

Fall of kNight

kNight Series Book 2

Written by

T.L. Mitchell

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It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

~Charles Darwin~

PREFACE

The sound of ghostly drums beat all around me, drawing my soul into another realm or dimension. I was not sure which one. The only thing I was sure of was the fact that I was in pain. Does death come easily to those who choose it?

I wondered. It was a question that clearly stood out in my mind. My body and mind were in complete torture as the war raged inside of me, killing me slowly and indefinitely. My knowledge of the present or past was not clearly identified. Even the future was not certain at this point.

My agony was my own demise. My decision. My choice. I barely noticed the days as they swept past me as my body continued its conflict. Visions swept across my mind of war, a battle actually, between a Lycan and a dark being. Was it real? Or was I actually dead and caught in the infinity of hell?

The already tortured heart inside my body, burned beyond recognition. A woman scorned. Finally, it stopped beating. Yes, this was the end. The last ounce of the precious blood squeezed from my heart. The pain was intolerable as my mouth opened to gasp for the last moments of air. I wanted to scream. To cry for help in some way, but I remained silent in my agony.

Visions of recent events flashed before my eyes, glimpses of all the madness and deception. My mind flooded with the lies that had brought all this to a head. Yet, there

was one unsettling factor that I held onto like a safety net; it was not over. The words, spoken softly by an angel, held the only glimmer of hope that drove me through this agony. "I love you, Julie." His words whispered against my neck as they etched themselves in my heart forever. His love for me was far greater than I could have ever imagined. It was patient, kind and everlasting. The kind of love you gladly die for.

The darkness that clouded my mind vanished abruptly. Clarity hit me like a strong northern wind, chilling me to the bone. In one unfathomable moment, I realized my life was not as it had seemed.

CHAPTER ONE

The darkness crept closer, surrounding me with the eeriness of the night. My footsteps were only echoes against the silence of the darkness. Slowly, I padded along the path in my dream.

Deep within the wooded area, I smelled them. The werewolves. It was the stench of rotten flesh that clung so tightly to their wicked bones that lingered in the mid night's air. I gave in to my senses, moving slower, cautiously, through the depth and darkness of the night. I tilted my head upward, lifting my nose higher into the air. A new scent of lilies and carnations filled my nostrils. It was a scent I was all too familiar with. Vampire. One must be close by.

Behind me, I heard the sound of footsteps as they approached and I stopped. My ears perked forward. I listened intently as the pace quickened. The leaves and twigs crunched under its feet as it approached. My breath held tight as I braced myself for the oncoming attack. The thick brush parted as the creature moved into full sight. Its fierce teeth bared as its red glowing eyes flared with killing rage. It would be over soon now. The killing. The death.

A low growl rumbled from deep within my chest. My lips curled back revealing my threateningly sharp teeth. I firmly planted my feet onto the ground as I braced myself.

Involuntarily, my wet tongue slipped through my teeth as my lips quivered against the vibrations of my growl. This time I sent one last warning; a snarl of deadly valor. One clean bite and it would be over. A shiver prickled up my spine. The hairs on my back bristled on their ends. My head lowered closer to the ground. Cautiously, I circled the creature as our dance of death began. My heart quickened its pace. A huff of air escaped my mouth as the muscles in my hind legs tensed. My eyes firmly locked on my prey. The dance came to an abrupt halt. My front paws braced against the cold hard ground and I bolted forward.

The powerful muscles in my shoulders tensed. The leg muscles underneath my skin flexed as I gained speed, pushing my body forward. My feet pounded against the earth beneath me, lifting my body higher in the air. I moved toward the wiry-haired beast. The chill of the air blistered against my face and the breath held in my chest as the cold wind blew into my nostrils. My senses were alive with the foul stench of werewolf

as the killing rage overtook me. Death was certain, but it would not be my blood spilled this night.

My eyes locked onto the creature. I focused on the hind leg. I knew I was faster and could make it. There was no time for mistakes.

Out of nowhere, a white flash moved in front of my eyes, momentarily blinding me. Distraction. Not good. A pale arm wrapped around the creature's neck. On top of its head rested a pale hand. A quick jerk and loud cracking noises filled the air. It was over. The smell of death was imminent. The creature slowly dropped to its knees, the foul scent of werewolf blood filling the air. I snorted twice to clear the offensive odor from my nostrils.

Richard MacArthur stood before me. The pale skinned, inhumanly beautiful vampire. The most dangerously seductive vampire or human I had ever known. As always, his attack on the werewolf was flawless. A killing method he had perfected over a century.

The thick mist on the ground moved under my feet as I exhaled slowly. My body jerked forward and I was human again. The coolness of his pale hand reached under my arm, pulling me to my feet. Richard could kill me with one quick snap. Even though I was extraordinarily strong even in my human state, he was faster. He slowly pulled me to him. The blue diamond-like eyes deeply peered into mine. Fear screamed through my body. I was afraid. The words I wanted so desperately to say to make him stop fled my mind. I wanted him to release me and set me free. Release and save me from the end I feared, the end he would have gladly given me.

With a gentle cooing whisper, he shushed me as his hand slid behind my neck. The coolness of his fingers lingered against my burning skin. Lightly they caressed my warmth. Richard held me inches from his face. The coolness of his breath fanned against my skin, haunting and tempting me. My eyelids dropped at the soft sweet floral scent of his breath. Under his control, my head tilted backward. Hot fire pulsed through my veins as my heart pounded loudly. My breath came out in quick gasps as I struggled to breathe. The sanity I once held onto so tightly had left me, and I was under the spell of this beautiful vampire.

The blood that coursed through my veins was a woman in need of her lover. She called to him. She pleaded to him. She arched herself to him and begged him to take her so passionately. The muscles in my body trembled as she pushed my will aside. I felt the coolness of his tongue as it slowly traced the vein up to my ear. My senses ran wild. The world swirled around me as their love affair began. My body waged war against my own will, surrendering itself to every touch and smell of this inhumanly beautiful vampire.

With each beat of my heart, my blood called out to him. Tempted him. She gave herself willingly to him as the vein in my neck arched to meet the lips of this vampire. He inhaled deeply, intoxicating himself on the savory scent. The coolness of his lips pressed against my skin, kissing the vein containing the woman who desired him.

His once cold lips were warm as they grazed over my mouth. Something was wrong. Terribly wrong. His mouth left mine only to find my neck. His lips touched my

neck again as he inhaled a deep and solemn breath. Ever so slow and gentle, his lips moved down my throat to the base of my neck. Fire burned within me as I felt the softness of his tongue on my bare skin.

I prepared to force the protest from my mouth as I inhaled a deep breath. Then I felt it, a sensation like no other. The razor sharp cold teeth as they gently grazed over my bare skin. A tremor ran through me, exciting every nerve in my fevered body. My mouth opened as I exhaled a ragged breath. My body trembled against his lean statuesque form.

"No," I whispered in a ragged breath.

"Yes," he hissed softly. His words burned against my skin.

My heart raced and my mind whirled. Hot flames rushed through my fevered veins. Intense burning and desire welled within me. In that one moment, I knew I wanted him. I wanted all of him. It was his spell. But as the bells of fear tolled again, I left all caution behind and ignored the warning signs. My will was not strong enough to save me. I had fallen deeply and unendingly under his control. Richard had left me with a need that only he could fill. A need that screamed through my body as his cold hands felt like fire skimming over my skin.

Richard's fingers feathered against my cheek. His crystal blue eyes peered into mine, piercing into my very soul. Searching. He sought out an answer I wasn't willing to give him. The hunger was clear in those diamond-like eyes, wanting more than my blood offered. It was the type of hunger that needed to be quenched and satisfied. The hardness of his need pressed against my body, making me completely aware of his desires.

With one gentle motion, his lips were on mine again. Searching. Taunting. Desiring more. He called to him the woman of desire inside of me, beckoning her to him. Slowly, his lips left mine. I exhaled another ragged breath. I felt the softness of his lips on my neck, tasting the flesh he so desperately desired. Richard unleashed the she-wolf inside of me, and I shuddered as his lips parted against my throat.

Richard inhaled a quick breath followed by a soft growl that rumbled from his throat. In one instant, one breath of a second, I felt it. The sharp piercing pain as his fangs entered my flesh. My breath seized. My eyes widened with fear and I couldn't scream. I was immobilized under his spell. My heart raced wildly, forcing more blood to his lips. The rush of fear ran through me, screaming for me to wake up. I fought hard to find my way back, searching my soul for salvation, as I knew my death was near. My body slowly drifted away as my blood spilled across his thin cold lips. Wake up! Wake up! Fear called to me.

"JULIE! For the love of Fate! Wake up!" a voice shouted to me.

Violently my body trembled. My eyes opened. No, I wasn't trembling. Someone was shaking me. The words became clearer, like I was fine-tuning a radio station, but my mind was still in the dream. I found myself screaming. Reality finally settled in and I quieted. My eyes remained clouded by darkness, and my heart pounded loudly. My breathing was erratic, but I left that dark and illusive dream.

Daniel was in clear view. The expression on his face matched my dream. Pure

horror. I opened my mouth to speak. Tears burned against my cheeks as they fell. He pulled me into his arms, sheltering me from my nightmare, sheltering me from the vampire Richard. The fact of knowing it was Richard in my dream was more terrifying than the dream itself. Had he left such a mark on me? A mark that haunted even my dreams? It was time I had to fear the worse. Worse yet, fear him.

Daniel pushed me back, his hands firm on my arms. My tears subsided, lingering to a soft whimper. The beautiful hazel eyes, hidden behind those dark and luscious black lashes peered into mine. He searched for the answers to my nightmare. His thoughts were clear in my head. Richard was a threat.

"Jewels? What happened?" his voice was velvety soft. His hands gently caressed my arms.

"It was...a bad dream," I managed. I didn't know how Daniel would take the news of Richard biting me, much less seducing me with his vampire ways.

"I gathered the obvious," he sighed. "What happened? Werewolves?"

I hesitated, "No."

He released a long sigh. "Jewels?" he warned. Daniel was not one who liked to be kept in the dark. I knew better than to avoid it. He had to know. We were mates. I could hide little from him. Even my thoughts were difficult to keep secret with the bond we shared.

"Vampire." My gaze met his. "It was Richard. He bit me."

The expression on Daniel's face changed. His jaw tightened. "What exactly happened?" His voice remained tight and controlled while his hazel eyes darkened.

"In the dream I was hunting for werewolves. Richard appeared out of nowhere. He killed the one I found. Then he...well...he somewhat seduced me, then bit me." There, I said it.

Daniel took the news of my dream well, or so I thought. His eyes intensified into a dark black cloud of anger. The muscles in his jaw line twitched slightly as his teeth tightly clenched together. Then he released a long breath. With curiosity, I watched as his eyes mellowed from black back to his usual soft shade of hazel brown. All this happened within a matter of seconds. It was hard to tell whether or not he was actually losing his temper. Lately, he was doing a great job of keeping it under control. Still, I didn't want to push him too far, especially mentioning Richard.

"Okay." Daniel was still calm.

It was a statement I didn't expect to hear, especially coming from Daniel. I studied his face for a long moment, contemplating his reactions. Daniel surprised me with his controlled behavior. This was unusual for him.

"Daniel?" My voice came out almost in a whisper.

His gaze dropped to my trembling hands. Lovingly, he took them into his and he gave me a gentle squeeze. I watched as the beautiful dark lashes lifted, revealing to me the depth of love in those hazel gems.

"Julie, it was a dream." Pausing for a moment, he sighed again. "I also know your dreams are related to premonitions. Which leads me to believe Richard's interest in you is exactly what I thought. We know very little of vampires." His voice was still soft and

controlled.

For a long moment, Daniel and I stared at one another. The connection with Daniel was one which mates commonly had. Our souls and hearts were as one. It was easy to hear one another's thoughts. This was the reason I was so cautious of my own thoughts of Richard. I loved Daniel with all of my heart and soul.

Those beautiful hazel gems traveled down to my hands again. He took them into his, raising them to his lips. I watched in awe as he pressed a soft kiss on my fingers then placed them to the side of his face. His heart ached. I could feel the earnest fear he had for me. I leaned forward then pressed my face against his, snuggling against his warm body. Daniel's head pressed against mine. Slowly he shifted, nestling against my neck. It was our way of communicating. It was the nature of the wolf within us.

In my heart, I wanted to soothe him, assure him in my own way. I pulled back slowly. My lips lightly touched his, as his lips parted slowly to mine. I felt his tongue touch my lips. Gently, I went for the kiss, keeping it soft and warm. Daniel teased and taunted me with his tongue but I knew he wanted more. I gave in to the kiss as it became more passionate and sensual. He was satisfied as he pulled back slowly, allowing the kiss to linger on our lips.

"Daniel," I softly caressed the side of his face with my fingertips. "You know I love you with all of my heart."

His eyes softened to a mellow brown. "I know," he whispered. "I would do anything to protect you. Nothing is going to happen to you."

My heart froze as the anxious feelings crept back into the very depth of my soul. Daniel's thoughts overwhelmed me. The fear, which consumed him, consumed me.

"You're afraid Richard will do something to me, aren't you?" I sat back on my heels.

He studied my face for a moment. "We must be careful. We do not need to take any unnecessary risks." His finger touched my lips. "From now on, we stay together when we hunt."

In my heart, I knew something else bothered him. I felt his anxiety. Daniel had a gift of knowing certain things that would eventually happen. It wasn't exactly like he could see into the future. He had a strong sense of premonitions. Chills ran down my spine even as I could feel my determination setting in. Richard was not going to come between us. My heart truly belonged to Daniel. I was his, and his alone. Daniel would try to kill Richard, if necessary. One question remained in my mind, could Daniel actually kill a vampire? I feared for his life, and did not want to put this question to the test. Richard was extremely dangerous, in more ways than one.

Daniel turned away from me, moving over to his side of the bed. He pulled the bed covers over himself. With one hand under his head, he laid back against the fluffy pillows. I could hear him contemplating the fact he may have to kill Richard. My heart sank to the pit of my stomach.

"I love you," I stated firmly. The overwhelming need for me to say it was apparent by the concerned expression on his face.

Daniel's eyes lifted to mine. "Nothing will come between us. I promise you."

Daniel's statement was true. Within the deep recesses of his heart, he would kill anything that threatened us. The Alpha male I had fallen deeply in love with was, in fact, my protector. He would kill for me.

"I'm stronger than you think, Daniel."

"You are mine, mine to protect and mine alone to love. I will not let any harm come to you, especially from that Richard."

I turned away from him to turn off the nightstand light. I shifted, easing myself back to my spot on the bed. Daniel pulled me into his arms as he released a long sigh. His head rested against my shoulder.

"I love you so much." The softness of his voice whispered against my ear.

"I love you, too."

The warmth between us soothed our worries and calmed our souls. We slept the rest of the night worry free. Tomorrow was another day. If Fate had another challenge for us, then we would be ready.

CHAPTER TWO

Morning, the last moments of night lifted as my eyes opened to the soft sound of Daniel snoring. A smile crossed my lips as I rolled over on my side, snuggling close to him. The snoring stopped. A soft grumble released from my handsome man as his hand clasped onto mine. The warmth from his body was a relief to my chilled one. One thing I had learned about myself in this new life; my body temperature increased dramatically at night.

Daniel had turned the thermostat to the "freeze me" zone, which was fine while we were sleeping. I snuggled closer, absorbing the warmth his body emitted. He shifted his head, tilting it to the side.

"What time is it?" His morning voice was deep toned and somewhat scratchy.

"Don't know." My voice was soft as I closed my eyes and inhaled his spicy fragrance.

Daniel moved again. This time he rose and turned to look at the clock. He released a sigh then settled back on the bed. To my delight, his arms enveloped me as he placed a soft kiss against my forehead.

"It is almost seven. Mom is expecting us for breakfast."

Breakfast at Charlotte's was one of my favorites. I only wondered if she was going to do the cooking or Rose. No matter who was the cook this morning, it would be greatly appreciated. A small growl rumbled in my belly.

"I would say we need a head start this morning," Daniel mused.

I laughed softly, "Only if you turn up the heat in this house."

Daniel's lips pressed against my ear. "How about I turn up your heat?" He growled softly.

Chills ran down my spine, sending sparks to every nerve in my body. He had to be

joking. My stomach growled again.

"Julie, did you just growl at me?" His question appeared to have a hint of humor.

"No, I believe that was my stomach telling you I need to eat." I mumbled.

He laughed lightly then slipped out of the bed. I grabbed the bed covers and pulled them tightly over me. Light suddenly filled the room from his nightstand lamp. I winced, protecting my eyes from the brightness. He padded out of the bedroom and down the hall. A few seconds later, he was back and headed directly toward the bathroom.

In moments, I felt the heat blowing from the vent above me. As warm natured as I had become, I enjoyed the feeling of heat in the morning. The rising sun broke through the last moments of the night. With a reluctant sigh, I pushed myself from the bed to choose the clothes to wear for the day.

The shower stopped, and soon it was going to be my turn. Daniel walked back in the room with only a towel wrapped around his waist. I glanced over him; he was so adorable. My thoughts got the better of me as I gave him a wicked smile.

His black eyebrow lifted, his eyes glimmered with humor, "Breakfast, remember?"

A chuckle escaped me, and I darted off for my shower. It was going to be a good day. Tonight, however, was a full moon, which only meant one thing, a hunt. After a nice shower, my thoughts wandered back to breakfast.

Daniel was already downstairs in the kitchen, pondering over the local news while nursing a cup of coffee. As I padded in, following the aroma of coffee, I stopped. Daniel lifted his eyes to mine. Would I ever tire of seeing such a handsome man? I hoped not. My thoughts betrayed me as his lips twitched into a smile.

"You know," he started, as he sat his coffee cup down on the counter. "We do have a few minutes."

Nervously, I moved toward the coffee pot. "A few minutes," I teased.

"Well," he growled. I heard the bar stool sliding against the floor.

Daniel moved with stealth, his body pressed against mine. The scent was almost more than I could stand. I closed my eyes tightly as his lips pressed against my neck.

"I suppose I could manage an hour," his hands slid around my waist as he pulled me closer to him, "or two."

The pulse quickened in my veins as a gust of air released from my lungs. He knew my thoughts. It was the very desire that consumed me. One thing I loved about Daniel, I never had to ask.

"Must you tease me so early in the morning?" My breath shuddered as I felt his teeth nipping at my skin.

"Who is teasing?" he growled softly again.

"Your mother is waiting on us," I persisted.

"And?" he continued, as the fire flamed against my skin.

"And..." I braced myself against the kitchen counter. "You know how persistent they are when it comes to being late."

Daniel released another sigh. "Well, if we must."

A soft laugh escaped me. Daniel released me, just enough for me to turn and face

him. My head tilted back, looking up into those deliciously light brown eyes.

"We must, this time," I teased as I moved past him.

After a couple of cups of coffee and finishing the morning news, we headed out the door toward his parents. My expectations were on food and food alone. The overwhelming craving for blueberries was absolute torture.

When we arrived at the elaborate home, I could already smell the food from outside. Daniel and I made our way, following the aroma of a home cooked breakfast, to the kitchen. Just as I had expected, Charlotte was cooking.

The second thing I noticed, Charlotte had done a little redecorating. My first thought, she must have been bored or worse yet, stressed. The new sofa, a plush blend of deep brown with a hint of golden tones fit perfectly in the spacious living room. The color stood out against the pale cream walls and hard wood floors. As I moved through the living room to the kitchen, I noticed a few new pictures. I paused a moment to take in the artist, Monet. If I knew Thomas, and I did, this was an original painting. Thomas spared no expense for Charlotte's wants or desires.

The dining room was the same, the large dining room table covered by a white linen tablecloth, and the glass vase full of fresh cut flowers, Charlotte probably picked them up on her bi-weekly shopping trip. The walls were freshly painted a soft golden yellow accented by the white trim. Charlotte added a new set of gold draperies, which were pulled apart to allow the sunlight's entrance to trickle into the large room. I couldn't help but admire the soft pastel paintings that donned the wall. Thomas must have gone on a serious shopping spree.

In the kitchen, Thomas sat at the breakfast table with the morning newspaper and a cup of coffee. Charlotte was, as I expected, in the kitchen slaving over a brilliant breakfast. I could barely wait to taste the magnificence of her culinary skills.

Charlotte looked up as Daniel and I walked into her view. Her eyes brightened as a smile crossed her lips.

"Mom," Daniel spoke softly as he embraced his mother and gave her a gingerly kiss on the cheek.

"Good morning, you two. Sit down," her polite voice chimed as she motioned toward the table where Thomas rigidly sat in his chair.

"Looks like you have cooked enough for an army." Daniel glanced around the kitchen.

"Well, your mother decided to get an early start this morning, early meaning around 4 a.m. The woman has not let me rest one minute since her feet hit the floor," Thomas blurted out in a flurry of irritation.

Charlotte shot Thomas a glance of disapproval and waved her hand toward him. "Never mind him. He is just in a grumpy mood this morning."

I raised my eyebrows in surprise at Charlotte and Thomas. Daniel chuckled softly and pulled out a chair for me at the table. That's when I caught the smell of blueberries. My eyes darted around the kitchen to find the location of the wonderful scent. Oh that delightful smell, I must have them. "Well, Julie woke me up last night with another dream." Daniel announced.

Charlotte's expression changed to concern as she set a plate filled with a variety of breakfast items in front of me. I was looking at a plate loaded with sausage, eggs and hash browns. Not to mention the pancakes and a basket of blueberry muffins.

