Please."

The twin rushed over to her sister, ready to embrace her, when the kneeling twin withdrew a dagger, lunged; plunging it into her sister's chest. As she did, she rose to her feet, backing her sister against the cobblestone wall.

"No!" The vampires rushed toward them as the twin shifted into Selena, and savagely withdrew the blade from Simone's torso, putting space between her and them.

"Oh, yes, gentlemen." Selena laughed, causing the vampires to hiss in bloody outrage. "There's your precious Simone," she sneered as hatred consumed her.

"You've caused so much pain." Simone wobbled, clutched the dagger, and pulled it out while Sax and Lucius tried assisting her. "You killed our parents! Sister, I once loved you, but it's apparent that you are no longer worthy of the word!" Simone looked toward the ceiling. "Mother, Father, please forgive me for what I'm about to do."

Selena tilted her head with a cocky grin. "For what you're about to do? You're in no condition to do battle with me, Sis." She threw her head back and howled with laughter. "That dagger is laced with poison. The more you move, the faster it will affect your nervous system. Eventually, you'll have no control over your limbs."

"Simone, sit down," Sax commanded. "We must find you a healer."

"No, I've got to do this! Let me go, Sax!" Simone walked forward. "In your quest for magick and power, you neglected to remember that wolf shifters pure of heart always had the power deep down inside."

Selena glared at her sister. "What might that be? As wolf shifters, we are powerless! No shifter can ever possess power, unless a sorceress imbues them with it! Such as your precious Veruca! A simple wolf shifter cannot harness such magick!"

"Maybe so. I will make due with what power Veruca has bestowed upon me. Quickly Simone held up a large hematite stone. "This stone will absorb your negative energies, leaving you powerless. I do not wish to kill you, but merely bind you." A bright bolt of energy flittered from her, encasing her sister. Howls of pain filled the room as electrical currents coursed through Selena's body. Immediately she shifted from human to Hrothega several times, then back to human.

Lazius rushed over, restraining Simone's arms. At once, Selena had fallen to her knees, writhing in agony. "You mustn't." He continued staring at her, then glanced over at Sax and Lucius. "Simone, you cannot take your sister's life, or you'll turn into a Hrothega as well. You both know this." The words were barely out of his mouth when guards stormed the bedchambers.

"Seize her!" Lazius commanded. "Put her in the dungeon. She will not be shown one ounce of leniency!" His eyes glared with fury as he spoke. She will be judged, sentenced, and executed!"

"She should die by my hand, Lazius!" Simone cried out breathlessly, uncaring of the effects the poison had on her body.

"You cannot," Sax hissed. "You'll turn! By the gods, if that were to happen, I'd destroy myself along with you!"

"If you perish, we perish," Lucius insisted as he watched the guards chain and shackle Selena.

"No!" Simone stepped back with a gasp. "Please, you know that is not my wish!" She looked at them simultaneously. "Lucius!"

Lucius bowed his head. "I cannot go against her wishes; you know that, Sax!"

Simone remained standing as a guard escorted Selena past her. Swiftly, Selena shifted into Hrothega form. Pulling from the guard's grasp, she plowed toward Simone. The beast lunged, and Simone, unthinking plunged the weapon deep into the creature's chest. A death growl split the air, and Selena landed on the stone floor.

She watched as the beast lay dying on the floor, her blood gushing from the fatal wound. In a flash, the Hrothega's form changed into Selena. Her sister drew one last breath before her body stilled. Simone dropped to her



knees and clutched her chest in agony, disbelieving the sight that lay before her.

Regret claimed Simone as Sax scooped her up into his powerful arms. "It was not my intention to, I didn't mean . . ."

"Sshh. Don't move," Lucius soothed as he stroked her hair, kissing her upon the cheek. "We're taking her to Veruca. She needs to purge the poison from Simone's body."

\* \* \* \*

Veruca cleansed the wound, and Simone's aura along with it. She continued laying hands around Simone's body to ensure no further damage had occurred. "There," she said with a smile. "All fixed."

Simone sat up, smiling at her healer. "Hopefully, that's the last time you'll have to do that," she joked. Sax and Lucius cleared their throats in unison. The two were displeased. "I'm fine guys, really, I am," she assured them as she sat on the bed.

"We thought we were going to lose you," Sax said stiffly. "Why do you have to be so damned headstrong?"

"Would you prefer if she were a delicate flower?" Lazius strode into the room, with Felicia by his side. Simone was shocked when he smiled with warmth—at *her*. All other times, the coven leader had been harsh, almost cruel.

"Simone is far from that. She's no damsel in distress and can hold her own," Lucius stated before frowning. Apparently, he was just as shocked at Lazius' change of character as she was. "Exactly what are you talking about, Bro?"

"Hear me out," Lazius said in a firm tone. "If it weren't for Simone being so headstrong, she would have succumbed to the poisoned dagger." He turned to look at her. "Your sister apparently underestimated you, as she did the coven."