"Julie? What on earth?" Her hand touched my shoulder.

"Charlotte, it really isn't anything I need to discuss." I couldn't bear the thought of that horrid dream again.

"Nothing?" Thomas added as he folded the newspaper, giving us his full attention.

Great, I have his full and undivided attention. This wasn't going to be as good as I had hoped. I didn't want to go into the gory, let alone sensual, details of my meeting with Richard.

"Julie, how are you feeling after last night?" Thomas's graying eyebrows knitted into a frown.

"I'm all right." I nervously shifted in my chair as I reached for a fork.

"She had a dream about that vampire, Richard. He bit her." Daniel announced before he took a sip of his orange juice.

Immediately I shot him a look. It was a look that told him to keep quiet. Daniel's right eyebrow rose slightly, his eyes suddenly narrowed into slits.

"*They need to know.*" His thoughts blared in my head.

"Bit her!" Charlotte dropped down in her chair. The horrified expression on her face sent chills down my spine. Thomas glanced toward her. I knew they were probably communicating silently as Daniel and I just did. Thomas's attention snapped back to me.

"What happened?" His voice was tense.

"Nothing really," I tried to sound unconcerned as I shoved a forkful of eggs into my mouth.

Daniel huffed out a breath. "He tried to seduce her, and then bit her."

Charlotte let out a gasp. Thomas braced back against his chair. I raised my head to the ceiling and rolled my eyes. Why is it every time I'm truly hungry, I have to endure an inquisition?

"Seduced," Charlotte voice trembled, "How? What did he do?"

The uncomfortable feeling swept over me again. My heart sank into the pit of my stomach. My thoughts raced, trying to find a way to explain what happened without going into too much detail. How could I explain to them Richard's seduction methods? Would they have more knowledge of vampires than Daniel and I? Could they provide the answers to all of my questions?

Everyone's eyes were on me as they waited patiently for the details of my horrid dream. I glanced toward Daniel with a plea of hope he would save me from the query. The man of my dreams suddenly turned against me. His eyebrows lifted, and he nodded toward me to continue. His gaze shifted toward his parents, preparing for their response.

Defeated, I placed my fork down on my plate. I was no longer hungry.

"In the dream, I was hunting for werewolves. Richard appeared. He killed the werewolf I was attacking. He seduced me ... then bit me." The visions of the dream played over in my mind, rendering me helpless to my own thoughts. Daniel's head

snapped toward me. The fury in his jet black eyes was one of a terrifying measure. There was no doubt in my mind, or in my heart, Daniel knew what happened in the dream.

"And the seduction part?" Charlotte coaxed.

"That is something we don't need to discuss." Daniel interrupted. His gaze still locked on mine.

A certain amount of guilt swept over me. My eyes drifted down staring at the uneaten food on my plate. The room fell silent for a few moments before anyone had the nerve to speak. Thomas cleared his throat, breaking the unbearable silence.

"Well, apparently it was worse than I thought. What little do we know of vampires?" He asked in a firm tone.

"Apparently not enough," Daniel's voice was cold.

As I inhaled a deep breath, my eyes lifted to see Daniel's cold hard stare. From my peripheral vision, Charlotte looked from Daniel to me.

"Julie, my dear," her voice was gentle and motherly. "It would be a good idea for you to keep your distance from this Richard."

"My thoughts exactly," Daniel growled between clenched teeth.

Thomas's attention went to Daniel and then followed his cold stare back to me again.

"It's not her fault, Daniel." Thomas stated.

"I know." Daniel forced himself to look away. He had seen all he needed to see.

Pain swelled inside his heart. Tears welled in my eyes burning to be released, but I fought hard not to shed them. My thoughts of a good day had faded into the abyss. Daniel's heart was torn into a thousand pieces. He was frustrated with the thoughts of how to protect me from this vampire. In the same instant, he was crippled with jealousy over an event that had not yet happened. His gaze lifted to me again, but this time it was softer.

"I will not let anything happen to her," he promised.

"Are you two going out tonight?" Thomas questioned as he lifted the cup of coffee to his lips. "I saw in the news where two people went missing last night."

Daniel's attention turned to his father. "Yes, tonight is a full moon. I want to make sure there are no werewolves still running loose."

"By all means, be careful." Charlotte paused. Her hands rested on the table. "There may be more than werewolves roaming those woods tonight."

"I will give the Council a call today. There seems to be some unfinished business that must be attended to." Thomas glanced down at his watch. "This morning I am meeting with an old friend. He has an urgent matter to discuss. What time do you think you two will be back tonight?"

"Not late. I am guessing after a quick run, we should be back here around maybe ten or eleven." Daniel answered.

Thomas nodded to Daniel, his gaze shifted toward Charlotte. "Good. We will wait up for you. I am hoping we are done with the werewolves ... at least for the time being." He rose to his feet and placed the emerald green cloth napkin on the table. "Be careful, and I will see you tonight."

Daniel nodded to his father. Carefully, I watched as those hazel eyes followed Thomas out of sight through the living room. My attention immediately turned to Charlotte, who rose to her feet and headed toward the coffee pot.

"Daniel," she began as she poured herself another cup of coffee. "I understand how you feel."

"Mom?" His gaze shifted to me then back to his mother's overly apprehensive glare.

"Just do not be over protective. Have a little faith in Julie. She loves you very much."

"I know this." Daniel sat back in his chair.

Charlotte moved past him to her chair as she gave him a tenderly pat on the shoulder. "We have happier events to concern ourselves with, like the wedding." Her words were soothing as she sat down in her chair.

My heart gave a little leap of hope. The wedding was just a few weeks away, and there was so much left to do. My To-Do list included the final alterations for the wedding dress. And I wondered if Casey was actually going to make it back in time. We still haven't heard a word from her. Then there was Heather. She would have to come back soon for her final alterations. I wasn't sure how long it would take, but I hoped not too long. It appeared we were going to be in a rush down to the last moment.

"I have put together a small gathering tomorrow night." Charlotte peered over her cup of coffee.

"How many quests are going to be there?" I wondered in particular about my father's side of the family.

"I suppose the extended family. There are a few from my side of the family, who will also be attending the wedding. Oh, and not to mention some relatives on Thomas's side, probably fifty or so."

Great, I'll be in a room full of people I don't know once again. And with my father's side of the family, in particular Aunt Doris, I was sure it would be a disaster. She had the most annoying way of irritating anyone she came into contact with, even if it was only for a few minutes. This was one party I didn't look forward too.

"Where are we having this event?" I shifted nervously in my chair as I waited for the dreaded answer.

"Mom thought it would be nice to have it here. She wants to use the grand room for entertaining," Daniel abruptly spoke.

"Yes, I have not used that room in a long time. I have already made arrangements for a full serving staff for tomorrow night. The cooks will be here today to start preparing. Which reminds me, Julie, would you care to look over the menu?" Charlotte's voice tipped a higher pitch of excitement.

"Charlotte, I trust you. I know you have exquisite taste. Whatever you decide is fine with me." Graciously, I accepted Charlotte's expertise in this situation.

There was no way I could manage to do the planning and preparing like Charlotte. She was the social one of the family. Her skill and flare for unique parties was unmatched. The events she planned were always elegant and tastefully presented.

"Well, the dress is formal. Daniel, I expect you to wear something nice. And Julie, did Daniel..."

"Yes, Mother," Daniel interrupted with an irritated voice. "I have already picked out a suit for the night, and picked up a dress for Julie."

"Oh, you did pick out the jewelry, of course? What color dress did you purchase? What style? You know she looks elegant in a long dress. I hope you bought her diamonds. They always look elegant on her slender neck. Something not too gaudy, I hope."

"Mother, I took care of it. She has a beautiful dress and the jewelry matches. I chose something delicate and fitting for the occasion."

"AND the rings? Did you pick up the rings?" she continued.

"Yes, Mother. I already have the rings. I actually picked them up yesterday from the jeweler's. Please stop worrying. Everything will be fine." He tried to soothe his mother's nerves.

It was the last thing we needed to do, upset Charlotte. Daniel's overly anxious mother was in a dither. The woman had the tendency to stress over everything and anything, regardless whether it was a good event or bad.

Charlotte sat back in her chair and blankly stared at Daniel. She took a quick breath then pursed her lips together. Her disapproval of Daniel's behavior was apparent.

"Daniel, exactly what is it that you fear?" Charlotte asked without blinking an eye.

Daniel's hand immediately went to his head. His fingers combed through the black locks of hair. Nervously, he leaned forward to the table and looked to his mother. A mother knows her child.

"I am concerned about this vampire thing. Richard seems to have targeted Julie as his new quest," Daniel rambled out.

"Is this what you feel, or what you know?" Charlotte leaned forward placing her arms on top of the table.

"It is a knowing. I know he is not going to stop until he has her in his grip."

"Daniel, don't you think I have a say in this?"

"Julie, what little we know of vampires is not good. I don't trust them." He pushed the chair back from the table and abruptly stood to his feet. "Not even Casey at this point."

"Daniel!" Charlotte snapped. "I may not approve of Casey's choice or what she's done. BUT," she paused, collecting her thoughts. "She is still your sister and my daughter!"

Daniel turned around, pivoting on his right foot. "SHE IS A VAMPIRE!" He growled.

Chills ran down my spine. I didn't know what to say in Casey's defense. She was still my best friend. At least, I hoped she would be after her going vamp. I couldn't see Casey as a bloodthirsty creature running around draining perfect strangers of their blood. From what I knew of Nathaniel, he appeared human enough, at least for a vampire.

"Daniel, the love Nathaniel showed toward Casey was more than what some humans show toward one another. Maybe they are not all as bad as you fear." I tried to be reasonable.

Daniel's gaze shifted toward me. "It is not all of them I'm worried about, Julie."

"Then give it a rest," I started with a sigh. "Daniel, I love you. Shouldn't that count for something?"

"I am afraid we both are going to see how far our love will be tested." He took a deep breath and turned around toward the kitchen sink. "But I will be damned if I lose you to that thing." He growled quietly.

"Charlotte." I tried to change the subject. "The gathering is tomorrow night?"

Charlotte nodded slowly, "Yes."

"All right. Well, I guess we'll be going now. We'll see you tonight if we find anything," I spoke softly as I pushed away from the table.

Maybe Daniel would have a different prospective tonight after a good run. He desperately needed to let go of those thoughts about Richard. It probably wouldn't be a bad idea for me either. A good werewolf fight might do me good. I needed to release this anxiety I was feeling over the wedding as well.

Daniel placed his cup in the kitchen sink and turned to meet his mother's arms. I couldn't help but admire his love for his mother. The tall handsome man leaned down to his mother and gave her a loving embrace. Then, Charlotte turned toward me with open arms.

"Please be careful tonight." She spoke with the same motherly tone as I always remembered.

"We will," Daniel announced as he placed his hand on the small of my back.

We left the house, heading back to our home. Daniel glanced at me several times as I fidgeted in the car seat. Daniel's apparent irritation with the vampires made me more anxious than I needed to be. Thoughts of Richard attacking me, as well as the possibility of seducing me, ran wildly through his mind. What could I say to him? I wished there was something I could say that would change his mind and conquer his fears once and for all.

"Do you think there are any werewolves in the forest?" I tried to distract his unnerving and unending thoughts of how to kill Richard.

"I am not sure." His eyes remained on the road. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just thinking it might do us both good to have a little action tonight." I tried to make it as humorous as I could.

Daniel glanced at me with a discerning look. "Julie, I seriously doubt the werewolves will take my mind off those vampires."

"Those vampires helped save Casey." I shot out.

"Yes, and I think she would have been better off a werewolf instead of one of them!" His voice rose.

"I don't think so." I mumbled. "But whatever you decide, you already know I'm on your side."

Daniel resisted the temptation to argue with me concerning the vampires. His mind

was firmly set against Richard. It wasn't the whole vampire thing that was driving him to the edge; it was just Richard.

My love was for one man and that man was Daniel Maxwell. I was satisfied for the moment that he knew how much I loved him. Whatever fate had in store for the both of us, we would handle it together. Fight if we must. I believed our love was strong enough to handle any circumstances fate threw at us.

CHAPTER THREE

The illuminating light of the full moon penetrated the dark recesses of the forest. Daniel and I made our way through the thick brush and trees. It was already October, and fall was my favorite time of the year. I loved the cooler weather. The smell of the autumn air lingered in my senses. The red, gold and brown leaves covered the floor of the forest. They moved slightly, floating up around us as we breezed through the woods.

Daniel and I had managed to leave a little earlier than expected for our run. It was primarily my fault, as I couldn't stand to watch Daniel pace back and forth through the house. We needed to get out, and I knew the run would do us both some good.

As I moved through the forest, I was exhilarated by all the new scents. We were hunting for werewolves, but it was easy for me to become distracted. Each new scent brought on my investigative wolf nature. I couldn't help from stopping a couple of times to investigate the scent of a squirrel.

As my fascination increased, Daniel's irritation became stronger. I had finally trailed the squirrel's scent to a tree, where up above I notice its nest. I circled the tree a couple of times. Daniel stopped ahead on the trail, turned and then trotted back toward me. He gave me a couple of short disappointed snorts. My eyes were wide as I showed him my new and exciting find. Promptly, he moved toward me, giving me a nudge, meaning for us to move on.

I glanced back to the tree one more time before I left. Maybe another day, I would make a run by myself. Investigate these scents more carefully. Tonight was more in nature - werewolves.

Our victory only a few short months ago ended the threat of danger to the nearby humans, or so we thought. However, recent news reports still had people turning up missing.

Those few short months ago, my life changed dramatically. My father's death left me with more than just his financial inheritance. He left me with a secret I soon uncovered. I was a Lycan. A wolf shape-shifter, left here by an ancient tribe of Indians over a thousand years ago. Never would I have believed my life would have changed so much. To kill or be killed was the objective of my existence.

Among the other mysteries, I had discovered werewolves and vampires. My first battle against the werewolves ended in a victory. That was the same night we met the vampires. It was the same night we discovered the vampires were very skilled and

experienced in killing the same stinky creatures. Richard was especially flawless in his killing techniques.

Richard MacArthur, Nathaniel's older brother, was the most inhumanly beautiful creation I had ever seen. His seduction methods as a vampire were as flawless as his killing methods. I soon realized Daniel had a right to be concerned. Richard's attention fell upon me. He saved my life that night, allowing me, in return, to save Daniel's life. It was a battle I will never forget. Still, I knew there were more battles to come. It was only a matter of time before more werewolves would come into the area.

Daniel Maxwell, my love, stole my heart. The tall, dark and handsome man drew me in like a magnet. He contained the true heart of a Lycan within his body. I discovered how rapidly Lycans love. And his love for me was binding. Our love was deep and impenetrable. Our love protected us from our over-heated passions, a danger I swiftly learned we had to endure. I suppose this was the reason Casey fell in love with Nathaniel so easily. She left with him to become a vampire, to spend the rest of her immortal life with the one she loved. It was a nightmare her family would not soon forget.

The passions between Daniel and I could so easily turn into rage. It was one of the many side effects of being a Lycan. An animalistic desire could take over, causing a life threatening moment. Daniel and I had managed to overcome this rage so far. We discovered our love was stronger. The unconditional love you would die for. We pushed Fate to the limit that night, overcoming battles as well as the obstacles of our love.

Tonight was a night we hunted. It was a full moon. If there were any werewolves, they would be out this night. Two people were missing, and our family feared the worse. Usually if bodies were found, there were no threats. This time we had an idea the werewolves were involved again. The Lycan laws stated we hunt together. Hunt as wolves, searching out and killing the evil that plagued mankind.

Daniel abruptly stopped in front of me. His head went down to the ground. The sounds of the tender tips of the insides of his nose flapped as he sniffed the ground. I couldn't help from letting out a snort. The sound actually made my own nose tickle. His head rose to meet my humorous gaze. His eyes narrowed slightly. He could tell I was having fun, but he was the serious one tonight.

Recouping my position, I raised my head and inhaled a few whiffs of air. The scent of the werewolf was not the only thing in the forest tonight. The smell of lilies and carnations lingered in the night's air. Daniel turned his head to me. His eyes widened. He gave a short snort. Yes, he suspected, as I did, Richard was nearby.

I gave a quick nod to Daniel. He wanted me closer to him. Quietly, I padded toward him, lightly touching my feet to the ground. Daniel glanced over my shoulder, peering deeply past me into the darkness of the trees.

Daniel was not pleased Richard's attention was so focused on me. For that matter, neither was I. The dreams I had of Richard were unnerving. My thoughts of him were reined tightly from Daniel. This vampire had put his spell on me. However, the heart inside me belonged to Daniel. It would belong to him forever. I was a Lycan.

The wolf beside me stood perfectly still. With his ears perked forward, he listened

to each and every sound in the forest. I shifted alongside of him as I carefully watched the forest for movement. I rested my head on top of his shoulders, my eyes darting through the darkness for signs of prey. It was unbelievable how much I loved Daniel. Even as a wolf, there was so much love filling my heart for him. Daniel turned his head toward me, and I raised my head from his shoulders.

The softness of his fur touched my head as he gently rubbed his head along the side of mine. The warmth of his tongue touched the side of my face. It was a kiss in wolf form, the most wonderful feeling. I thought I could feel the warmth of love from his heart. Daniel nudged me one more time. We needed to keep moving.

Our pace quickened, as we moved closer to the great wall. The closer we came to the wall, the greater the scent of the werewolves became. The air was thick with the stench. Why were they back? Why were so many of them around the wall? It was not humans they were hunting. They were not adding to their pack. It didn't make sense.

A twig snapped behind me and I stopped abruptly and held my breath. Holding one foot off the ground, I listened. Daniel stopped. He could feel the rush of adrenaline as it shot through me. A shiver ran up my spine. The hairs on my back stiffened. I lowered my front paw slowly down on the ground. Daniel's lips curled over his teeth. I closed my eyes tightly, allowing my senses to take over. I could sense it. A werewolf was approaching from behind me.

Swiftly, I turned around. My head lowered as I saw the creature emerge from the thick brush. The rotten stench of the creature hit me full blast. A burst of air rumbled from my chest followed by a menacing growl. The creature was on all fours. It turned toward us. The eyes of the wiry-haired beast flamed red as balls from the pit of hell. Those red eyes narrowed, and we were marked as its prey. Daniel moved off to the right, slowly circling the creature as it bellowed out a heated roar.

The werewolf stood before us. The human and wolf features combined. The wolf-like head and shoulders were spiked with long prickly hair that ran down its back. The large ears flattened against its head as it roared again. It braced itself on its dog-like haunches and claw-like hands. The stinky beast circled us, contemplating our next move. Another one appeared before I had the chance to move. The second one moved alongside the first. It was much smaller. Perhaps a younger male.

I lowered my head and moved toward the second creature. Daniel was already trying to distract the two of them. The larger one circled Daniel. I was in a similar dance with the smaller one. The young werewolf was inexperienced in attack methods. It charged me, galloping at a fast pace. My lips curled over my teeth as I growled out a warning that his death would come shortly. It ignored my warnings and leapt into the air. The muscles in my hindquarters flexed, pressing my front feet down on the ground, and I pushed off to meet the wiry-haired beast.

Our bodies collided in mid-air. The claws of the creature sank into my shoulders. It lost balance, dropping down to the ground with a loud thud. The edge was mine. The creature was underneath me as I snapped ferociously at its large mouth. Without warning, the rancid smelling beast's feet slipped underneath me. A hard thump hit my stomach and the next thing I knew I was air borne.

The instinct for survival burned in my veins as I turned around the instant my feet landed firmly on the ground. The reeking creature prepared to launch another attack. A few shakes of its head, and it charged toward me at full speed. This time, I allowed the creature to pass me. I dropped my rear end, pivoting as the creature passed by. With my mouth open, I grabbed the back of its neck. My teeth closed down on flesh. The skin broke under the pressure of my jaws. Foul smelling blood poured from the wound, seeping its way into the corners of my mouth. The creature roared loudly from the pain as my venom, shot through my teeth, disoriented him. My eyes closed as I locked my jaws, sinking my teeth further into its disgusting flesh.

The large muscles tightened in my hindquarters as I balanced my body for the next move. I placed my right front paw on its shoulder, bracing my prey for the kill. I would have to make it quick, end the suffering of this evil thing. With a quick jerk, pieces of its flesh hung over my jaw. Hastily, I clasped my teeth down onto the soft skin of its neck again. This time I could feel my teeth as they smoothly cut through the flesh and bones. The werewolf went limp. The taste was vile and disgusting, much like the smell. I turned to check on Daniel.

Daniel managed nicely to take the large one down by himself. However, not before he sustained an injury to his left shoulder. It appeared he had a rather large gash above his shoulder blade. I watched as he stood over the body of the larger werewolf, still snarling over the kill. Werewolf blood dripped from his bottom jaw as his head rose. A lowly howl of victory flowed from him. He was satisfied the creature was dead. I padded closer to Daniel to examine his wound. It was not nearly as bad as the ones we sustained in our first battle. The wound was already healing. Our hunt would be over for the night, as we couldn't risk another attack. Even though our wounds healed rapidly, it drained us of precious energy. There would be another full moon tomorrow night. Maybe after the gathering we could hunt again.

The bodies of the werewolves began the slow metamorphic change to their original human forms. Two young men lay before us. The younger of the two looked to be no more than eighteen years old. The authorities would claim it was an animal attack. They never realized that these were the creatures that hungered after human blood.

I moved slowly, nudging Daniel. To my relief, he could move and we headed back through the forest. The scent of the vampire became stronger. I knew it was Richard, for whatever reason he was following us. There was still much we needed to learn of our new acquaintances.

The car was in sight. Our robes remained exactly where we left them. I exhaled slowly, allowing the transformation to take place. My body jerked forward, and I was human again. It took me a moment to gather myself. Beside me, Daniel fell forward on the ground. As I rose to my feet, I turned to him. For the most part, his wound was healing rapidly.

"Can you move?" I asked softly, and knelt down beside of him.

Daniel rolled over on his back, wincing from the pain in his shoulder. He stretched back on the ground. The muscles in his chest contracted as he inhaled a deep breath. Show off. The stomach muscles rippled in waves as he exhaled. Daniel's body always

excited me. There was no denying my desire for him. It was just in my nature. He was my mate.

"Just give me a moment," his husky voice growled against the pain.

"I can help you to the car. There appears to be a vampire in our midst." My eyes darted around the dark woods.

"You noticed it too? I caught his scent earlier. Could be your boyfriend, Richard." Daniel's mouth twisted into a grin.

He actually found it humorous. I couldn't believe he would tease me with Richard. However, I knew he was very serious when it came to Richard's presence around me. In Daniel's eyes, this was no joking matter.

"Oh please." I let out with a loud snort.

Daniel chuckled softly as he grabbed my arm. His fingers locked around my flesh as he pulled me over onto his hard and taut body. I couldn't explain the type of arousal that ran through me as my body made contact with his.

"Well, some people do like to watch." He whispered in a growl. The corners of his mouth twitched into a smile. The dark eyebrow above his right eye lifted.

The tones in Daniel's voice tingled in my ears. A certain rush of heat ran through my body, igniting the fire in my veins. It was no wonder why I responded to him so easily. His spicy scent illuminated my senses as the moon did the night. It propelled me into an intoxicated state. If we were anywhere other than here, I would consider the mating response. My heart warned me otherwise.

"You're still weak. I really don't think this is a good idea." My lips curled into a sly grin. Honestly, I didn't think Daniel would pursue it.

"Hmmm," he began in a deep and throaty growl. "Not weak enough for this," he said as he slid his hand behind my neck, pulling me closer to his face.

Daniel's lips touched mine. My pulse increased against the warmth of his scent. My lips parted in a breathless gasp as his tongue touched the inside of my lips. Fire wielded inside my veins as I gave into the kiss. If I needed to be the responsible one this night, then I was going to have to try harder. I forced myself back.

"Daniel, let's save this for a little later." I peered into his eyes. His lips broadened into a smile. "You are just intent on torture aren't you?"

His face softened as he lightly chuckled. The run seemed to help Daniel with his anxiety. He was back to his normal self again; torturing me. Even in the dark, I could see the twinkle of humor in his eyes. He knew without a doubt that I was his. It seemed Daniel enjoyed the thought of torturing Richard as well. It was a cruel effort on Daniel's part. But he was sure of himself, if maybe a little over confident. Boys do like their games. I feared the type of game Daniel was beginning to play was going to become deadly.

"All right, you win...for now. We need to go home." He rose to his feet. "We still need to discuss this with Dad. I am not sure he is going to be pleased to hear what happened here tonight."

As Daniel stood, I glanced over the wound. It was completely healed, leaving no signs of damage or trauma. My fingers traced over it, examining it more carefully. He

was fine. We would need to be better prepared next time.

We dressed rapidly in our robes. As usual, I ended up waiting patiently for Daniel to unlock the car for me. Within a short minute or so, we pulled out onto the road, heading back to our home.

An eerie feeling about the werewolves we killed tonight kept gnawing at my nerves. It was still a mystery to me as to why the werewolves were roaming the area again. The feeling that we were being tracked bothered me.

"Daniel, did you think it was a little odd they came from behind us?" I had to release my thoughts verbally.

Daniel glanced towards me, then back to the road. "Yes, I was thinking the same thing. They were tracking us."

"But why?" My attention turned to him.

"I am not sure. It seemed as though they were hunting us. I have never seen werewolves do that before. And there were more of them out there than just the two."

"It sounds like they are planning something. I mean with all of them grouping together like that. Daniel, this is not good."

"It looks that way." He slowed the car down as he made the turn down our long driveway.

"What if there are more out there than we can take on? I mean, tonight you got hurt."

"Did you notice anything different about them?" He glanced at me again.

I shook my head. To me they were the same smelly creatures I'd seen for the first time a few months ago. There was no difference I noticed other than the age of the youngest one.

"Julie, these were stronger than the ones we killed out in the meadow. I have a strange feeling there is more to these guys than meets the eye."

"Surely you're not thinking about running tests on them, are you?" I couldn't believe what I witnessed as he nodded his head.

Daniel pulled in front of our home and turned off the car. We sat there staring at each other for a long moment. I couldn't believe it. He actually wanted to test these things.

"Julie, all I need is a blood sample. Don't look at me like I'm Victor Frankenstein."

"Doctor."

"What?"

"Never mind." I opened the car door and climbed out.

The driver's door opened and slammed behind him as he swiftly moved around the car toward me. "Listen," He began as he grabbed my arm. "I need to figure out what is going on. If you want to talk about a Dr. Victor Frankenstein, then let's discuss Dr. Miller." Daniel shot out.

Dr. Miller, the man's name alone made my teeth ache. Considering his involvement in the betrayal of my father, I would rather not hear that man's name ever mentioned again. Then the thought occurred to me, Brendan Phillips, the young man whom Dr. Miller found. The same young man whom Miller used in his experiments with the

vaccines that Miller hoped to sell to the government.

"We still haven't found Brendan. How do we know he hasn't already turned into a werewolf?" The frown on my face showed my clear irritation with the matter.

"We do not know. This is the reason I am worried. Julie, there are too many questions left unanswered." Daniel turned and opened the front door.

I shook my head as we walked inside the warm home. This conversation would have to continue another time. I was craving the woofie shake Daniel always made for us after a run. Deep in my own thoughts, I headed toward the kitchen while Daniel made his way up the stairs.

The smoothie was easier to prepare than I had expected: powdered protein, soymilk, a couple of scoops of a vitamin powder and blend. I reached into the cabinet and grabbed two glasses. Slowly, I filled them to the top with the milky substance and taking a sip, I was satisfied. I turned the television on and watched the news closely. Missing persons were always our top priority.

The sound of water running upstairs drew my attention away from the television. Daniel was already in the shower and a smile crossed my face. I was tempted to join him. So far, there was no news on the missing persons. I turned off the television and with both glasses in my hands, I headed upstairs. Daniel was going to need this drink more than I did.

Daniel appeared from the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. Standing in the doorway to the bedroom, I froze while my heart began that silly fluttering again. His black hair, still wet from the shower was combed straight back. It gave him a kind of sex appeal I adored. My eyes grazed over his tall statuesque figure, not missing anything, including the bulge behind the towel.

As my eyes roamed over his broad shoulders, I took note of his lengthy, muscular arms. A quiver ran through me as I skimmed over the tight eight pack of muscles across his stomach. Those tight and well-muscled buttocks only enhanced the narrowing of his physique, not to mention his long muscular legs. I was in a frozen state of awe. A little too long, I contemplated how much I adored his body. The beautiful hazel eyes seem to gleam with a hint of pleasure. I knew he had caught me staring.

"Do you think I should finish the drink before or after?" A wicked smile crossed his lips.

"Before or after what?" My voice was a little breathless. I handed the shake to him. His husky voice had brought me out of my moment of awe. Daniel's spicy scent filled the room and my senses tingled and came alive. I knew without even checking, Daniel was aroused.

"Before or after I ravage your body." He growled softly as he took the drink from my hand.

I gave him a wink followed by a precarious grin. "I think you'd better finish your drink, wolf boy. You took a pretty good hit tonight." I moved around behind him to check his shoulder.

The wound was still fine but that didn't alter my concern. I gently ran my fingers over the slightly red area. Daniel's muscles shuddered under my touch. Tenderly, I

pressed my lips against the injured spot causing a soft moan to escape Daniel's throat. He turned around to face me, sliding one arm around my waist. The towel between us couldn't hide his full desire. The warmth of his body enveloped me as he pulled me tighter against his frame.

"You know if we did not have to go to see my father..." He growled against my neck. His lips trailed down my neck to the sweet spot. "I would take you right this moment." Softly he nipped the sweet spot on my neck.

My lips quivered and my body trembled. Fire scorched my body as my heart pounded the flames of passion through my blood. My legs went a little limp. Daniel pulled me closer, supporting me in my weakness. The hardness of him pressed against me, full, thick and erect. My thoughts faded. Need and desire overtook me, flooding my mind with thoughts of how I wanted Daniel. What pleasures could I inflict upon him? What pleasures could he inflict upon me? My breath shuddered.

Daniel growled again. The tingling sensation shot through my body as my body ached for him. The tender points on my breast became hard and full. I truly wanted him, every powerful and lovely inch of him. I wanted to drench myself in his control. The desire in my body wanted Daniel, but the reasonable part of my mind knew we would have to wait, duty called. Thomas Maxwell was a man you don't stand up, especially not in the current conditions.

"You know Thomas is expecting us."

Daniel sighed. "I guess you are the reasoning one of us. Maybe...after we get back?" He exhaled a long breath.

"Maybe?" I teased and pulled back from him. My eyebrow rose as my lips formed a wicked smile. "Maybe, *I'll* ravage *you* when we get back."

The corner of Daniel's lip broadened into a smile. I knew what was hidden behind that towel would have to wait but Fate help me. It was all I could do to force myself away from that man. I turned and headed for the shower.

Once I was showered, I walked back into the bedroom. From the sounds coming from downstairs, he was waiting on me, while watching the news. My decision for dress would have to be made in a hurry. Mulling over my closet, I grabbed a pair of black jeans, topped them off with a thick black sweater then grabbed my black leather boots. Giving my hair a couple of tosses, I headed down the stairs to meet Daniel.

"Anything new?" I said as I approached the last step.

He leaned forward and turned off the television, setting the remote back on the coffee table. "Well, it turns out our missing people were found tonight."

"They found them?"

Daniel stood to his feet and turned to me. "No, we did. Their pictures were plastered all over the news. They were two brothers who disappeared two weeks ago." He walked toward me.

"Are you sure?"

"Most definitely, I would recognize the larger one anywhere. We should go." He said, as he opened the front door and waited for me to walk through.

We made our way to the car. Daniel turned the key and brought the vehicle to life.

My thoughts traveled back over tonight's events again. What if Daniel was right about these guys?

"Do you think someone has reopened the Miller Project?" I couldn't help my curiosity.

"I am not sure, but I would like to find out."

"Daniel, how are you going to get samples? I mean it's not like we could just walk up to one of them and politely ask."

Daniel turned the car off the main road, heading down his father's driveway. He glanced at me with a precarious look.

"Julie, let me handle this." His words were firm and sharp.

Inside the huge home, Thomas was waiting in the great room, pacing back and forth. The glass of cognac in his hand gave me the idea our news was not the only thing we had to discuss. Charlotte sat on the sofa, poised elegantly with one leg crossed over the other. In her hands, she also held a glass of cognac. Daniel gently touched the small of my back as we moved further into the large room.

Thomas stopped his pacing and looked up as we entered. Combed straight back, his once coal black hair was peppered with streaking silver threads that clearly showed his age. The lighter graying sides accented his strong face, which showed signs of deep concern. There was much about this night I had to fear.

"Julie," Charlotte began. "Daniel." Her arms reached out for me.

I could feel the motherly love as I fell into her embrace. I let her go as Daniel towered over her, leaning down to give her a hug. The love between mother and son could be felt, even from afar. He let her go, only to move toward Thomas. Thomas stood in front of the bar, nursing the remains of the cognac in his glass. Daniel nodded once to his father then poured himself a drink.

Thomas took another sip, his gaze focused on Daniel. My breath came almost to a halt. The anticipation of what I saw on his father's face was grim. Daniel poured another drink, and then moved to my side. He handed me the glass of cognac and seated himself beside me on the sofa.

Thomas's bushy eyebrows rose as his gaze went from me then to Daniel. "How was the hunt?"

"We killed two. But there was something different about tonight." Daniel began. "They were hunting us."

Thomas took another sip of his drink. "And?" He prompted.

"Dad, they were different than the group we defeated in the meadow. These guys were bigger and stronger than the others."

"How so?" Thomas asked as he poured himself another glass.

"They were a little harder to kill. The one who attacked me was very strong. I took a pretty good hit tonight. It took everything I had to bring him down."

"And the other one?" Thomas looked to me.

"I managed to kill it. It was faster than the first group we encountered." I managed as I took a sip from my glass.

Thomas paused for a moment, considering the news. "They attacked you?" His

gaze darted from me to Daniel. We both nodded.

"This, of course, means something else is happening with our werewolves."

"Dad," Daniel shifted beside me. "I have a feeling these were genetically enhanced. I won't know for sure until I get a blood sample."

"And what was the reason you did not take a sample tonight after you killed them?" Charlotte inquired.

Daniel turned to his mother. "Because I need a fresh sample, while the individual is still living. Once a person is dead, the tissues begin the decomposing process. Any signs I would be looking for in the blood would not be there. If I had a fresh living sample, I could tell if there is any mutation."

"Do you need it from a human form or when it has transformed?" Thomas asked.

"I will need it in human form."

Thomas took another sip of the cognac. "Then this is something that needs to be done immediately. You are thinking that someone has access to Dr. Miller's research."

"I think it is possible, yes. But I don't know why."

"Daniel," Thomas paced back and forth again. "Dr. Miller was planning on selling this vaccine to the government. If we find out that these things have mutated, then we are in for a long ride. Our goal will be to find out who is behind this little operation." He sighed then stopped. "However, we have bigger problems."

Daniel's spine stiffened. I could feel the rush of fear run through him. He could tell from the expression on Thomas's face this was the cold blow we expected. What could be worse than the werewolf problem, I wondered.

"For starters, the Council is arriving in less than a week. There is no easy way to put this. Daniel, they want you. Leadership is what they need at this point. There seem to be some problems between the clans."

Leadership on the Council meant order and control of the Lycan clans. The Council only chose the strongest, the most purebred. It was a high honor to be recommended, but it was an even higher honor to be chosen by the Council itself.

"Son, you are strong and you possess the qualities the Council seeks. The clans are in an uproar right now. Several clans have ignited a war against one another. The rebels, who do not want to conform to the ways of the Council, are calling themselves the Dark Wolves. They have killed many in an effort to gain control and destroy the Council. The Council fears if this civil war is not stopped in time, the increasing werewolf packs will take advantage of our weakness. They may use it to their advantage by attacking the weaker of the Lycan clans, converting them to their ways or killing them."

"What?" Daniel leaned forward and placed his arms across his knees. "What are you talking about ... Dark Wolves?"

Thomas took a breath and began again. "Dark Wolves, they have formed some type of group against the Lycan Council. We do not know where this business started. All we know is that they are trying to take over the Council. Daniel, our very lives are at stake here."

"Wait a minute. The Council wants to put my life in danger to save their ass? Dad!"

"No! Now YOU wait a minute!" Thomas snapped. "You are the one they have

chosen to lead an army of Lycans to seek out and destroy these rebels."

"But why? I mean have you considered it sounds a little lame that they would choose me for leadership? Are they so afraid of dying...?"

"It is not about death. It is about preserving our way of life. Each of us has a responsibility."

Daniel huffed a breath. "Yeah okay, whatever! It appears my responsibilities have increased more than anyone else. Did you happen to mention to them I have a problem with vampires?"

"The vampires are not their first concern at this point." Thomas calmed his voice to a normal tone.

"Yeah okay, this is really great, Dad. Julie and I are due to be married in a couple of weeks. I have to protect her from a vampire who has a hard on. And now you are telling me I have to risk my ass for a group of leaders who don't even have the strength to defend themselves against an attack from a small group of rebels. Not to mention we may have a larger problem to deal with concerning werewolves in our own backyard. Oh, this just keeps getting better and better. How am I supposed to handle all of this?"

"Daniel, you will find a way," Charlotte chimed in. "It is not about you. It is about all of us. We will try to keep an eye on Julie for you. I know the Council is not going to let you go by yourself. I am sure they will send some help."

"Your mother is right. They are already gathering a group of volunteers who will be at your disposal. The Assembly should be here in a matter of a few days. These are the best warriors we have. Daniel, the Council would not do this unless they felt you were strong enough to handle it." Thomas walked back to the bar and poured the last of the Cognac into his glass. "I believe in you, and so should you. You can handle this."

"What about the Rite? You said the Rite must be performed before Julie and I are married. What happens if we don't find these rebels? Or take care of the werewolves? Do they expect us to put off the wedding?" Daniel roared.

"No. They are willing to make an exception on the Rite. They feel since you two have already submitted yourselves to one another without killing each other you might be safe. Life is a test Daniel; it only counts if you pass." Thomas declared as he moved to his chair and sat down.

Daniel shifted again beside me. It didn't take me hearing his thoughts to know he was enraged. He clasped his hands together, but remained silent. I wasn't sure exactly what to do to help him. At this point, mentioning to him that I could probably take care of myself when it came to Richard was pointless. The room fell into an uncomfortable silence as we all waited for him to respond.

Finally, after a few moments, Daniel raised his head and glared at his father. "What's the game plan?"

Thomas turned up the glass containing the last bit of Cognac to his lips, drinking it down. He set the empty glass down, then cleared his throat.

"First things first. You say the werewolves are different in some way. We need to find out if they have been genetically altered. If so, then we need to find out who is starting this mess. Secondly, you will meet with the Assembly, and see if you can track

down these Dark Wolves before they kill any more of our people. They are rebels and a threat to us. I am sure I do not need to tell you what will need to be done. Thirdly, this situation concerning Julie." He shifted his attention to me. "We should look at this reasonably. This Richard saved her life, correct?"

I nodded. Daniel growled.

"All right." Thomas charged. "The chances are he is not going to harm her. As much as I hate to admit it, they do seem very civilized."

"CIVILIZED?" Daniel roared. "You expect me to just sit back and wait until he does something like..." Daniel rose to his feet. "I am not willing to take that chance!"

"Daniel, I can fend for myself. Please, I think I can handle myself against a vampire if it comes to that." I offered in my defense.

"We do not know enough about them!" He roared louder. "I want you to stay clear of him!"

"Daniel, he might just be infatuated with Julie because she resembles his deceased wife. Please, Daniel, take another view of this matter. His view. He may be a vampire, but they do show signs of humanity. What would you do if you were in his situation? How would you feel if it was you who lost Julie?" Charlotte pleaded with him.

"I am not going to take that chance. That is how I feel about it," he snapped.

"Never the less, you would still be longing for her after all those years." Charlotte's voice remained calm in spite of her son's raging temper.

"I am not going to repeat myself. Julie," His hand softly locked around my fingers, taking my hand into his, he pressed it to his lips. He dropped down on his knees before me. The softness in his heart showed in those hazel eyes. Slowly, he pressed my hand to the side of his cheek. Closing his eyes, he rubbed it softly against the bristled skin. I watched in awe as he opened his eyes. Those incredibly beautiful hazel jewels deeply peered into mine.

"You do know you are my life, my heart and my very soul. I would die to protect you. Julie, we will make it through all of this together." Daniel's expression was as true as his words.

In my heart, I knew Daniel would die for me, as I would for him. No one could ever break the bond Daniel and I had. We were in love. It was a type of love beyond human conception. To be a Lycan and in love, there was no greater feeling and no greater pain.

"Daniel, we will be fine. I'll be fine." I tried to assure him. "You are my life as well." I paused shortly, searching his eyes. "I couldn't stand the thought of losing you. I will be at your side no matter what may come. Nothing, I mean nothing will tear us apart. Not even death. Where you go, I shall follow," I promised.

Daniel turned to Thomas. The night had ended for us. His hand softly locked around my fingers. He moved me past Thomas and Charlotte. Pausing by his father's side, Thomas laid one hand on Daniel's right shoulder. Only one nod passed between father and son before we made our exit.

Once inside the car, Daniel and I remained silent. It was clear we had no other words to say about the situations we faced. As the car moved along the dark road, my eyes watched the shows of the night. The vague shadows hidden in the darkness behind

the trees drew my full attention. What lurked in those dark shadows? Werewolves? Vampires? I wondered. It may even be part of our own clan. The ones that waited patiently, looking for some sign of weakness to attack at just the right moment. I could only hope not.

Lycans were the protectors of man, the human race. At least, this is what I had been told. Who could have the strength to protect us from ourselves? If this civil war was as bad as Thomas feared, then we were all in danger. I shifted in the seat slightly, nervously contemplating our danger. Maybe the only ones who were safe were the humans.

"I think tomorrow," Daniel broke the silence, "I am going to give Jason and Heather a call."

Jason and Heather McLaughlin were our Lycan friends from Scotland. They were not Scottish. Actually, Jason was a purebred Irish pup. I shook my head as I reflected on our first battle together. Jason walked out onto the patio where Daniel and I had been waiting for them. He was dressed in a full Irish kilt, complete with face paint. It was all I could manage to hold back a laugh. Daniel even asked his dear friend if he was going to make us watch him sacrifice an animal, and drink its blood before the battle. Jason, stood squarely on his feet, adjusted his kilt and raised one eyebrow. With a sly grin on his face, he announced we would not have to witness such an event. However, he reminded us we might have to watch as he danced naked around the fire. I did miss them.