Simone nodded in agreement. "Yes, apparently so." She braced herself for what was to come. It was time to set her focuses on never returning to

the coven. It would be a tough decision, but she'd stood firm on not wanting to be turned into a vampire.

Lazius shifted his weight. "Please accept my most humble apology. I was wrong. In the face of death, you showed great courage. Who am I to take away your true nature? Furthermore, as a wolf shifter, you have far more power within you than any Hrothega. I'm impressed by your will to remain pure."

"So, you aren't going to have Lucius and Sax turn me?"

"Close your mouth, honey; flies will get in," Veruca teased.

"No." Lazius smiled. "Long ago, my pet wolf, Shayla, and I discovered a human woman laying in the woods. Mind you, Shayla wasn't a shifter, but a regular four-legged animal." He paused before continuing. "The woman's name was Seharie, and she'd been left for dead by Hrothegas."

Lazius's jaw tightened at the memory. "I took her back to the castle with me and nursed her back to health. The bond grew between us—and she wanted me to make her vampire, but I denied her."

Simone's heart went out to the coven leader. She watched as Felicia reached for his hand in an effort to console him.

"Shayla disappeared for a few days, and when she returned, I—" He held his head down. "I thought nothing of it. It wasn't Shayla, but a Hrothega. After a council meeting that night, a few hours before dawn I returned to see the hideous beast was feasting on what was left of Seharie's body. While burying Seharie, I discovered Shayla's carcass in the woods.

Lucius placed a hand on his brother's shoulder. "That night, Sax and I were hunting wargs. I'm so sorry for not having been there." He glanced at Sax. "We didn't know."

"Now I understand everything," Sax said solemnly. "You've definitely had your reasons for your actions. However, all creatures should not be condemned for the act of a few." He faced Simone. "That's something I can't—don't—ever want to imagine," he said, reaching out to cup Simone's face. "Losing you would turn us both into madmen," Sax completed his sentence before sighing.

Lucius nodded in agreement. "In my entire existence, I never thought I'd meet a woman that could make me feel complete," he said in a soft tone.

A feeling of completion enveloped Simone as each man embraced her simultaneously.

Lazius smiled wryly. "Well, it's over now. I feel like I can move on, now that I've shared that part of my existence." He turned to face Felicia. "Can you forgive me for neglecting you as I have?" He stroked her cheek affectionately.

"Of course," she said, wrapping her arms around the vampire's large frame. Felicia pulled away and blinked. "You owe me a trip to Palm Springs or the Bahamas," she said slyly. "We could use some alone time together, don't you think?"

Lazius smirked. "We could indeed," he said before turning to his brother. "You're next in line as coven leader. "Make changes as you see fit."

"I don't know what to say, Brother." Lucius was indeed at a loss for words.

"My time is over," Lazius said, pulling Felicia close to him. "He glared at the three of them. "Make sure you take good care of her," he insisted.

"You know we will," Sax said with a grin.

\* \* \* \*

After giving much consideration to the matter, Simone moved into the condo with Sax and Lucius. She'd miss her apartment, but it was time to move on. She'd gotten into many a battle with her sister in that small place, and, quite frankly, she didn't care to have the old negativities in her life.

She hummed quietly to herself as she unfolded her neatly packed clothes from her suitcase and placed them with care in the large black lacquer dresser drawers. She loved her new bedroom. Although lovers, they all came to an understanding that sometimes they needed space to themselves. She had her own bedroom, just as Sax and Lucius had theirs.

The two strolled into her room. Sax playfully scooped her up into his arms, and hoisted her onto the large four-poster bed.

“What the hell are you two up to now?” She laughed as they quickly rid themselves of clothing. Soon, she found her self sprawled across the black and gold comforter, naked as a jaybird.

Lucius grinned as he ran his thumbs over her nipples. “It occurred to us, little wolf, that we’ve never seen you shift. Well, only while battling your sister, briefly,” he purred. “I’d love to see the magnificent creature behind the woman.”

While Lucius spoke, Sax ran his tongue over her mound, gently probing her slick folds with his fingers. “Look at her eyes.” Sax ceased his actions just enough to glare at them both. “They are a beautiful golden color. She’s aroused,” he said before dipping his head between her thighs again.

“Mmm,” Lucius said before sinking his fangs deep into her breast. While she writhed in pleasure, he rolled her nipples between his fingers, gently squeezing them.

Simone gasped and sucked in a breath at what her lovers were doing to her. The wolf scratched just beneath her human façade. No longer forced to hide, she longed to run wild and free with her vampire lovers.

The End

## *About the Author*

Charisma Knight resides in the Maryland area with her daughters. An overactive imagination and her love for vampires, ghosts, and other paranormal beings prompted her to pursue writing in March 2009.

On some occasions, her stories may contain regular human couples. Charisma's stories are highly erotic and laced with a wild edge that will have you wriggling in your seat. She captures her dreams and fantasies, reinventing them as paranormal and contemporary stories.

But be warned. You will discover, sometimes Charisma walks on the darker side of the paranormal, and you may find yourself caught between this realm and another...

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