Heather was a petite woman, who, at no more than five-foot four, dragged me away from Daniel during that moment I dared only to remember. If it had not been for them being with us, we probably would have killed one another that night. Not in the angry way. Our passion exploded on a level beyond rage. I trembled slightly at the memory. Daniel and I had become cautious ever since, controlling our passions. We learned how to control our full desires, being satisfied for the moment with our intimacy. However, there were deep desires that still raged inside of us both.

Daniel pulled the car to the front of our house. I stepped out and walked to the front door, pausing as I waited for Daniel. He moved up beside me, and we walked into the house together. He closed the door behind us as usual and promptly locked it. It was a full night, and I was exhausted mentally and physically. All I really wanted to do was have a good night's sleep. I hoped that my dreams would be good ones, ones that did not include Richard.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was Sunday morning. Our weekend mornings typically started the same. Showering, dressing and a trip to Charlotte's for breakfast, the same routine as yesterday. However, this morning was a little different. Daniel called his mother and informed her that we wouldn't be coming over for breakfast. He wanted to stay home and work on researching Miller's project, looking for any clues that might lead to his speculations concerning the werewolves.

Despite my lack of skill in the kitchen, I managed to pull together a satisfactory breakfast for my wolf man. A steak and cheese omelet with semi burnt toast. So I wasn't the best when it came to toast. At least the omelet turned out pretty good even with scorched marks of its own. One would think because I owned a kitchen built for a chef, I would learn how to cook. One would think, that is.

My father was particularly fond of a well cooked meal. He was a great cook, when he wanted. I remember as a child he mentioned to me the kitchen was designed by my mother. It was my father's gift to her. The 64-inch large gas/electric double oven stainless steel stove, a built in total refrigerator were all complemented by a built in freezer. Everything in the large kitchen was stainless steel, something he thought would look appropriate. I suppose he was right. The black countertops over the ginger stained wood cabinetry were set apart from other kitchens. Not to mention the sage green painted walls with white tile that contained painted green fern. I think my father meant to bring the outside in to this house.

I placed the plate of overly cooked food in front of Daniel. His eyes traveled from the folder to the olive colored stoneware plate. Half-heartedly, I expected him to grab his fork and dig in. With a little resistance, I held back the urge to ask if there was a problem, giving him a little time to adjust his view of the breakfast.

Daniel stared at the plate for a moment. Finally, he picked up his fork, while I waited patiently for his response. I think the moment he poked it with the fork was the moment I decided I would take it away from him. As I reached over to snatch the plate from him, he grabbed it with both hands.

"What are you doing?" he exclaimed in a little higher pitched voice.

"You're poking at it with your fork like it's not dead yet," I seethed.

Daniel pulled the plate out of my hand. We both stared at the plate as red bloodlines dripped down onto the plate from the omelet.

"You were saying?" Daniel's lips twisted into a grin. "Did you actually cook the steak before you added it to the eggs?"

I stood there and glared at Daniel in disbelief. No one told me that you had to cook the meat before adding it to the omelet. Tears welled in my eyes. I knew that my career as a chef had ended before it began.

Daniel's humorous expression continued as he set the plate back down on the table. He turned to me, wrapped his long arms lovingly around my waist and then pulled me closer to him.

"Sweetheart, it is okay. You did your best. Actually it smells really good." He held me close to him as the tears streamed down my face. "I will eat it. Don't worry."

The last thing I wanted was for Daniel to eat a half cooked meal. Even if the eggs were scorched a bit.

"No," I sniffed. "I'll just toss it in the trash and try again."

"Julie," he began as he stood up. "Really, it is all right. I like my steak a little tartar anyway. Please just sit down."

I pulled up a chair across from him and sat down. Daniel walked through the kitchen to the refrigerator. I couldn't imagine what he was looking for. The coffee

creamer was sitting on the counter. I had already set his favorite jelly on the table to complement the burnt toast. Daniel raised his head and backed away from the refrigerator. Then I saw the revolting item in his hands. It added the absolute insult to injury for any cook. Ketchup. I watched as he proudly marched back to the table, seated himself and promptly opened the top and squirted the red goo on top of the omelet. I cringed at the sight of the ketchup as it piled high on the eggs.

I pushed myself away from the table and stood up. I refused to watch as he dug into the culinary disaster with a fork.

"You never put ketchup on anything your mother makes," I mumbled as I headed out of the kitchen.

"That's not true!" he called out behind me.

"Like what?" I called back to him as I reached the living room.

"Meatloaf! I always put ketchup on her meatloaf!" he yelled back to me.

I let out a growl as I made my way through the living room to my father's office. If my memory served me correctly, Daniel never liked meatloaf! I inhaled a deep breath, fighting back my tears of rejection and plopped down behind my computer. At least I could try to put my focus on something other than this morning's breakfast debacle.

It only took moments for me get lost in balancing my accounts and transferring money. I was consumed with the thought of one day actually hiring an accountant to do these things, but for now, I still had the financial reports to review from the companies in which my father owned stock. This wasn't my favorite chore. From the looks of everything, the companies were still making money, and I was still collecting a sizeable return. The money was electronically posted into my account. Thank goodness my father gave Thomas temporary power of attorney to handle all the legal matters as well as financial ones until I understood what I was doing. Thomas did a great job setting up the new bank accounts and having my name added to each account.

I looked up as Daniel appeared in the doorway. My emotions had stabilized, no more tears. I had even let go of the breakfast incident.

"I am running over to the office this morning. I want to see if I can find any computer files that may give me a little more information on Miller's project," he stated, as he had my full attention.

"Did you find anything?"

"Nothing more than what we already know. Brendan Phillips may be our only link to find out more. I will see if I can track him down. Hopefully before something happens to him and the Department of Defense starts climbing all over our ass."

"Daniel, we're not connected to any of Dr. Miller's work. Why would they even trace it back to us? DalMar rejected his proposal," I reminded him.

"Yes, I know. But, there is still some slight chance they would link his research to DalMar. I cannot take that chance. I will be back home in a few hours," he said as he dashed away out of sight.

Why was he so worried about DalMar? Could Daniel's research actually be linked to Dr. Miller's? Then the thought occurred to me, Daniel never really told me where he obtained the DNA he used for his research. It was something I was going to look into the

first chance I had. For right now, I had reports to finish.

It couldn't have been more than a few minutes, thirty or so at the most, after Daniel left, that the doorbell rang. It was probably Charlotte coming over to bring muffins because Daniel and I didn't make it over for breakfast. I pushed myself back from the computer, and headed out of the office door.

As I made my way into the living room, I glanced up and my heart froze in my chest. It was Richard. I swallowed hard and pushed myself toward the front door. Through the glass, I could see him clearly in the daylight. He was so damn breathtakingly beautiful. It made no sense to me how one person could be so utterly gorgeous, even if he was a vampire.

When he caught sight of me, I watched as he slowly removed his sunglasses. I was already stunned to see him standing in front of the door with black jeans and a dark grey sweater. The sleeves were pulled up to his elbows, showing off the paleness of his skin. My thoughts were shaken as I allowed my eyes to travel over his seemingly well-built body. His sexy appearance was enhanced by the way he combed his sandy blonde hair straight back. My heart fluttered again as I watched his lips curl into a smile. I guess it wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't expected the worst out of him. My dream still lingered in my mind, flashing before me as I made my way to the door.

Hesitantly, I grabbed the door handle and opened it. What on earth did he want? I inhaled a deep breath, preparing myself the best I could. No mishaps this time. I was sure of it. If indeed this vampire had me on his menu, I would at least be prepared to defend myself.

"Hello." I managed cordially.

Richard's gaze roved over me then his eyes settled back to mine. "Hello, Julie. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

My heart raced, and the palms of my hands beaded with sweat. The muscles inside my body trembled at the sound of his deep alluring voice. I wasn't sure if it was the smoothness of the tones, or the luxurious way he spoke my name. Either way, it was very sultry and sexy. His voice had an odd effect on me, one of which made me uncomfortable. The sound of his voice sang melodies to my soul, reaching deep inside of me. It called out and awakened something deep within me. Just being in his presence evoked a certain desire within me. There was an uncontrollably alluring aura surrounding him. It drew me to him like a moth to a flame.

"A-a-actually," I stuttered. "I was... um...was um, working on a few office things." I shook my head to gain better control. "Was it something in particular you wanted?"

His lips twitched into a smile. I could only guess what he thought. From now on, mental note, watch what you say to a vampire. I always managed to say the wrong things to Richard. If I recalled correctly, the second time we met I had offered him something to drink! Now, I realized, I had the audacity to ask him if there was something in particular he wanted. Damn it! Of course there was!

"Well," he softly purred. His voice was silky and sultry. "For starters, may I come in? I would like to speak to you concerning your little werewolf problem."

Hesitating, I opened the door for him. For reasons I couldn't explain, I allowed him

entrance. At the same time I said a silent prayer he would behave himself. He stopped, paused for a moment, eyed me carefully then walked past me.

"We can talk in the office. That is, if you don't mind," I stated flatly. I was sure he could hear the fear in my voice. Probably even smell it.

Richard followed me through the living room to my father's office. I immediately went to the desk, sat down and grabbed a folder. At least I felt a little safer with the dark cherry desk between us. Like a desk could offer me protection from this vampire. Richard however, lingered in front of my father's massive book collection.

"Your father? He was a big fan of Edgar Allen Poe."

"Yes, he was."

"Ah, an old favorite? *Dracula*?" He teased as he pulled out the book.

I raised my eyebrow, astonished to see a vampire reading a book about a vampire. Somehow, this was a very humorous moment for me. No one but me would find this amusing, but to see Richard, the most inhumanly beautiful creation I had ever seen, a vampire, reading Bram Stoker's *Dracula*... Unbelievable.

"Yes, it was one of my father's favorites. Have you read it?" I was almost teasing him, a point I couldn't resist.

"Actually, I have not. I really never liked the scary stuff." His gaze caught mine. His lips twitched once or twice. "May I?" He gestured with the book.

"Please, be my guest." I gestured with my hand.

Richard seated himself on the golden trimmed red sofa my father loved so much. His right leg crossed over his left, poising himself comfortably as he opened the ancient book. Slowly he flipped through the pages. My computer screen blinked as the banking information came up. I wasn't sure exactly if it was Richard or I who was stalling.

"Richard, you mentioned the werewolves." I broke the silence.

"Oh yes. I am terribly sorry. Forgive me, please." He paused and looked up from his book. "I suppose I was somewhat side tracked. It appears there has been more activity in the area of the werewolves. They have been coming in from outside areas."

My heart froze again. "What are you saying?"

"What I am saying is the werewolves are grouping together. More packs of them are coming into the area." He closed the book then rose to his feet. With a few steps he was in front of the bookcase again, replacing the book in its rightful place.

"How do you know this?" My eyes widened.

"I have seen them." He glanced up at me. "They are concentrating around the Fort Mountain area. Do you have any idea why?" He pulled out another book.

I sat back in my chair, clearly annoyed by his seeming lack of concern.

"I have no idea. Daniel and I were out there last night. We ran into two of them."

"Hmm." He chimed as he peered up from the book in his hand. "Maybe they were hunting you and Daniel." His tone was more inferable than I would have liked to hear.

"And you know of this... how?" I leaned forward. My eyes narrowed as I glared in disbelief. "Unless, you were there." I challenged.

Richard's gaze met mine. His eyes peered into my soul. A shiver ran through my body. He knew I was challenging him. My senses ran wild, igniting the wolf inside of

me. The hair prickled on the back of my neck. I could almost sense the thrill of the hunt.

"Yes, I was there," he stated firmly. There was no change in his expression. "They were hunting you. I had been following them. Lance and I killed three on the other side of the ridge. At first, we thought they were fleeing from us. I soon realized their attention was somewhere else. I followed them. Lance stayed behind. I caught your scent and immediately followed the two who split from the pack. "

"So you watched as we fought them?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't help us?" I was astonished.

"It appeared to me you didn't *need* my help." Tag.

Again, I rested back in my chair. My fingers drummed lightly on the armrests. I wasn't sure how to take Richard at this point. What if I did need his help? Was he waiting for me to be mortally injured before he stepped in? Worse yet, would he have waited for Daniel to be killed?

I watched his expressionless face turn back to the book in his hand. The pale fingers flipped through a few more pages. He stopped. Apparently, a specific passage caught his attention. The thrill of the hunt escaped me, replaced by my annoyance with his distraction.

"So what's up at Fort Mountain? Why were they there?" My voice was controlled.

"I was hoping you could tell me. It appears they were searching for something. I thought you might have an idea about this."

"Nothing, I haven't a clue." I was rather exasperated.

Richard's eyes lifted from the book. He carefully studied my face, then closed the book and replaced it on the shelf.

"Really, I do not understand where these authors acquire their information on vampires." He turned to me again.

"Richard, you should know by now, a book is simply the imagination of the author."

"Yes, I suppose you are correct. However, I must say I am a little disappointed. Long and pointed fangs? Really." He humorously snorted.

"Well, I suppose you could write one in better form. I mean, after all, you are a vampire. You have, shall we say, firsthand experience," I challenged.

"Ah, yes. Right again." He took a few steps toward the desk. "Let me give this a little thought." He placed his right index finger across his lips.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I feared the moment to come. Again, Richard accepted this challenge and in some small way, I knew better than to challenge him. I couldn't help myself. Richard was just the kind of beautiful creation a woman couldn't resist. There was no way I could retract my words. When his lips twitched, fighting back a smile, I knew I was in trouble.

"Hmm," he purred. "Let's see how this would work. A beautiful, yet strong, female..." Pausing only for a moment, he contemplated his plot. "Who comes into contact with a handsome, seductive and passionate vampire." His right eyebrow rose slightly.

"And?" I gestured, pretending to be interested in his story. My heart raced, my hands beaded with moisture.

"She's captivated by his charm," he softly purred. "And very curious about his seductive nature." The words rolled off his tongue with such finesse. It was barely believable how such a man's words could draw someone in as deeply as he drew me to him.

"I see. Exactly how is she so curious about his seductive nature when they just met?" I couldn't help myself at this point. The hunt was on.

I actually wondered how far he would take this little game. It seemed like a game worth winning. A sly grin crossed his face. The expression on his face read "Welcome to my web, said the spider to the fly."

"Well," he moved closer to me. Richard had the sexiest walk I had ever seen. He moved and walked like a man of confidence. Sturdy and strong. Determined and virile. Very virile. He moved behind my chair. "He was drawn to her scent." Richard leaned closer to me. His face slowly moved to my neck. My spine stiffened. I braced myself for the impact of the coming moment.

"He wanted only to taste the blood of this beauty. The tempting fragrance of forbidden desire," he murmured. His lips were on my neck, moving slowly and gently against my skin. "But the desire that flamed in his cold veins was more than just for her blood alone."

The coolness of his breath tingled against my skin. His lips moved to my ear. My heart pounded loudly. My breath became hot pants of air. My fingers clutched tightly to the armrests of the chair, attempting to hold onto what sanity I had left.

"Mmm..." he purred again. The deep sultry vibrations of his voice ended in a low growl. "Her scent was a delicate dish. A dish he would savor. No, he did not want to devour this delicacy all at once. This vampire would keep her alive to taste the pleasure of her again another day."

A small noise escaped my mouth. It strained out as I felt his lips move to my jaw. Suddenly I found myself immobilized. The web of the spider had trapped me, leaving me unable to free myself from whatever doom waited.

"When he first laid eyes on her, he was captivated by her mere presence. The beauty that emanated from deep within her was as a soft melody. It was the type of melody that tamed his savage soul. To him, only possessing a beauty such as this could put an end to the desires he had. It was that very desire which burned inside his cold body, warming him to the very depth of his loins."

Richard paused again. His hand gently cupped my chin, tilting my head slightly back. His lips lowered to mine. Gently, the coolness of his lips grazed over mine. A warm rush of excitement ran through my body. My pulse quickened with each breath. The fire which pulsated through my veins sent me into a fevered state.

"As his lips touched hers," he feathered his fingers against my jaw, "her heart raced wildly. And her racing heart sent more of her perfumed scent coursing through her veins. He inhaled deeply, savoring the scent as if it was a fine wine. His lips traveled from hers, leaving a trail of hot fire down to her throat. He followed the delightful

fragrance to where it was the strongest." He stopped and inhaled a deep breath. The coolness of his lips touched my fevered skin once again.

"Her blood...it called out to him. The vein in her neck arched to his lips, wanting him like a woman yielding herself voluntarily to her lover in their most passionate moment. Yes-s-s," he hissed. "It was her blood that desired to satisfy the hunger that raged deep within him. But the vampire fought against his own desire so that she might live."

Confusion flooded my mind. The air I consumed came in heavy pants. The sweaty palms of my hands gripped the chair tightly. Did he really want to kill me? At this point, I couldn't even concentrate on the thought. Fear ran through me. I couldn't move! Dear Fate! I was paralyzed. Richard unlocked a tremendous need that welled deep inside of me. A need I feared the most. My animalistic side had been unleashed, the side that needed to be controlled. The dangerous passion which burned and raged inside of me slowly surfaced.

With one swift motion, Richard pulled me from the chair, turning my helpless body around to face him. He eyed me carefully. I was putty in his hands. I watched helplessly as he leaned closer to my neck.

"Mmm-yes," he growled against my flesh. "He reached around her fevered body, so hot and tempting she was to him. He pressed his lips closer to hers..." He paused when his lips touched mine.

Wearily, I opened my eyes to see the evil grin on his face. Heat burned my cheeks from the fact he could turn me on like a water faucet, worse yet, a light switch. One word, one touch and I melted into his clutches. It was his spell, the spell of a vampire. I was sure of it. There had to be a way out. Had help eluded me? Had Fate left me to my own demise? I shuddered against the thought.

"Julie," the deep rich and sultry voice cooed. "*You will call out my name before I let you go,*" he softly whispered against my ear. A promise I was sure I was going to regret.

Richard pulled my body closer to his. His penetrating gaze deepened. The tinted contacts he wore couldn't hide the hunger present in those blue diamond gems. His taut muscular body pressed tightly against mine. I could feel the full length of his hardness strapped against the inside of his jeans. A thrill of excitement ran through me. The wonder. The curiosity of whether the rumors were true about vampires. From what I felt, they very well could be true. Richard was, without a doubt, well endowed.

The coolness of his breath lingered against my face again. The soft floral scent drove my mind into a whirlwind. My body weakened. I couldn't think. I couldn't move. I tried hard to regain my will. It was a battle, to say the least. A battle I was losing ever second I remained in his arms.

Gingerly his mouth met my neck again. The soft caress of his lips moved to that sweet spot. The coolness of his tongue ran softly over the erogenous zone. Chills danced up my spine, thrilling nerve endings I never knew existed. Every nerve in my body was a fire tipped flame, even my teeth ached. It was the slow ache of my canines emerging, the wolf emerging. His mouth opened against my neck. The coolness of his teeth grazed over the sweet spot. Fire burned in my soul, and the burning sensation flew across my

body. But there was something inside of me willing my body back to reality. Was it strong enough to free itself from the clutches of this inhumanely beautiful vampire? The vampire who was going to adorn himself with my blood, draw from me the beauty inside my veins.

With a quick motion, I grabbed Richard. In a flash, I had him pinned against the wall. I blinked a couple of times, allowing my eyes to adjust to the black and white vision.

Richard seemed taken by surprise at my sudden response. He moved slowly as he backed away from me and pulled my arms down to my side. Our breaths were a series of quick pants. I knew my quick pant was an overactive sex drive. I wasn't exactly sure if his was the same. His jaw remained tightly clenched for a moment, and his eyes were wild. Richard had lost control. Slowly, he relaxed, allowing his grip to loosen around my arms.

"I suggest," I growled as my teeth clicked, "you might want to reconsider your advances, my vampire friend."

Richard studied my eyes for a moment. I could only imagine what he saw, the blackness, and the darkness in my eyes. The things he didn't know about me, or any Lycan for that matter. It took every ounce of strength I had to control myself. I was already over the edge. The battle raged within me to regain control. Trying to control the animal that wanted to tear into him was almost a futile effort. He had no idea what he had encountered. The burning rage inside of me wanted to devour every inch of him. Take him like the animal I was. My teeth ached to taste the flesh of this vampire.

"You seemed to have made your point very clear." He spoke in a controlled manner, still staring cautiously into my eyes.

"Richard. You have no idea the point I'm trying to make." My teeth clicked again.

"I am sure," the brown eyebrows met into a frown as his eyes narrowed into tiny slits, "I am well aware of it, now." He moved.

"DON'T!" I snapped. "I'm not in control of myself!" The rage continued to boil in my veins, burning to the depth of my very soul. The muscles in my body trembled, fighting the urge to lunge for his neck.

"My... what big teeth you have," he teased. "Are you planning on eating me?" His mouth twitched into a sly grin.

"Don't tempt me!" A growl erupted deep in my throat as I moved closer to his face, my eyes narrowing as I met his gaze. How could I explain to him that I saw him as my prey?

My heightened senses flamed into torture as I glared into his eyes. I licked my lips, wetting them lightly as I bore down on the rage again trying to gain control. Richard may be fighting the urge to drink my blood, but I was fighting the urge to kill him.

His gaze lowered to my mouth. I thought my canines would be enough to intimidate him, but in one blurring motion, he grabbed the back of my head and pressed his mouth to mine. My breath caught in my throat with surprise. Nope, I was wrong. This vampire wasn't going to give up so easily. Ever so quickly, his lips parted mine and his tongue searched the inside of my mouth. With his tongue, he gently stroked it over

my extended canines. My body shivered with each gentle stroke.

The sweetness of his tongue caught me off guard. The taste. A brief gasp of air came from me. The flavor was nothing like I had ever indulged in before. My tongue chased his with delight. It was a delightful taste, light and sweet. It was sweet like the finest of gourmet desserts. Delicate like a summer rosebud. Smooth like a fine French wine. Fresh like the morning air after a first snow. Rich like the finest chocolates in the world. Nothing in all my years tasted like him. Nothing could compare to the exotic nature of his flavor that tingled against my taste buds. I gave in to the kiss, delighting myself with this newfound flavor. A flavor I wanted to completely devour. To consume and enjoy it as long as I could. If a vampire's kiss was this good, then I should have kissed one a long time ago. Then again, it may be only Richard who had such an exotic appeal to me.

Slowly he caressed my tongue with his. His hand held me firmly in place as he inhaled a deep breath, intoxicating himself on my scent. He drew my breath deeper inside of his lungs. A low growl rumbled in his throat followed by a husky groan as his tongue wrapped around mine and pulled it into his mouth.

A soft moan escaped me as I explored his mouth to the fullest, tasting more of the desirable flavor. My body ached and trembled inside, as the coolness of his hands slid from the back of my neck down to the small of my back. My body molded itself to his, every part of his body fit against mine with perfection. The muscles in his chest flexed against my breasts as his strong arms wrapped tighter around me. With each stroke of his fingers against my back, I melted into the illusive creation of this vampire.

Tremors overtook me, an impossible thing. Wave after wave, my world slipped away. The coolness of his hand pressed against the side of my face. His fingers feathered the softness of my cheek. Finally, it happened. I fell into an abyss of sensual and erotic pleasure. I released a soft moan as my body quickened under his control. With just one kiss from Richard, I softly and irreverently came. It was one of the gentlest ways I have ever had the pleasure of experiencing.

The muscles in his arms flexed underneath my fingers as I dug my fingertips into his flesh. He moaned with excitement. Carefully, he released me. I swayed in his arms, my eyelids fluttered as the room around me faded. In all my twenty-four years, no one has ever kissed me like Richard. There was no thought that I could comprehend. No words I could use to describe the moment. My mind was at a loss, with one exception.

"Richard." My words were but a whisper before my world swirled into utter darkness.

* * *

My eyes fluttered opened, realizing I was lying on my back on the sofa in the living room. I rose and looked around. Richard was gone. My hand went to my neck, checking for any bite marks, puncture wounds, anything that may have happened to me. After my relief of realizing Richard kept my virtue in tack, I released a long sigh of relief.

I sat up on the sofa and put my head in my hands. I couldn't believe what happened. I fainted! For Fate's sake, I fainted! There was something about Richard. Something about that vampire. He possessed a strange ability to bring out the animal desire in me. Daniel was right. Richard was dangerous. I didn't know how much more I

could take of him. If he had wanted to, he could have bit me, or even worse, raped me. I laughed lightly to myself. Richard was not that kind of vampire. But he still had fangs and he seduced me. What else could he do? I was helpless under his control!

The front door opened as an excited Daniel barreled into the house. The stack of papers he carried in his arms told me he had found something. Weakly, I stood to my feet.

"Did you find anything?" I already knew the answer as he made his way to the kitchen.

"Yes!" he called back excitedly.

I was glad he was not within eye's view, I stumbled a couple of times before I managed to get a grip on my mobility. Moving slowly, I made it to the kitchen where Daniel had laid out several small stacks of papers.

"What did you find?" I asked moving closer to the table.

"It turns out, Dr. Miller had quite a research theory. I found a couple of files in the deleted section of his computer. These files are the blueprints to how he created the vaccine he was planning to sell to the Department of Defense. The Interior Office called CalCom was the DOD's code. It seems that Brendan was a volunteer."

"But I thought that Dr. Miller saved his life and..."

"No. Just saving Brendan's life was not all there was to it. I guess Brendan did not have much of a choice. Dr. Miller introduced him to the project. He set up a series of injections. It turns out that somehow with these injections, he kept Brendan from turning into a werewolf. Apparently Dr. Miller's research was not complete, because he could not figure out how to change back the men he already turned into werewolves."

"What do you mean Daniel? You're babbling."

"Julie, what I am trying to tell you is, once Dr. Miller turned someone into a werewolf, he could not figure out how to reverse the process. Even with the Lycan venom, he could not reverse it. What Miller did find out was that the Lycan venom could prevent the human from turning into a werewolf with the added bonus of regeneration. This is why he was so amped to sell it to the D.O.D.

"According to what I have found, Brendan was in a group of ten volunteers. All of the volunteers successfully made the DNA modification change. My concern is, since Miller is gone, how are they obtaining the injections?"

I shifted slightly and braced myself against the doorframe. "Who manufactured the vaccine?" I added, frowning to myself as I tried to gain more control.

Daniel looked up from the papers to see my troubled look. "Julie? Are you okay?"

I nodded. It didn't do any good to lie to him. Instantly I could feel his thoughts as they swept over me. He was searching mine, looking for some explanation as to my wooziness. With every ounce of strength I had in me, I blocked my thoughts. Daniel frowned slightly.

"Well," his attention went back to his papers. "CalCom is the manufacturer, and it seems that it is still in the experimental stage. From the looks of it, CalCom is privately owned, but somehow connected with the D.O.D."

"So what now? I mean, are you going to contact them? How do we find out if

they've mass marketed this vaccine?"

"They have not, at least not yet. I already called Dad, and gave him the details. He has his contacts. Right now the only thing we have to do is find CalCom, or worse yet, Brendan, and see if we can't put a stop to all this before it's too late. If these guys find out exactly what will happen when they stop taking this vaccine, who knows what the DOD will do."

"Daniel, they are always looking for ways to make better soldiers. Have you ever considered the possibility that they already know what they are dealing with? I mean, think about it, a team of super soldiers. They would be something new in warfare," I added as I moved toward the table.

Daniel raised his head and eyed me carefully. He sniffed the air as I came closer. Suddenly his eyes narrowed. This was it. I needed to prepare myself for the worst. His thoughts gave him away. He could smell Richard. Apparently, I was still carrying Richard's scent. The scent of a vampire, lilies and carnations.

"Richard was here?" Daniel threw out sharply.

There was no sense in lying. I nodded.

"Damn it, Julie! What did he do? What in the hell did he want? Did he harm you?" His voice was tense and filled with concern.

"NO! He didn't harm me. He told me he was in the woods last night and saw us. He said the werewolves were hunting for something. Richard said they caught our scent and came after us. Richard followed the two that attacked us. He said they were hunting us."

I watched Daniel's eyes narrow into tight slits. "What?"

"Richard said..."

"I heard you the first time. This is just great! Now we have a pack of werewolves on our ass. I need to get a sample from one of them. Find out if this is a strand of Miller's work. We need to find out what they are up to."

"Daniel, Richard said they were searching for something." I tried to distract him from his own thoughts of anger.

"Searching for what?"

"He didn't say. He was going to find out."

Daniel released a sigh. He pushed back from the table. The sound of the chair sliding against the wood floor sent shivers up my spine. The dark eyebrows knitted into a frown as he crossed the room and took me in his arms. Deeply the hazel gems peered into mine. There was no need in me wondering if he was upset.

Daniel pressed my body against his. The slow rhythm of his heart beat steadily against my chest. Fear gripped my heart as I heard him inhale a deep breath.

"Julie," his voice was soft, yet firm. "When are you going to learn to trust me? When are you going to learn to talk to me?"

A tremor ran through my body, shivering against his. Daniel pulled more out of me than I was willing to give at this point. The shards of pain stabbed at my heart, deeply penetrating the core of my emotions. The tears threatened my eyes. How could I tell him the truth? What could I say?

"I..." I began as he pulled back and looked into my eyes.

"Julie, what did Richard do to you? I need to know." His voice was firm and controlled.

My teary eyes searched his, carefully taking note of any changes in his eye color. The beautiful eyes were still a soft hazel. Why was it so hard for me to be honest with him?

"He...Daniel..." I turned my head. There was no way I could penetrate the fear inside of me to tell him Richard seduced me. Or the worse part, that I enjoyed the kiss.

"Jewels, what is it that you fear so badly? Are you afraid I will become angry? Tell me, please. Do you realize how crazy this makes me feel?"

Daniel's eyes clearly were the windows to his soul. As I stared into those beautiful gems, the hot tears fell, streaming down my cheeks.

"Sweetheart," his voice softened. "No matter what you tell me, I will never leave you. I do not care how ugly it might be, I will never let you go. I love you too damn much." He let out a painful sigh. "I just wish you would trust me enough to talk to me."

"He..." My gaze drifted as I turned my head to the side. Daniel gingerly took my face in his hands. Softly his lips pressed to my cheek and kissed the tear that trailed from my eye.

"If I have to stand here all day and kiss each tear from your eyes I will," he softly whispered in my ear.

More tears fell as my arms tightly wrapped around him. My body trembled as his arms pulled me closer to him, providing the assurance and protection I needed.

"I love you so much," I cried into his chest. "I don't know what happened. Richard began...then he... I couldn't stop him. The kiss...Daniel?" I stammered as the painful fear flowed through my words.

"He kissed you?" Daniel softly asked against my ear.

I nodded. "I couldn't move. There is something about him. He made me want him, like some type of drug."

"Did he do anything else?" His voice was still soft and assuring.

"No. I fainted," I finally told him.

Daniel shifted his weight and pulled me up in his arms. My heart raced as he carried me toward the sofa and sat down with me in his lap.

"There is no way I am going to leave you alone again, at least not until he's gone and out of your life for good. I will make sure this never happens again." He pressed a soft kiss on the top of my head. "Do you still want to go to Mom's tonight?"

"Yes, we need to be there."

"Are you going to be all right?"

I nodded again.

"We need to leave in a couple of hours for the gathering. Then afterwards, I want to make another run to the mountain. I want to take a closer look at our werewolves. Maybe I will get lucky and get a blood sample."

"Exactly how are you going to do that as a wolf? Where do you think you are going to put the syringe?"

"I have some ideas." He raised his eyebrow.

For some reason, I really didn't want to know. This was going to be one long night. It may do well for us to have a couple of vampires with us when we go to the mountain tonight. At least they could keep the werewolves busy while Daniel and I attempted to find out more about their interest in the mountain.

There was also the possibility of Daniel drawing a blood sample. I suppose we were going to walk up to one of the stinky beasts, and ask them to be perfectly still while we took a sample. To accomplish this feat, someone had to be human. I hope he didn't think I was going to volunteer. When it comes to dealing with a werewolf, I would rather keep my wolf form. Anyway, my human form would probably scream and run away. That was another drawback to being a Lycan; the women appeared to have bad nerves. Deadly killers as wolves, but they made for very nervous humans.

Tonight's adventures waited. The gathering at Charlotte's to celebrate the upcoming wedding, followed by a lovely romantic evening with werewolves. What more could a woman want? For some reason, I just knew this evening would be entertaining to say the least.

CHAPTER FIVE

Six o'clock, and I was already past the point of having a nervous breakdown. Daniel was dressed and patiently waiting on me. Despite his attempts to help me dress, tossing my panty hose at me, choosing the wrong shoes and his very subtle sighs, I still wasn't dressed. Two pair of hose, both of which had horrible runs and then I managed to break a fingernail putting on the expensive pair of shoes Daniel purchased made for the start of a lovely evening. All was not lost as I adorned myself with the new jewelry. Daniel, rushing as usual, attempted to place the diamond necklace around my neck at the same time I was tried to put on the earrings. The diamond earring slid from my fingers and fell down the top of my dress. It would have been easier to catch if I had worn a bra.

My hand went to my stomach, catching the little jewel as Daniel's hand went down the top of my dress. For a moment, we both froze and stared at each other in the mirror. I couldn't let go of the earring and he suddenly realized he couldn't let go of my boob! The cuff of his shirt was caught on my new fifteen thousand dollar diamond necklace. If there was any evening to top this one, I would like to know.

Finally, we managed to make the trip to his parent's house. Our delay, as Daniel would soon tell it, was of course my fault. We sped down the long wooded driveway, and I don't think Daniel missed any midsized rocks as the car bumped one too many times for my taste. As expected, when we pulled the car in front of the house, a valet waited for us. Two men dressed in black suits walked out to the car. One went to the driver's side to greet Daniel, while the other one stepped to my side and opened the door for me. He greeted me in a cordial tone, and offered his hand to assist me out of the car. I

stepped out and waited as I watched Daniel move around the back of the car to join me. Words couldn't describe how handsome he looked in his black suit. The dark black hair, tossed slightly enhanced his sexy appearance. I suddenly realized I wasn't breathing as I watched this handsome man walk toward me. Those beautiful hazel gems lifted through the lush black feathering of black eyelashes to focus on me. A smile formed on my lips as he lifted his arm to accompany me inside.

"What?" He broadly smiled; his eyes glazed a soft twinkle.

Admiringly, I lifted my eyes to his. Fate only knew how much I loved him. "You are so handsome."

Daniel lifted his fingers to my chin, tilting it upward as his lips pressed down on mine. "And you are the most beautiful woman I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. You are the softness of a candle, illuminating the very depth of my soul. The warmth of the sun as it warms my heart with your kiss." he charmed.

Was there any question why I was so in love with this man? Never. *Oh Daniel!*

Thomas had spared no expense for this shindig. The night's event came complete with a butler. Daniel and I were greeted promptly, our jackets taken and we were served immediately with champagne. We moved through the foyer into the grand room. The smell of money filled the air, along with the scents of new Lycans.

The grand room was just that- grand. It was the largest room in their entire home, meticulously decorated with Grecian artifacts. The white room was trimmed with a Greek looking crown molding, one which really set the mood for the room. Overhead, in the center of the room, hung a large gold and crystal chandelier. Marble columns were set approximately fifteen feet from each other all the way around the room. In between the columns, a soft light inset in the ceiling shown down on beautiful Grecian statues. The cracked marble on the floor added to the ancient appeal. Money to say the least, something Thomas had and enjoyed spending.

Nervously, I glanced around. I knew my worst fears were not over. Yes, there she was, I followed the scent. Dear Fate! The old buzzard's eyes caught me! I turned to flee and slammed into Daniel's solid frame.

"Where are you going?" He shot out as his hand to steady me.

"*The old buzzard is here!*" I hissed without turning around.

Daniel's eyes peered past me. The twinkle in his eyes, followed by the twitch of his lips let me know she was headed our way. I buried my head against his chest. For the love of Fate, could I at least have a break today?

"Julie!" the old crow screeched.

"Nevermore! Nevermore!" I cried into his chest. This seemed like the appropriate thing to say at this damned gathering.

Daniel chuckled softly, leaning his head closer to my ear. "Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!" Quote the raven, 'Nevermore'."

Tears formed in my eyes as my body trembled with laughter. It would take Daniel to come up with a quote from Edgar Allen Poe to make the night complete. I turned around, watery eyes and all to face the raven rapping at my door.

"Hello Aunt Doris." I lifted a finger to my watery eyes, taking note of the confused

look on my Aunt's face.

"Doris!" Daniel spoke out in delight. "How are you, my lovely dear?" He reached past me to hug the old bat.

Aunt Doris staggered a bit before she reached her clawed feet toward Daniel for a hug. Uncle Dave reached around to give me a warm embrace when we noticed Aunt Doris wavering as Daniel stood her back on her feet. Daniel's eyes twinkled brightly. The humor in it all had given new hope for the night.

"Oh Julie! I'm so excited for you. I..." She immediately reached down to my hand to look at the ring again. "Now you two must work on having children. Julie, it is better to have them while you're young, you know." She croaked, patting my hand.

"We haven't discussed children Aunt Doris." I managed to strain out.

"You know, I was wondering," Daniel's lips twitched. "Aunt Doris, what would you suggest would be the quickest way possible to impregnate Julie?"

I watched the woman as her eyebrows rose, her eyes widened and her mouth opened.

"Well..." She was not going to lose this battle.

"See I was thinking, if I put Julie on top and then grabbed her hips at the right moment..." Daniel rambled out.

The words were not nearly as funny as Daniel giving a visual of his idea. Somewhere in the back of my sick and tormented mind I did find it a bit funny. The humor in his eyes was more than what I thought the old gargoyle could stand. I think she had a pretty good idea Daniel was not going to stand for her insolence any more than I did. She needed a taste of her own brew, and Daniel was the one to give it to her.

"I think there's a book or something you might want to read...Dave? DAVE!" She briskly turned around as a red glow danced on her cheeks.

Uncle Dave covered his mouth with his hand, his eyes danced with humor. He gave a gentlemanly cough, and then cleared his throat. Turning quietly, Uncle Dave gave me a quizzical grin as he was abruptly drug away by my embarrassed Aunt.

"Excuse me." A deep voice announced behind us. Daniel and I turned around and noticed Thomas.

"The Council has sent over The Assembly to help you out with these Dark Wolves." Thomas turned the glass to his lips. "Any idea of who these rebels are?"

Daniel shook his head. "No. I hope we will find out soon."

Thomas continued. "I heard from a neighboring clan that they've already moved into this area. Daniel, I am afraid they are closer to home than I like. They have converted a few more clans, turning them against the Council with their lies. They are saying the Council is not the true Order of the Lycans. Also, there are rumors building that the Lycans have turned away from the old ways and have concealed the truth of the old ways."

"Old ways? We have always lived by a strict code. Who are these wolves to challenge our beliefs? If they had the true hearts of the Lycans, they would not commit murders against their brethren." Daniel took a sip from his glass.

"Daniel, be careful. There is much talk of warmongering among the clans." His eyes

darted around the room, as if searching for someone.

Daniel's eyes narrowed. "What are you saying? Are you implying the Council is wrong?"

"What I am saying *is* that you should be careful. These Dark Wolves are very strong and dangerous."

"Do you think they would actually attack us?" It appeared Thomas knew a bit more about these rebels than Daniel and I expected.

Thomas gave me a nod. "I believe they will not stop until they've brought the Council down."

"It sounds like they want absolute power." I stated as I turned toward Daniel.

Daniel's gaze fell upon me, considering my words, he nodded. "We'll be careful."

Daniel's arm slid around my waist as he placed a tender kiss on the top of my head.

"Excuse me Daniel, I will be right back." Thomas darted off to the other side of the room.

The Dark Wolves were a new problem we really didn't need at this point. And the question remained unanswered; where did they come from? The thought of them killing their brethren upset me. They were a pack forming rapidly against the Council. It appeared for the moment, we had more than our share of worries. The list was growing with the threat of being hunted by werewolves, seductive vampires in our midst, and now Dark Wolves attacking us. There was no wonder why Daniel was stressed these last few days. I didn't know what to do to help him. One thing I could do, stay away from Richard. Daniel had enough worries. Eliminating the fear of being attacked by a vampire would help.

A slight touch on my shoulder and I jumped. It was Thomas. There was a very thickly built blond man standing beside him. I was caught off guard by his size. He was around the same height as Daniel, around six-four with a heavily pronounced chiseled facial structure. The squared jaw clenched as his eyes fell upon me. Daniel turned and instinctively took a step in front of me. I watched carefully as the blue eyes of this stranger sized me up. Daniel's spine stiffened as he noticed the stranger's interest.

"Daniel, I would like to introduce you to Holt Tanner. Holt will be your second in command. He is with the Assembly." Thomas turned to the blond man. "Holt, this is Daniel, my son, and his fiancée, Julie Knight. They are to be married in a couple of weeks."

Holt stepped forward and offered his hand to me. "Julie, it is nice to meet you. We've heard wonderful things about you, even in my part of the country."

I reached around Daniel and took Holt's hand. "And what part of the country would that be?"

"Washington State." His attention immediately went to Daniel. "Your news also has traveled very far. I hear your research has been ground breaking."

"Well, I do my best." Daniel replied as he shook the man's hand.

Thomas cleared his throat. "Holt has been informed of the situation with the werewolves and these Dark Wolves. We are ready to begin cleaning house when you are. I would like to discuss the plan of action with you."

"Of course." Daniel turned to me. "Julie could you..."

I nodded. My feelings were kept intact. I knew it was a man thing. Politely, I excused myself to allow the men their privacy as I mingled through the crowd. My stomach growled, which told me it was time I had something to eat. I inhaled the scents in the room. It was good to be a Lycan. Every scent of food in the room was clearly identified. I nodded for a server, who apparently had a nice tray of tiny meat sandwiches. She arrived and held the tray for me as I greedily grabbed two of the tiny sandwiches, and popped one at a time in my mouth. I was starving. I hoped Daniel didn't stay too long tonight. The expensive finger food wasn't going to stop the hunger pangs that were overwhelming me. I wanted meat, lots of meat. Real meat. A plate full of meat. Mouthwatering meat. My stomach growled loudly again. I turned and grabbed another appetizer from the next waitress who passed by.

As I was taking a sip of my champagne, Daniel's warm hand touched the small of my back as he handed me one of those finger sandwiches.

"I could hear your stomach from across the room. If you are ready, we can leave if you want."

"Daniel, I need some real food. I'm starving." I pressed my hand on my stomach as it loudly growled again.

"I know you are. We should get you home before that thing jumps out and grabs someone." He chuckled softly.

At this point, a small animal might do. Daniel and I both raised our eyebrows as the thought crossed my mind.

"Oh, no you don't! I have plans tonight and you are going to be a good little wolf girl. We have plenty of meat in the house to keep you busy. I think I stocked the freezer with half of a cow last week." He mused.

I laughed out loud as Daniel led me back through the crowd. We chatted briefly, saying our hellos and goodbyes. My stomach remained silent for a few moments until we made it to the front door. Another growl erupted so loudly the butler gave me a curious look. Daniel took advantage of the moment to inform him that I may have him for dinner, if he didn't find our coats in a hurry. I think Daniel must have scared the poor man to death, because he was back within a few seconds with our coats.

On the way back to our house, Daniel explained to me that I was to stay home tonight. Holt was going to be my guard dog until Daniel returned from the run with the Assembly. I wasn't sure I like the idea of having a guard dog. Daniel didn't want to take any unnecessary chances that Richard would return when he wasn't there.

After Daniel dropped me off, I noticed another car pulling up behind us. It was Holt. Great, a guard dog that drove a blue BMW. Nice car, I admired. It was one of those new sportier models with all the sensor controls. At least he wasn't going to stay inside the house with me.

Daniel walked me to the front door, and gave me a quick kiss. "I won't be gone long. Lock the doors. Holt will be outside. You should be safe."

"Daniel, does he know what he's protecting me from?" I asked softly, peering past his shoulder as the stout man stepped out of his fancy new sports car.

Daniel turned back to look at him. "Yes. He has had a few run-ins with vampires. He knows how to kill them."

"Kill them!" I shot out.

Daniel turned to me. "I am just kidding, Julie. Besides he is the best protection I can provide to you while I am out there in the middle of a bunch of werewolves. Please just do not worry."

My disapproval was met by another kiss as I entered the house. Daniel waited until I locked the door before he turned around and headed back to his car. I set the alarm and headed to the kitchen.

After stuffing myself with everything I could get my hands on, I was finally full. My stomach was quiet and happy. Well, for a few minutes anyway. I placed my hand on my chest. The tight feeling of gas welled inside threatening to erupt. I pounded my chest for relief as the bubble of gas escaped through my mouth. My eyebrows rose. What a manly belch. I hurried up the stairs to take something, and then retire to bed. I felt like an overstuffed turkey at this point. Just like the wolf I was, a full stomach and I was already beginning to feel the effects of sleep taking over me.

After preparing myself for bed, I slipped under the covers and fluffed my pillow. Sleep would come on swift wings. I knew Daniel would be fine with a group of Lycans at his side. I, on the other hand, felt somewhat safe with Holt on duty. My eyes closed as I drifted away on the soft pillows.

Where the dream began, I don't know. My surroundings told me I was in a thick wooded area. The full moon brilliantly illuminated the darkness of the forest. I was in my wolf form, moving through the woods. The smell of water was in the air. I moved cautiously toward the smell. The sound of the water trailed in the night as I listened intently.

The smell of the water drew a thirst inside of me. The river was just ahead. I licked my tongue over my lips, anticipating the taste of the cool river water. Only a few feet away from me, I could hear it. I moved along side of the stream. There it was. Cool and refreshing. I peered over into the running water. The reflection of the moon danced on the surface. The sound of the gentle flowing river moved slowly down stream. Then there was the wolf. I moved back suddenly, startled as the wolf moved back as well. It was right behind me. I turned. No one.

I turned back again and peered into the water. There it was again. I realized it was my own reflection in the water, the shadowy reflection of a black wolf. Its large size and dainty head watched me cautiously. The ears of the wolf perked forward as I watched with curiosity. Almost in a playful way, my ears flickered as I let out a small laugh. The laugh came out as a small bark. Yes, this was me. I leaned closer and lapped generously, allowing the coolness of the water to flow over my tongue. My eyes closed tightly as I drank my fill, attempting to cool my thirst. But the cool water didn't quench the burning in the back of my throat.

A twig cracked in the distance. I jumped. The remaining water ran down the sides of my jowls as I stood in a frozen state. I held my breath and listened, focusing my hearing to determine the direction of the sound; another sound of leaves rustling in the

distance. My attention snapped to the right of me. Whatever it was, it was moving slowly. I lifted my head in the air and inhaled a quick breath. Hundreds of woodland scents encumbered me, exhilarating my senses all at once. The strong scent of another animal caught my attention. I couldn't determine whether it was friend or foe. The smell was not recognizable. Another crackling noise, and I jumped again. The sound was closer than before.

The thick green brush moved. The foliage parted slowly as another wolf pushed its way through the thick brush. It was a black wolf. Its yellow eyes locked onto me. The scent was strong and woodsy. I sniffed the air again, the strong smell of spicy male musk tingled my nostrils. Immediately, I knew it was an Alpha male. He lowered his head as he moved slowly toward me. I took a step back. The natural instinct to lie down and expose my bare belly swept over me. The thought soon changed as a growl erupted from his chest. Before I had a chance to return the growl, the wolf bolted forward in a run. Every muscle tightened in his body, flexing as it galloped toward me at full speed. I couldn't move fast enough. My eyes widened as his body leaped into the air. My chest dropped to the ground, preparing for his pounce when his body flew over mine. A loud thud, then growls and snarls erupted loudly behind me.

I turned abruptly. The black wolf was locked into a battle with another wolf, a Lycan. From that point, I couldn't tell who was who. Both were large and moved around one another, rising up and down on their hind legs. Teeth snapped ferociously into one another's faces. The two wolves dropped back down on the ground and the attack continued. Deep, menacing throaty rumbles barreled from their chests. Chills ran over me as I heard the gnashing of teeth and the high to low pitch snarls and growls continued. I knew one thing; I needed to run. I didn't want to be here when the battle ended. I made my retreat through the woods, my tail tucked firmly between my legs.

There was only a short distance gained, before I ran into a pack of large black wolves grouped together in a circle. Dark Wolves, I presumed, and too many of them for my taste. If they decided to attack then I was in trouble. They saw me, and it took only a second before they bolted toward me. I turned and broke into a run, running as fast as I could. My feet pounded against the ground as I moved, giving me the distance I needed to survive. I needed to find another way around them. My muscles stung and burned from the distance I ran. My tongue lagged from my mouth; I was exhausted. They were still on my trail. I could run no more. A few more steps and I collapsed on the ground.

Confusion surrounded me, and my mind was at a loss. I heard the pack as their ear piercing high-pitched howls barreled out in the distance. My body trembled then jerked, I was changing forms. There I remained, lying still on the cold wet ground as a human. The howls pierced through the night again. Something or someone had grabbed my body. Was death certain?

"Julie!" the voice shouted. Was I still dreaming? There was no one around. "Julie!" Suddenly, I felt my body trembling.

My eyes flew opened. It was still night. I inhaled a deep breath. It was Daniel. I was fully awake from his warm spicy sent as he leaned over me.

"What on earth was it this time?"

I tried to focus on his face. "Was I screaming?"

"No, you were just breathing heavily; panting actually." He smirked with a grin. "Were you having a naughty dream?" he purred.

A grin crossed my lips. "It depends on what you call naughty." I paused, remembering he had just returned from his run. "You're back. How was your run?"

"We will talk about that later. I guess..." he inhaled a deep breath, allowing the air from his lungs to come out in a low growl. *"I guess, I could find out the hard way."* He whispered against my neck. His lips pressed into a kiss. Slowly his mouth opened on my throat, teasing my skin with soft nibbles and kisses.

Fire welled in my veins. My breath came out in a pant. Daniel chuckled softly against my neck. His lips met mine, gently grazing over them. The warm spicy scent grew stronger, captivating me, drawing me to him. The scent lingered in my mouth and the warmth of his tongue teased mine. Taunted and played with me until my world slipped away as I gave in to the kiss. The pulse in my fiery veins raced. My breath caught in my throat. A soft growl rumbled in his chest as his mouth pressed harder against mine.

Neither of us was prepared for what came next. As I threw myself into the kiss, Daniel leaned in, taking over and consuming me. His hand grabbed at my leg, moving me underneath him. The passionate kiss came to a halt. Daniel's lips moved to the sweet spot again. He nipped and bit softly at the sensitive spot until a soft moan escaped me. He inhaled a slow breath. My blood pounded against every vein in my body. In a swift motion, he pulled my nightshirt over my head and gave it a toss to the side. After that, I was in such a heated rage, our clothes scattered in different directions.

My eyes were already wide with excitement, probably black in color as I watched in desperation as his lean body hovered over me. My body felt the increasing need to be satisfied by him. This time I was the aggressor. I wanted Daniel more than ever. I grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed him over on his back. In the dim light of the room, he smiled broadly. He appeared to be a little amused by my advances as I nipped at his chest. My fingers traced over the rippled muscles, slowly letting my fingernails graze his skin. The quivers of his stomach against the tips of my fingers satisfied me. Yes, Daniel was all mine. My teeth grazed over his hard nipples. A moan escaped his mouth, followed by a somewhat throaty growl. He had no idea of what I wanted to do to him. I was in the mood to experiment. I had only one hope that I could control my rage, if it came to that. My fingernails grazed down his side as my tongue trailed down his smooth and tight stomach. Softly I nipped and bit at his flesh. To my satisfaction, the moans and breaths that gasped from him excited me even the more.

My fingers gently clasped around his hardness. Daniel was very ample in size, much to my pleasure. I teased and taunted him until he could take no more. Without any warning, Daniel moved quickly. His hands gripped my shoulders as he threw me on my back.

A growl rumbled from his throat. His mouth moved to mine again. Slowly his lips trailed down to my breasts, nipping at them tenderly. I cried out as he pulled them into his mouth. His lips moved from my chest, leaving a trail of steamy kisses down the

length of my stomach.

Daniel paused. His eyes lifted to mine. He was so damn handsome. The deep desire I saw in those beautiful eyes could never compare to anyone else. It was his desire to please. My breath caught in my throat. I heard his thoughts clearly. I shuddered. Slowly his hands slid around my thighs. My breath had escaped me. Ragged. My heart pounded loudly. Shivers ran uncontrollably through me as I felt his mouth, then the warmth of his tongue inside of me.

I grabbed a pillow and pressed it over my face. Almost embarrassed by my reactions to him, I cried out into the pillow. My teeth ached in my mouth. My canines had emerged slightly. Control. Get control of it. I held the pillow tight against my face, attempting to cover the whimpers and cries that followed. Suddenly, Daniel ripped the pillow from me. Feathers went everywhere. His mouth pressed against mine. The kiss was feverish and hungry. I wondered if Daniel was going to devour me in his haste. In one easy, gentle motion, long and hard he entered me. My fingernails plunged into his back, drawing blood. Every smooth and gentle stroke brought me into a torment of blissful pleasure. I wanted more. My back arched, as I gave in to every inch of him. Soon I was matching him stroke for stroke. The whimpers and cries streamed out of my mouth as I pleaded and begged him for more. His hand slid under my knee, resting it on the center of his arm. His body leaned into mine as he drove deeper into my very existence.

Pants raced out of me. My world faded from the tension that had built, forcing us to a higher level of pleasure. My body tensed, my fingers gripped his arms tightly, digging deeper into his muscles. Daniel's body tensed and I trembled as he soon followed. The wave continued until we both came violently.

Daniel moved his body from mine. He reached down and pulled the bed covers over us. I was too weak to move. Weak from fighting the rage inside me and yet Daniel and I had never experienced a bliss like this before. I wondered what had happened to us to cause such a change.

Daniel pulled me into his warm muscular arms. He pressed a kiss on top of my head and then chuckled softly. I frowned slightly, wondering what he thought was so funny, as if I didn't already know. He was elated, glowing with the pleasure of the blissful moment.

"Daniel?" I began softly. "Something has changed with us."

His lips pressed gently against my shoulder. "I have noticed it too. Something is happening."

"I wonder what it is."

"Whatever it is, do not worry over it. We will know soon enough."

"Yes, you're always right." I pressed my head against his chest, nuzzling closer to him.

Daniel had exhausted me, totally, and I paused to fully enjoy the moment. I smiled to myself as I heard him softly snoring. Well, if there was one way to put him to sleep, this was it. Tomorrow, I would ask him again about his run tonight. For now, I would let him rest. My eyes closed. I drifted off again, hoping no more dreams were going to

present themselves to me. At least, not tonight.

CHAPTER SIX

Lazily, my arms reached over my head as I stretched my sleepy body. It was a typical Monday morning. The aroma of fresh coffee brewing swathed my senses. I had the overwhelming urge to roll over and cuddle against the pillow, just to enjoy a few more precious moments before my day started. The smell of fresh coffee evoked my senses again. Calling to me; drawing me from my warm place of rest. With a sigh, I climbed out of the bed and made my way down the stairs, following the delicious aroma.

As I walked into the kitchen, I noticed Daniel sat in his normal place with the daily newspaper in one hand and a cup of coffee in another. I smiled. Whether he wanted to admit it or not, he was his father's son.

"Morning," I said, lured to the freshly brewed pot of liquid gold.

"Good morning," he replied as his eyes lifted from the newspaper. "Sleep well?"

I nodded as I stirred the creamer in my cup. "Very." It occurred to me I wanted to talk to Daniel about his run last night. "How did it go last night?"

Daniel's face brightened. "Well, I thought it went well." His lips twitched a couple of times, and his eyes brightened with a hint of humor. "I was thinking it is a good thing we do not have neighbors. The way you howled last night, I thought they would have expected I had a wild animal trapped in my bedroom."

Swiftly, I turned around to face Daniel in astonishment. Did I actually howl last night? The memories of last night's events replayed in my mind, searching for the evidence to back up the accusation. Heat burned against my cheeks as the memory came flooding back to me. There were no words in my defense. It was not the moon that brought out my howls last night.

"Well, I suppose I could blame that one on you." The embarrassment was clear in my voice.

He chuckled softly, folding the newspaper and sitting it down on the table. "Then I have done my job well."

The Alpha male was emerging. Proudly he sat back in his chair and crossed his arms over the muscular chest that threatened the threads of the forest green sweater he wore.

"Yes, you did." I admitted, swallowing my pride. I needed to change the subject before he had the chance to embarrass me any further. "So you were going to tell me about last night's run."

Daniel's eyebrows rose. "Oh. Well, it went smoother than we expected. By the way, we managed to obtain a blood sample before we killed the beast. Your boyfriend may be correct. They are searching for something."

Ignoring the word *boyfriend*, I continued with my inquiry. "Did you ever figure out what it is they're searching for on the mountain?"

Daniel shook his head. "No, but they are concentrating their efforts around the wall. Holt suggested it might be something hidden inside the perimeters of the wall. I'm guessing it probably has to deal with the reason why the wall was built in the first place."

"Have you called Jason?"

"Yes, I called them yesterday. Jason and Heather are coming tomorrow morning. He has some loose ends to tie up today. Speaking of which," he glanced at his watch, "I need to run to the clinic. Run some tests on this blood sample. I would like you to go to Mom's until I return home."

"Daniel..." I began to protest when a loud growl rumbled from my stomach. I noticed he had a piece of uneaten sausage on his plate. Immediately I reached over, grabbed it and popped it in my mouth. "I'll be fine."

Carefully, he watched my every move. "Julie, what is going on with your stomach?"

"I don't know. I'm starving." I glanced around the kitchen and noticed a breakfast plate on the stove.

"Well, eat your breakfast before that thing tries to eat someone." He kissed me on the forehead as he rose to his feet. "And yes, Mom brought over a blueberry pie. I took the liberty and put a slice on a dessert dish just for you."

Blueberry pie! That was exactly what I wanted. I wolfed down my breakfast and nibbled on the pie as Daniel and I watched the rest of the morning news.

From the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of Daniel as his body became rigid. Daniel's face suddenly changed. He grabbed his stomach as he braced himself on the table. My attention immediately went to him as I froze in mid bite. Daniel's face was pale, ghostly pale, almost as pale as Richard's. The color was depleted from his lips. Tiny beads of sweat formed on his forehead.

"Bathroom!" I shouted with a mouthful of the pie.

Immediately, Daniel jumped up from the table with his hand covering his mouth. He shot out of the kitchen toward the bathroom downstairs. A second later, I heard the door slam. My eyes drifted to the wondrous pie in front of me. Those delicious blueberries were calling my name. I turned toward where Daniel made his exit. I couldn't help from wondering as I stared blankly into the living room. What happened to him? We just finished breakfast and I felt fine. Although, I still wanted my blueberry pie.

Feelings of guilt swept over me; pulling at my heart to check on the man I loved. I pushed myself away from the table, wiping my mouth with my napkin. I knew I needed to check on him, Daniel had been in there too long. As I made my way through the living room, I heard the most horrific noises. Violent roars came loudly from my downstairs bathroom. It sounded more or less like I had Leo the Lion trapped inside my bathroom. As I knocked on the door, I hated to ask the million-dollar question. It was so cliché.

"Daniel? Honey? Are you okay?" It was such a stupid question. I hated to even ask,

knowing the answer; of course, he wasn't all right.

Another loud roar. No, I guess not.

"Do I need to call a doctor? Do you want to go to the hospital?" I tried to be soft, but that was impossible. My voice rose over the roaring noise from behind the door.

"NO!" He managed to yell out. "I will... be just...." Another roar.

"Okay. I'm going to get you that seltzer stuff. Don't worry about the pie...I mean kitchen. I'll clean it up."

There it was again, another roar. I nodded my head; there was nothing left for me to do. I headed up the stairs to my bathroom. There were some Alka-Seltzers in the medicine cabinet for cases such as these. I grabbed a blue package of the fizzy stuff, pulled one of the Dixie cups from the wall unit and filled it full of water. I dropped the two tablets in the cup and waited. Daniel appeared in the bedroom doorway. He looked awful. I handed him the fizzing liquid. He motioned me away with his hand.

"I took some of that pink stuff." His voice was weak, still holding tightly to his stomach.

"You should really lie down. You look terrible."

"No. Shower first." He announced as he moved toward bathroom. "Go ahead, I will be fine." With a wave of his hand, he dismissed me.

Reluctantly, I left the bedroom and making my way back down stairs, I checked the bathroom for any mishaps. At least Daniel was clean. However, I needed a little bleach to clean up the smell. I clicked on the overhead fan then headed to the laundry room. A little bleach would take care of this. Being a Lycan, one's senses are highly sensitive to smells.

After cleaning the bathroom, I returned to the kitchen to finish off the dishes. I was in a bit of a hurry to check on my wolf man, and finish off my pie.

Once I had finished cleaning the kitchen, I headed upstairs to check on Daniel, after I finished my pie and a cup of coffee. He was sound asleep on the bed. I didn't want to bother him. His color had returned. He looked so handsome. His face was so...so sexy. The black hair tossed against the pale cream sheets. The long dark black eyelashes closed, waiting for a kiss to awake them. He was so appealing. The broad shoulders rested against the bed. The sheet folded over the middle section of his stomach. The strong muscular arm folded over his stomach. The ripples in that stomach were so alluring. So....my hormones over took me. He was sick for crying out loud! What was wrong with me? I was becoming a bitch wolf in heat! A cold shower would do me good at this point. Instead, I took a hot shower.

Fresh and clean, I crawled into the bed next to my sleeping prince. He was my handsome man. He smelled good. There was no scent of sickness around him. What happened? I wondered. Hopefully, this was the end of it.

I snuggled against his body, feeling his warmth against mine. He shifted slightly, wrapping his arms around me. Yes, I did love this man. Daniel made me feel safe when I was in his arms. When I was in his arms, my problems disappeared. But Daniel couldn't be with me all the time. I could take care of myself...sometimes. It just depended on the situation I guessed.

Daniel appeared to be fine. A trip to the mall would be a good adventure for me. Gently, I kissed Daniel on the forehead as I slid out of his arms. Wearily his eyes opened.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to make a quick trip to the mall. Are you going to be okay?" I leaned over and place my hand on his forehead.

"Yes, I will go with you." He shifted under the covers.

"Daniel." I shot out. "Stay here. I'll be fine. It's daylight and I don't think anything will happen. You need to rest. Whatever bug you have needs to run its course." Reluctantly, he nodded in agreement.

* * *

The mall was packed more than usual with Christmas shoppers. And teenagers browsed the mall with their friends, shopping and chatting. Everyone was preoccupied with his or her own lives. Not one of them knew the truth of what lingered in the darkness as they slept at night, the danger that lingered closer than they knew.

I came upon my favorite store for clothes. A younger woman smiled to me as I walked in, and her name pinned on her badge identified her as an employee of the store.

"Do you need some help?" She smiled brightly.

"Oh! No, thank you. I think I can find what I need." I responded with a smile.

Thoughts of what happened earlier ran wild in my mind. I sighed loudly, and placed my hand on my head. I still wondered how Richard could have such an effect on me. The answer began to sink in; it had to be his spell. I was immobilized for a moment, just long enough for him to bite me if he wanted. No, that couldn't happen again, I thought, as my fingers pulled back the latest clothing fashions.

After I chose a couple of outfits, I made my way to the sales counter, Richard still lingering on my mind. What if he had bitten me? What would have happened? Didn't he make it clear he was waiting for the right time?

"OH!" The revelation hit me. He *was* waiting for the right time! He *was* planning to bite me! Now, I was sure of it! That was his intention!

"Dear, did you forget something?" The sales person asked with a confused expression on her face.

"Yes, I did." I spoke mainly to myself. "I think I'm ready to pay for these."

I placed the items on the counter, pulled my wallet out and chose a credit card. After I paid for my purchase, I left the store. Yes, Richard was waiting. His plans were to take me. There was so little I knew about the vampires. One thing I knew about myself, was my sex drive was to the point of becoming a nymphomaniac. Ever since I awakened as a Lycan, I had the insatiable desire for Daniel. It was as if I couldn't get enough of him. I wondered if it was this way for all of us. Daniel didn't mind I was oversexed, but, of course, what man wouldn't? There were the exceptions when he would make me wait a few times here and there, just to gain more control of himself. Richard had awakened something else in me, the wolf rage that I'd purposely tried to harness. Something more of a challenge to Richard. Why didn't I see this coming?

The Bath & Beads shop was just around the corner. It wouldn't take me long to find what I needed. After I picked out the shower gel sets, I headed to the checkout. Again, I

paid for the items then promptly left the store. My stomach growled, checking my watch I realized it was already after six. I was starving. I was growing hungrier by the minute. I turned and felt someone catch me from behind. The hand squeezed around my arms. A hard body pressed into my back.

"You need to tell your boyfriend we're coming after him, you and the whole Lycan clan." The voice was rough, and he reeked with the stench of werewolf.

I didn't turn around. "You will be killed before you have a chance to blink," I growled lowly. Twice in one day. Give me a break.

Roughly, he laughed next to my ear. "Such a pretty bitch wolf you are. I might have a little fun with you before it's all over with. Mmm...you do smell delicious. Good enough to eat." He growled in my ear.

"You will die where you stand if you even dare try." I growled back.

He laughed low and heavy in my ear. "See you on the next full moon, bitch." He snapped then released me.

By the time I turned around, he was already gone. Carefully, my eyes searched each person, looking for this werewolf person. How did he know what I was? Was it my Lycan scent? I turned around again. There was no distinctive person in the crowd of shoppers. I sniffed the air. The scent was still strong as it lingered around me. The trail was distorted through the crowd of people as they passed by me. It would take a wolf to track the scent to its owner, which was impossible at this point.

My hands were full. I moved swiftly to the mall exit and my car. This was a direct threat. Daniel needed to know of it immediately. I opened the car door and tossed the packages into the back seat. I carefully looked around the parking lot before I got into my car and promptly locked the doors. Times like this called for a little extra caution. A few months ago, Casey was abducted from her car. How easy would it be for them to grab me? Surely, they wouldn't try something like this now. Would they? I looked around again. No one looked suspicious. I grabbed my cell phone and called Daniel. Thank Fate, he always answered on the first ring.

"Julie?"

"Daniel, I was just approached by a werewolf in the mall. He told me to tell my boyfriend that they were coming after him, me and the whole Lycan clan." I rambled out a little breathless.

"What?" he broke out in the phone. His voice was tense and full of concern. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Will you call Thomas?"

"Yes, of course. Do you want me to come and get you?"

"No. I'm headed back to the house now." I said starting up the car.

"All right, listen and be careful. Call me immediately if you see anything strange."

"I promise." I clicked the phone closed.

I shoved the Spyder into gear and pulled the car out of the parking space. As I pulled onto the interstate, I hit the accelerator. The car's engine whined and the car sped out. Once I made it to the interstate, I could pretty much handle anything. As I gave the car a little extra speed, my eyes darted to the rearview mirror for anyone who might

decide to tail me.

The drive to the house didn't take as long as I thought, probably because I was driving like Daniel. I pulled up in front of the house. It was no surprise when Daniel met me at the front door. Nervously he grabbed the shopping bags and escorted me inside the house with his hand on my arm. He locked the door behind us. Yes, I was somewhat spooked, but Daniel's concern was making it worse. I remembered clearly the damage they inflicted on Casey. I, for one, was not planning to become the next victim to be mauled by a werewolf.

Daniel set the shopping bags on the sofa, then turned to me and pulled me tightly into his arms. I almost collapsed, not from fear, but the fact I remembered I was starving. In my trauma, all I could do was think about food.

"I called Dad. Are you okay? Do you know who it was? Did you get a chance to see his face?" He rambled too many questions for me to answer all at once.

"Yes, I'm fine. No, I didn't see who it was."

"Julie, I'm so glad you are all right." He pulled me to him, hugging me tightly. "I was terrified. I'll call Dad, and let him know you are here." He said, placing a kiss on top of my head.

I returned the hug. "Daniel, I need something to eat."

He released me slowly, carefully eyeing me and then gave me a slow nod. I gave him a quick kiss, and headed toward the kitchen. He had the cell phone in his hand already prepared to dial Thomas.

Daniel was on the phone with Thomas as he walked into the kitchen. The smell of food cooking was apparent. Thank Fate Daniel already cooked, and from the looks of it, enough for an army. I grabbed a plate and filled it full of food.

Daniel watched me intently as I piled the delicious food on my plate. I glanced his way a couple of times. Briefly, he chatted with Thomas while he kept a steady eye on me. The conversation ended, and he clicked the phone close.

"Are you sure you are all right?" he asked as I continued to pile food on my plate.

"Yes, I'm starving," I mumbled as I grabbed a glass of tea.

Curiously, he watched as I forgot my manners. I shoveled food into my mouth like a half-starved wolf. Daniel shook his head as he prepared his plate, with not nearly as much food as I had obtained. Quietly, he joined me at the table.

Between chews, I nodded as I listened to Daniel's onslaught of chatter. Most of which graciously reminded me of his propitious plans for my well-being. My thoughts, of course, concentrated on the food in front of me. One comment he made that caught my attention was of Jason and Heather. They would be arriving tomorrow morning. This was a good thing. I couldn't wait to see them again.

When I finished my plate, I was satisfied. Daniel raised an eyebrow as he looked from my face to my plate then back again. It was a long moment before he actually spoke.

"What?" The feeling of gas welled inside my chest.

"Julie? Are you sure you are all right? I mean you ate more than normal. I mean enough for three people. I do not mind the appetite, but this is a little unusual for you."

"Nonsense. I'm fine." Something caught my attention. I sniffed the air. My mouth watered. Fruit. Berries. BLUEBERRIES! "Daniel! Do we have any blueberry pie left?"

He shook his head again. "Maybe I better get it for you. I am a little afraid of what you might do to it." A soft chuckle escaped him as he moved away from the table.

Patiently, I waited as Daniel sliced the pie and placed it on a dessert dish. Another pain of gas threatened my chest. This time there was slight burning sensation. Heartburn. Was there something wrong with Daniel and me? Daniel, with the violent roars of Leo the lion, and me with indigestion from hell. I wondered if it was a virus that attacked Lycans.

"Daniel, are you feeling better?" I asked as I pounded my chest with my fist.

"Apparently better than you. I am fine now. I guess it was just something I ate this morning that did not agree with me."

"I ate the same thing, and it didn't affect me." A gust of air escaped my mouth in a manly belch. "Excuse me," I proclaimed as Daniel raised an inquisitive eyebrow.

"As you were saying?" He placed the pie in front of me.

"Oh, it's just a little indigestion. I'll be fine." I picked the fork up and cut into my pie. "Jason and Heather will be here in the morning?"

"Yes, I will pick them up at the airport around eight. We are going from the airport to the clinic to analyze the blood sample." He paused as he sat down across from me at the table. "Julie, do you realize the danger you were in this evening?"

In mid bite, I froze. "Daniel, nothing happened to me. Yes, I do realize it was a threat, not just to me, but also to all of us. What do you want me to do?"

"For one, don't go out by yourself anymore. Do you know how this worries me? How much I worry for you?"

The concern on his face showed there was more threat than what I actually feared. I understood the threat very well, but somehow I felt Daniel was not telling me everything. Did something happen in those woods last night he failed to mention? I wondered.

"Are you planning on going back out there tonight?" I asked as I shoved the last bite of pie in my mouth.

"No. I am going to stay here with you. Let the others nose around for a change. I cannot take the chance of leaving you alone."

"Daniel, please don't do this." The last thing I wanted was for him to hold me captive in my own home. I wouldn't be able to stand it.

"It is something I must do." He said as he pushed his way back away from the table. It was the end of the conversation.

For the rest of the evening Daniel paced around the house, silently checking through the windows for any threats of danger. The only time we spoke was when I told him I was going to bed early and good night. He remained downstairs, patrolling the interior of the house.

As my indigestion lifted, I felt I could finally go to sleep. A couple of fluffs on the pillow and my head rested comfortably. Slowly, I drifted, allowing the night to consume my thoughts.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was Tuesday morning, and I'd slept longer than usual. It was already 8:00 a.m. My first guess was I would have probably slept longer, if the sound of a roaring lion hadn't awakened me. The sound of Leo the Lion was roaring loudly from the bathroom, and then the phone started ringing. At this point, I was fully awake. I grabbed the phone from the cradle and placed it to my ear.

"Hello." I stated as I moved out of the bedroom.

"Julie? Hey ya, lass! It's Jason." There was no doubt in mind it was Jason. The Irish accent immediately gave him away.

"Hey Jason! I hear you are going to be coming in this morning." My voice was filled with excitement.

"Yeah well, Danny boy was supposed to pick us up at the airport at eight. Is he still there?"

"Oh Jason, I'm so sorry. Daniel is in the bathroom. Maybe you can take a look at him when you get here. He's sick."

"Sick? What on earth? Wee bit much to drink, did he?" Jason chuckled.

"No, nothing like that. This is the third time he's been violently ill."

"Well, I'll take a look-see at 'im when I get there."

"I'll send a limo over to pick up you and Heather. Hang tight, I can't wait to see you both! Are you hungry?" I rambled on.

"Yeah, I would say we are. You know me, hungry as a wolf." He chuckled.

"All right, see you in a few." I said turning off the phone.

Immediately I dialed the limousine service. They would have Jason and Heather picked up within a few minutes. I returned to the bedroom. Daniel was lying in the bed again. He was very pale. With his pale lips, he looked as though he was turning into a vampire. I shuddered at the thought.

"I arranged a limo to pick up Jason and Heather." I informed him as I walked over to his side.

"Thank you," he replied weakly.

"Daniel, I'm going to have Jason look over you when he arrives. You look awful. I mean, really. I haven't seen anything look so pale except those vampires." I tried to joke with him. The frown on his black eyebrows let me know he was not in the mood.

"Not funny," he said, holding his stomach.

"Can I get you something? The pink stuff?" I watched as he shook his head. "Okay, I need to get cleaned up. Will you be okay for a few minutes? I'll need to get breakfast started." Daniel waved me off.

I turned and closed the blinds, allowing the room to darken a little. Maybe he would sleep it off. He did look very sick. In a way, I felt bad for leaving him in such a

state.

I rushed through the shower, dressed, and then checked on Daniel one more time. He was sleeping soundly, so I quietly padded down the stairs to start breakfast. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I felt like Charlotte in the kitchen. I wanted to cook everything in sight. I figured I would call Charlotte and invite them over for breakfast. The thought faded, when I realized it was Monday. Thomas had already had breakfast. He was probably on his way to the office. So much for inviting extra guests. The second thought ran through my mind, my culinary skill in the kitchen. Today would be the day I conquered all, at least I would give it my best try.

Within a few minutes, the bacon and ham were cooking nicely on the massive gas range. I prepared French toast, something even I couldn't mess up, and coffee brewed as I prepared scrambled eggs. After I decided I needed something else, hash browns came to mind. I knew Daniel loved hash browns and fortunately for me there was a frozen package in the freezer. This one was the easiest. With the no fail microwave instructions, they would be ready in a few minutes. As I checked the refrigerator for anything else that appeared appetizing, I saw the pie again. My mouth watered. There were two slices left, and without hesitating, I grabbed the dish and a fork. Oh well, I would have room for just one slice.

I gobbled down a slice of pie, followed by a few sips of coffee. All while I watched the breakfast as it continued to cook. Soon the breakfast was ready, and this time I managed not to burn anything. Just then, the doorbell rang. I ran through the living room to find Jason and Heather standing at the front door.

"Well, where's the ill laden lad?" Jason chuckled.

I pointed up the stairs. "Bedroom."

"I'll go and give him a once over," he announced as he headed up the stairs.

Heather followed me to the kitchen. We chatted briefly about Daniel's illness over a cup of coffee. Her face held more concern than I cared to see. We discussed the symptoms as she helped me arrange the breakfast items on the platter. Everything smelled wonderful and I was still starving. We both filled our plates and moved to the table.

Jason walked into the kitchen, and motioned for me. He had an odd expression on his face I couldn't read. The anxious feelings swept over me again, strong enough to put a hold on my appetite.

"What's wrong? Is he all right?" My heart tightened with fear. Could it be worse than I feared? Was something really wrong?

"Nope, he's going to be fine. I gave him something for the nausea. But I need to check you out." His voice sounded serious.

"What do you mean? What's wrong?" My voice was a little louder, as the high-pitched tones tingled in my ears.

"Just a simple test Julie, nothing to worry about, I need a sample from you as well." He waved a plastic cup at me.

"A urine sample? For what?"

"Just give me a sample and leave it in the bathroom. I'll let you know in a few

minutes. I'm looking for something specific, and it's a lot easier this way. Unless you prefer a blood sample." Jason waved the plastic cup to me again.

Since I was already a needle-phobic, I cringed and gladly accepted the offer as I moved slowly, taking the cup from his hands. There had to be some reason he was testing me. Maybe it was a virus. Fear shot through me. Daniel was so pale. Did this have something to do with the blood sample from the werewolf? And he didn't tell me? Could Daniel be turning into a vampire? My stomach knotted. My ears started to ring. Once in the bathroom, I almost fainted at the thought. I left the sample on the counter as Jason requested, washed my hands and then headed back to the kitchen.

When I returned to the kitchen Jason was already eating from Heather's plate. He rose to his feet without speaking. Chills ran down my spine as I watched him walk past me to the bathroom. I plopped down hard in my chair. My eyes firmly fixed on Heather as her lips curled into a smile.

"Love, don't look so grim. It's really not all that bad. Daniel's going to be fine." She smiled.

My gaze met hers. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I wondered. My stomach growled again.

"You'd better eat. I heard that growl." She chuckled softly.

I shoved a forkful of food in my mouth. Yes, I was starving. In between bites, I tried to talk. I wanted to know what they thought was wrong with Daniel. Fate knows I couldn't lose him. Heather shushed me and motioned me to continue eating. We ate our food in silence as we both waited for Jason to return.

A few moments later Jason appeared in the doorway, wearing a huge grin on his face. Heather's face suddenly brightened. My face, of course was grim. I couldn't imagine what he was thinking; apparently, it wasn't as bad as I had thought.

"Well, congratulations lass. You're pregnant!" He announced.

For some reason, the words didn't register. My fork dropped to my plate. I froze. Wait. Daniel was fine. I was ... the three words didn't register clearly.

"I'm *what*?" I whispered.

"With child! Julie! I'm so excited! You and Daniel are going to have a baby!" Heather squealed. "I had my suspicions, when you told me Daniel's symptoms. My suspicions were correct. Daniel is having your morning sickness."

I still remained in a frozen state of shock. With child? Pregnant? Those words were foreign to me. Daniel and I never discussed having a family. I couldn't be. Not at a time like this! Not when we were in the middle of a war.

"Julie? Are you all right?" Jason added. The concern was evident on his face.

"Yes, I guess I'm a little shocked. Worried mostly." I spoke softly.

At the same time, I was becoming a little excited. A child was inside of me, one that Daniel and I created. How wonderful would it be to bring a little Daniel or Danielle into the world? Martin Knight would have been elated to have a grandson or granddaughter. A smile crossed my lips at the thought.

"Ah-h there it is." Heather smiled broadly. "The glow. It has just settled in."

Yes, she was right. After the initial shock wore off, I realized the gift inside of me.

No wonder my appetite was tremendous, I was eating for two.

"I guess I need to call Charlotte. I'm sure she will be excited." I spoke out.

"I already called Mom." Daniel said standing in the doorway.

The warm color of his skin had returned. The smile on his face broke rivers of emotions in my heart.

"We are going to have a child." He smiled broadly.

The tears finally fell from my eyes. I pushed away from the table and moved to Daniel. The strong arms folded around me tightly as I rested my head on his chest. His joyous thoughts were not hidden from me as I could hear them clearly. Daniel was truly happy.

"She is on her way over. AND yes, she is bringing you some blueberry muffins. It was the first thing she asked." He chuckled softly.

"How did she know?" I stepped back from him.

"Well, she asked me what you had been craving. I told her blueberries. It seems I have had the same craving because of you. Apparently, I am going to be going through this pregnancy with you." He rolled his eyes as a soft smile crossed his lips.

Jason laughed and nodded his head. "You most definitely are my friend."

Daniel rolled his eyes again. "Well, now I am hungry. I hate to ask, but is there any pie left?" I couldn't help laughing with him as I motioned for him to sit down at the table.

A few minutes later, Charlotte arrived with a dozen freshly baked blueberry muffins. The basket was still warm when she sat them down on the table. Thomas already knew the good news via Charlotte. Good news travels fast among Lycans. Charlotte and Thomas were ecstatic that they were going to have a grandchild.

Plans were already being discussed between Charlotte and Heather for a baby shower. Here we go again. Casey was the only one absent from the celebration. We had always shared our life's events, no matter how good or bad they were. I wondered how much things would change between Casey and me now that she has gone vamp. Would she be the same Casey?

"Julie?" Charlotte broke my thoughts. "Thomas says he will be here in about an hour. He is leaving work early to come and celebrate with us. I hope you don't mind. I will plan a little dinner party tomorrow evening. I am just so excited."

I had a feeling the word "little" meant around a hundred people. However, it didn't even occur to anyone that Daniel and I still had to confront the Council. Well, we were only a few weeks away from our wedding date.

"Charlotte, don't you think we should wait until after Daniel and I are married to announce this? What about the Council?"

"Absolutely not! Besides Daniel is the Council now. You do not understand Julie. When one of us is with child, the entire clan becomes a part of it. It is a grand event. A new birth is shared with everyone. I remember when your mother was pregnant with you and I was pregnant with Casey. It was wonderful!" She voiced out in a chipper tone.

"Yes, I guess I'm still learning." I said softly.

My handsome man, the man who stood so tall and elegant, gleamed with joy. I felt

the joy in his heart. He didn't mind if his child were a boy or a girl, as long as it was healthy, Daniel was happy.

"Oh!" Charlotte started. "Julie, I must warn you of a few things. Just in case. Actually, you and Daniel both. While you are pregnant, you will go through a few more changes. You will become more protective. Daniel will as well. It is a natural instinct with us."

"You will find that you and Daniel will become more of a 'pack' so to speak." Charlotte spoke softly. "Everything about you will increase: your strength, your senses and especially your instincts. You will even have a greater connection with Daniel. If you are ever in trouble, he will be the first to know." She paused and glanced to Daniel.

"Daniel, you will feel her in a way you have never felt before. The connection will be stronger. You will be linked in a way like no-other. You will hear her clearly in your mind, no matter where she is." She finished.

"What about the werewolves? I can't just let Daniel go out there alone." I was now worried about him.

"Lass, we will have Daniel covered. Right now, we all feel the same way. Keeping you safe. I can speak for Heather when I tell you we are both excited for you and Danny boy. Our instincts are high at this point as well." Jason chimed in.

Yes, I did feel the protection they were offering. It was an odd sort of feeling. We were all behaving like a true pack. However, my soothing thoughts soon turned to the blueberry muffins. Laughter filled the kitchen as they watched Daniel and me devour them.

"Jason," Daniel began. "You feel up to coming over and seeing the clinic I set up? I need to check out the blood sample."

Jason's eyebrows rose. "Of course, I'm up for it. I want to see what you've put together. Have you hired an assistant yet?"

Daniel glanced to me then back to Jason. "Well, my assistant is currently handling something more important." He smiled broadly, his attention now on me.

"Well, you two have a great time. I'm going to take Heather into town and pick out a dress for the wedding." I returned his smile.

Daniel showered and dressed, then returned downstairs to steal another muffin before he left with Jason. Heather and I took my dad's Jag to Nancy's Boutique. A small store centered outside of the Atlanta city limits, the quaint little store where Charlotte purchased all of her formal attire was a specialty boutique that catered to and fared well among the wealthy.

I chose a medium blue floor length dress for the evening. The long sleeve dress was very elegant, straight and form fitting. The silver embroidery down the right side gave it the shimmering effect.

Nancy and I picked out an elegant gown for Heather. I was surprised how sexy it looked on her petite figure. The full-length black evening gown fit her perfectly. And, based on Nancy's recommendations, we chose a loose gold belt to accentuate her waist with gold jewelry. The dress was plain, but when Nancy was finished adorning it with gold accents, it was beautiful and Heather was gorgeous. I was sure Jason would

appreciate how the dress flattered her. We roamed the boxes of shoes for the perfect match, and Nancy made the adjustments for both gowns and sent us on our way. Tomorrow morning they would be ready to be picked up. Even though Heather insisted on paying for her dress, I further insisted I would take care of the bill. It was a gift, one of which I owed to them. Besides, I knew she could not afford the dress considering that Nancy's dresses were all designer originals. The bill was well over what Heather would consider paying for a car! I put it on my tab. It was a way of life for my family.

We returned to the house. Heather was exhausted and went straight to her room for a nap. I was still running on adrenaline. There had to be something in this house to entertain myself. The thought of the Dark Wolves crept back into my mind. This was something I could do. I wanted to see if there was any information on the Dark Wolves. Maybe I could find something that would help Daniel.

The doorbell rang as I made my way back into the living room with a bowl of popcorn. As my eyes glanced to the front door, an immediate rush of fear flooded over me like a heavy rain. It was Richard. At this point, I didn't know what to do. So much for the perimeter of the house being protected! So much for Lycan bodyguards! Slowly I set the bowl down on the coffee table, and moved toward the front door.

Richard stood outside and waited patiently as he saw me moving toward the door. My heart froze for a second to two as I contemplated opening the front door. The black long sleeve sweater he wore enhanced the pale color of his skin. I assessed his attire, admiring his choice in black Kenneth Cole jeans and shoes. Even I had to admit he looked very handsome despite the pale features.

As I opened the door, Richard removed his sunglasses. The inhumanly beautiful creature now stood before me. The tinted contacts he wore hid the beautiful crystal blue diamond-like eyes. My heart skipped another beat as his eyes appraised me in a seductive manner. There was no reason I had to fear him, especially when Heather was just a scream away.

"Richard." I managed flatly.

"Julie." His deep voice was thick and lustrous. The tones tingled in my ears.

"And you are here because?" I tried to hide the alluring qualities as my hand gripped tightly to the doorframe.

A spark of humor flickered in his face as a smile donned lips. "Actually, I wanted to talk with you concerning the information I found. May I?" He gestured with his hand for me to invite him inside of the house.

The air was chilled outside, so I went against my better judgment and stepped aside to let him enter. A warm smile crossed his lips as he moved past me through the threshold of my home. A few steps and he turned toward me.

"You have a guest?" He inquired as his eyes drifted up the stairs.

"Yes, Heather and Jason are staying with us for a little while." My voice strained.

His attention was upon me again. "Hmm." He began as he took a step toward me. "So we are not alone then."

"Richard, I swear to you..." I huffed out in a breath.

A small chuckle escaped him as he took a step away from me. His hand rose to his

mouth to cover the laugh. "You do have a beautiful home, Julie. It was my intentions of complimenting you before, but I was somewhat distracted."

"You are always distracted, Richard. As you were saying about the information." I urged.

"Ah-yes, please accept my apologies. It seems I have found some rather interesting information on your werewolves." His voice was silky and smooth. It appeared the more he spoke, the more I was drawn to him.

"Please enlighten me, if you will." My voice was firm and sarcastic.

My eyes narrowed slightly as I wondered if this was a trick. Richard appeared to be calm and very sure of himself. What type of information could he offer me?

"A lady would ask a gentleman if he would like to have a seat." His gaze drifted around the room. "Is this not what you would call Southern Hospitality?"

"Yes, a lady would." I walked past him into the living room. "However, I am no lady when it comes to you." I sneered. "Sit Richard, and please tell me what you have to say." I sat down on the sofa and motioned for him to sit down.

Richard moved slowly and fluidly toward the chair I offered him. As I watched him walk, I was awestricken once again. He moved as a man in control, confident and sexy. The way his legs moved with his body sent chills over my arms. Damn, he was too sexy for his own good. I shifted slightly on the sofa as I watched him seat himself in the chair across from me. My heart skipped another beat as I watched him lean back in the chair. The air of arrogance preceded him in the most unnerving way. Any woman would admire this in a man. It was what most women wanted. A man who knows what he wants, but Richard was no ordinary man. He was in fact a vampire. It was a fact which I constantly needed to remind myself. Does this quality add to the sense of sex appeal? For me, it most certainly did.

This inhumanely beautiful vampire had that type of confidence in his own abilities. It was this air of arrogance that drew me to him. Just watching him as he moved, walked across a room made my heart flutter. How was it that this vampire had this ability?

"I found out our werewolf friends are searching for something inside of the mountain. It appears there is an item which is hidden deep within the mountain itself."

"Do you have any idea what the item is?" I leaned forward; my curiosity over this new found knowledge appeared to have the best of me.

"No. There is one person who would know. I have already made arrangements to meet him." Richard glanced around the room again.

"Who is this person? How does he know what is hidden there?" My questions rushed out of my mouth.

Richard's gaze shifted only for a second. Even in that small second, I noticed his eyes travel past me and up the staircase. Without even questioning, I knew something about Heather bothered him. Maybe it was the fact I was not alone with him.

"His name is Mithras." Richard began as his attention fell upon me again. "I said he might know what is hidden up there. The answers you seek still remain open." He inhaled a slow breath and leaned forward placing his arms on his knees. "Julie, there is one more thing." His voice was low and soft.

The moment he moved, my heart fluttered once again. It appeared that even moving an inch closer bothered me. It was without control of myself that I immediately stood to my feet. I needed distance between this beautiful vampire and me. Reminiscences of our first kiss clouded my mind.

Slowly I crossed the floor to the bar, allowing a little distance between this vampire and myself. I had the uneasy feeling Richard was not going to stop. He didn't seem to be the type to give up so easily.

There was a flash of sudden movement in my peripheral vision. Richard had moved, standing behind me as his floral fragrance encumbered my senses. The familiar smell of lilies and carnations lingered against my senses, even heavier than before. My eyelids drooped as I tried to breathe without inhaling the intoxicating scent. Slowly my hands gripped the granite counter, holding tightly as I fought the effects of this exquisite scent.

"In my scurry to uncover the secrets behind your werewolves, another precarious secret revealed itself to me. One of which, I was most intrigued in its origin. Of course, I had to explore more into this wondrous thing." The coolness of his breath fanned against my hair. The sweet scent overloaded my senses, leaving me helpless once again. The desire to have his lips once again on mine, tasting the sweetness of his kiss overwhelmed me.

"What may that be, I wonder." My words came out through gritted teeth.

I felt my hair as it was pulled away from the side of my face, exposing the flesh on my neck. The temperature in my veins rose as I felt the coolness of his lips against my skin.

He inhaled a deep breath. "Mmm." He paused. "Oh, I think it is something you would enjoy immensely. A bit of information your dear Daniel and the people you consider your family and friends may have hidden from you."

The muscles in my arms trembled. The tones in his voice tingled in my ears. I couldn't think. Confusion had taken over my mind. As I fought hard against this wave of intoxication, I remembered, it was his spell. It was the spell of a vampire.

I bore down against his spell, turning to face him. My will had to be stronger than his.

"You're lying." I hissed between clinched teeth.

Richard chuckled softly. "No... my dear." He whispered. *"See I know a few things about you, some of which you don't even know about yourself. Your mother for example."* His hand lifted slowly to my face. The pale finger locked onto a strand of my hair and twirled it around his finger then brought it to his face. *"You never knew who or what she was. Maybe she wasn't what you thought."*

I blinked a couple of times, staring into his beautiful face. The lips that once touched mine carried that kiss which still haunted me.

"If you will," He began as he leaned closer to my face. *"Trust me and I will tell you everything I know."*

I inhaled a deep and ragged breath. My mind swirled from his scent. "Wha-at ma-ake-s you-u..." The words shuddered out of my mouth. "Th-hink I can trust you."

"Because my lovely, I am the only one who will give you what you desire." He leaned closer to my face.

Richard took a step back away from me. Something had changed about him. His eyes had become bloodshot. The linings of his eyelids were almost a blood red. I watched as his body tensed and become rigid. The beautiful features suddenly became distraught as his jaw clinched tightly together. For a moment, I had considered the fact Richard might indeed attack me. Was he actually losing it?

Apparently, he gained control of himself and spoke in a strained voice. "Soon and very soon I shall return for you, my lovely."

A soft kiss feathered against my skin, my eyes closed tightly, my body trembled. Richard was in control of himself. Just how badly did he want me? I wondered. When I opened my eyes, he was gone. My trembling fingers lifted to touch the skin where the soft kiss lingered. At least this time, I thought, I didn't faint.

Richard's new information left me in a quandary. What if Daniel and the Maxwell family knew about my mother? What if there was something about her they were keeping hidden from me? Charlotte had said once; she knew what my mother was. Was it something that would cause me pain? All of these thoughts ran through my mind in a rush. I was tired of being in the dark. I wanted the truth. For now, Richard appeared to be the only one willing to provide me with the answers I was seeking. The biggest question remained, could I trust this inhumanly beautiful creature with my life? There was only one way to find out.

Daniel and Jason returned later that evening. There appeared to be some odd static in the air concerning the two of them. Even Heather noticed the difference. After a quiet dinner, quiet meaning no one spoke during the entire dinner, I watched as Daniel lingered by the kitchen counter staring blankly into the wall. My heart was beginning to break. I didn't know if Daniel realized it or not, but it felt as though he was putting a certain amount of distance between us.

I crossed the room and moved beside of him. "Daniel, will you talk to me about this?" Gently I placed my hand over his heart.

The expression on his face was now grimmer than ever. He shook his head, and then ran his fingers through his hair. His hazel eyes narrowed into a glare. My heart fluttered. This was bad, worse than before, and it was written all over his face.

He sighed. "We have a lot on our plates right now."

"Daniel, we will get through this." My heart hoped he would tell me this torture he was enduring. Something happened and I knew it. Daniel was withholding it from me.

Hope failed me as Daniel moved away from me. He paused and gave me a kiss on the forehead. From there I watched as he slowly walked back into the living room and out onto the patio closing the door behind him. A feeling of dread washed through my heart. Something else was bothering Daniel. The fear that washed over me was more or less if he knew if Richard was here again. The need to eat had left me and he was my concern now. I did what any woman would do...I went after him. He was standing on the patio, leaning against the railing.

The chill in the air swept over me, sending a shiver down my spine. Daniel was

staring out into the woods; he turned his head slightly to side as I touched his back. Raising his arm, he slid it around my back. I looked into his eyes and my heart shattered. Daniel's teary eyes met mine. He was in pain, a very deep emotional pain.

"Julie," He began. My heart pounded loudly to the point my ears were ringing. "I want you to know I love you more than my own life."

"I know." I spoke softly.

"I could not bear it if anything happened to you. When Dad told me about the mall, I immediately had flash backs of Casey. I could not handle it if they did something like that to you. You do not understand what would happen to me, if they hurt you that way."

"Daniel," I wanted to say so much, but the words caught in my throat. Still I felt he was not telling me something. "We will get through this."

"I know we will." He sighed again then turned back to look out through the woods. His arm slid away from me and returned his hand back on the wooden railing.

The heart inside my chest broke as I turned around and went back into the house.

"Julie?" Daniel's voice was soft yet there was a brokenness I heard clearly.

I turned to face him, he hadn't moved one inch. "Yes?"

"I just want you to be happy." The words were barely above a whisper, yet they rang loudly in my heart and ears. For a split second, I felt as though I was losing Daniel.

Hot tears streamed down my face. The heart inside my body shattered into a million pieces. What had I done? I brought my trembling hand to my mouth, to cover any sound that I may make. Did he not realize I loved him more than my own life? Could he not see I would die for him? I stood frozen for a moment consumed by the overwhelming pain I was feeling. Daniel never moved. He stood motionless with his back turned to me. I didn't know what to say. I needed to put some distance between us. I pushed my way back to the kitchen to clean up. It was making no sense to me. Tears continued to stream down my face, I needed answers, but this wasn't the time. My heart felt the crushing waves again, tearing at my soul. A gush of air erupted from my chest as the tears continued to flow. I raised my head and looked around the kitchen. Chills prickled down my spine, I loved Daniel so much. A certain amount of guilt swept over me concerning Richard. How could this have happened?

Heather and I were in the kitchen when Daniel made the announcement he and Jason were going to see Thomas. I was ready to go with him, when his weary eyes looked into mine and said the words that tore through my heart.

"Not this time, Julie." The hurt in his voice matched the pain in my heart. "I want you and Heather to stay here until we come back. There are some things I need to discuss with Thomas and the Council. Please be careful. We may be back later than expected, so don't wait up for me."

Those were the last words I heard from Daniel before I went to bed. As my eyes closed, I couldn't help feeling the distance between us. What could be creating this? I wondered if it was because I kissed Richard. Then it dawned on me; Daniel could have detected Richard's scent in the room. Why didn't I think of that before! Maybe I should have told him Richard came over. I turned over in the bed again.

The argument continued within my mind, until I finally became too exhausted to continue with the war. There had to be some other explanation as to why Daniel was doing this?

Tomorrow would be another day and hopefully, a day of answers. My plans would be to seek out Richard, then confront Daniel. I only prayed the answers wouldn't be as bad as I feared.

Finally, my thoughts faded as I drifted off into a deep sleep. The darkness covered me as my body relaxed. Yes, tomorrow was another day.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The new day started off with a bang. I was still sleeping soundly when Daniel woke me. Wednesday, the week was almost over and I still had a lot to do. My grumbling and protests didn't stop him as he pulled the warm bed covers off me, exposing me to the coolness of the house. I glanced at the clock; it was only five thirty. My eyes peered through narrow slits to see him standing before me already showered and dressed. The irritation on his face was probably due to my disagreement from waking up so early.

"Julie, we have house guests, come on! We need to get breakfast started," he snapped.

Wearily, I rolled off the bed as he grabbed my arm and pulled me to my feet. I pushed his arm away and padded toward the bathroom. Yes, I knew we had guests, but I was not a morning person, at least not before I had my first cup of coffee. Five thirty, I thought, I was standing in the shower at five thirty. I finished, dressed and found Daniel in the kitchen. He cranked up the griddle on the massive gas range. The coffee was ready, with a second pot ready to start brewing when needed.

I stumbled my way to the coffee, grabbed a cup and glanced around the kitchen. He shoved a carton of eggs and bowl toward me on the prep island. I didn't speak, still in my stupor, and broke the eggs into the bowl. He cooked the country ham and bacon on the griddle and then chopped the onions for what looked like hash browns. I took another sip of coffee then beat the eggs once I had emptied the entire carton. Reaching for the salt and pepper, I held them over the bowl and suddenly he slapped my hand away and yelled at me again.

"NO! Do not put salt and pepper in those!"

I glared at him a moment, trying to decide what I was going to say. "I thought you wanted scrambled eggs."

"I do," he sneered at me. "But I also need an egg batter for the French toast. Here" He shot out at me as he tossed me the French bread and slammed the carton of cream down in front of me.

I went to grab another bowl, and another carton of eggs. Returning to the counter, I pushed the first bowl aside and broke open another carton of eggs.

"What in the hell are you doing?" he yelled as he walked over and looked into the bowl.

"You said you wanted a batter for the French toast." I replied.

"Julie, Damn it! Use the one you started for the batter! What is wrong with you?" he snapped again.

Okay, have it your way! I grabbed the cream and poured it into the bowl, followed by the vanilla and stirred it. Setting the bowl aside, I grabbed the knife and cut the loaf of French bread into slices. Fate help me if I cut them wrong. So far, he was intent on watching the meat cooking. I continued with the French toast until I had it prepared for him. Then I went back to working on the scrambled eggs.

"Start the grits, will you?" he snapped.

I grabbed a pot and proceeded to start the grits. Placing it over the burner, I turned it on.

"Got those eggs ready?"

I paused a moment to look at Daniel, irritation was the first word that was coming to my mind. He glanced at me and then back to the food he was working on.

"When did this become 'Hell's Kitchen'?" I snapped as I turned to finish the egg mixture.

"Well, if you would keep up and concentrate!" He snapped back.

That was it! I slammed my hand down on the counter. "What in the hell is wrong with you this morning?! You have been acting like an ass ever since you woke me up!"

"Julie just get the damn eggs scrambled! I really do not have time for this shit!" he roared at me.

"Shit huh?" I snarled back at him. I grabbed the egg carton, held it high in the air, and turned it sideways allowing all the eggs to fall into the bowl breaking. "THERE!"

Daniel turned around and stared into the bowl, then looked up at me. His eyes were now black as midnight. His jaw flexed as he gritted his teeth. Then a cold expression crossed his face.

"You need to get out of this kitchen before I do something I will regret," he said in a low and steady voice.

I turned to leave the kitchen when he took a couple of steps and grabbed my arm squeezing it tightly. Something I never expected; he proceeded to jerk me back to face him.

"Julie, I just want to know something!" he growled at me. "You called Richard's name out in your sleep last night! I am sick as hell of smelling his scent on you! Are you fucking him?" Daniel roared.

Fire burned inside of me, as I jerked my arm away and slapped him as hard as I could. When Daniel's head turned back around, he was enraged. He leaned forward, closer to my face. Fear shot through every nerve in my body. Daniel's lips had curled back far enough over his teeth to expose the now extended canines. Dear Fate, he had lost it, I thought as I stood frozen in my own fear. A lowly growl erupted from him, as he was only inches from my face.

I suppose it was the instinct of the wolf that came forth inside of me. I turned my

head, keeping my eyes lowered as my heart pounded loudly. Before I knew it, he ripped himself away from me and marched toward the kitchen door. Another thing I never expected he took his fist and hit the wall. With the powerful hit, he managed to punch a hole through the wall. I immediately took advantage of the moment and ran. I needed to get away from him before he did something to me.

Daniel followed behind me. "Julie!" He called out behind me.

I grabbed my purse and headed out the front door. Daniel ran up behind me, his fingers grabbed for my arm but before he had the chance to grab it, I turned and threw myself into a punch that sent him sprawling backwards on the ground. I fled to my car and locked the doors, then started the engine and burned rubber leaving down the driveway.

Through my painful tears, I glanced in the rearview mirror, to see Daniel standing alone in front of the house. *Damn him!* I cursed as I drove faster. I had no idea where I was going but I needed to get away from him. Daniel had never shown any signs of this type of anger toward me. I knew he was mad and upset, I guess it settled a little deeper than what I imagined. He had every right I thought to be mad and hurt because of me.

I didn't know where to go that he wouldn't find me. If I went to the Maxwell home, he would find me. There was only one place he would not find me, Richard's home. I remembered he lived in Villanow, located off Route 136. It would be hard to follow the scent once I was near the house. The decision was made as I turned the car onto another road. I was going to get at least one answer this morning.

I drove for a few minutes and found myself passing the exit sign for Route 136, Villanow, Richard's home. Without thinking, I took the exit. I vaguely remembered the box address. But there was one way I could find him. I rolled the down the car window. The cool air rushed in. I inhaled deeply. Nothing. I pulled the car over to the side of the road. What was I doing? I wanted to talk to him. I wanted to find out what Richard knew about my mother. Also, I wanted to know if he could really find out what was hidden in the mountain.

My actions or reasons had nothing to do with him though, and I couldn't see Daniel's point. Richard wove a spell over me, at that one moment. That was it. It wasn't like I was thinking about him all the time. Or was I. Closing my eyes, I realized Daniel may have been telling me the truth. Richard's obsession was becoming my addiction.

"Are you lost?" A voice came from the left side of the car.

I jumped. My heart pounded, my ears rang and my breath froze. I turned. Oh Dear Fate, it was Richard.

"I..." I tried to force out. My mind was jumbled. Thoughts ran wild. To do or not to do; that was my question.

He leaned against the car door. "Julie? Are you all right? Is something wrong? You look distracted."

"Yes, I mean no, I mean..." I was still in an array of confusion.

"Can you drive? I live just down the road here." He motioned up ahead.

I nodded.

"Then follow me there." He turned and walked back to his car.

How could I have been so deep in my own thoughts that I never saw him approach my car? I never heard him pull up behind me. What was wrong with me? I felt as if I was losing my mind.

Richard pulled the manly Mustang around my car. I put my car in gear, and followed him down the road. We turned left into a long driveway, one much like my own, long and wooded. It curved and then I found myself pulling up in front of his home. It was larger than the one I lived in, probably about the same size as Thomas's and Charlotte's. The home was very modern and stylish and appeared to be only a few years old. It was a two-story home. Most of the windows were down stairs. The upper part of the home had large windows, but I could tell they were hidden by dark drapery.

I pulled up behind Richard and cut my car off. Opening the door, I reached for my purse and stepped outside. As I stood, I noticed the beautiful foliage in front of the home. Even in the fall months, it was still beautiful and green.

"This is beautiful."

"Thank you. The gardening is a project of Adrianna's. She loves to work with plants as you will soon see." Richard said moving closer to me and reaching towards my teary eyes. "What happened?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" He raised his eyebrow.

"Okay, Daniel. He knew what happened yesterday. Apparently it didn't sink in until this morning."

Richard frowned and his eyes narrowed, his jaw flexed then he took a deep breath.

"Did he hit you?"

"No. It was my fault." As soon as I said the words, I reminded myself of those women who are beaten by their boyfriends and husbands and blame themselves.

"NO, IT'S NOT!" Richard snapped. He drew back his body and took another deep breath. He exhaled slowly then calmed down. "Julie, no man has a right to hit a woman. No matter what she did or did not do. You are a human being."

"HE DIDN'T HIT ME! And I'm not necessarily human." I stated flatly.

He rolled his eyes at me. "You know what I mean."

I nodded. "Well, I hit him."

Richard's eyebrows raised in amusement. "O-kay. Let's just say I am going to leave it alone. Are you okay otherwise?"

I nodded.

"Then we should go inside." He motioned for me to follow him.

Curiously, I followed Richard into his home. The double wooden front doors were more private than the glass one's on my home. However, my father and mother wanted to feel like they truly lived in the woods. Richard apparently preferred the more private approach to woodland living.

Once inside the home, the first thing I noticed was the plants. He was right. The house was filled with an array of tropical foliage like exotic ferns and potted trees. Well, so much for them keeping the woodland out of the house.

The home of this vampire was beautiful. The walls were smoothly textured in a

creamy, earth-toned paint. As we moved through the foyer into the formal living room, I was in awe. Elegant paintings hung throughout the room. I moved slowly to one of them. I could tell it was a Monet without even looking. Glancing to the rest of the paintings, I noticed they were all Monet.

"Is this your collection?" I asked softly admiring the paintings.

"Yes. You could say I have a taste for Monet." He smiled gently. "Oh, please pardon my manners. Could I offer you something to drink?"

I turned to face him. Somewhere his sentiment wasn't exactly serious. From the grin that remained on his face, he was in fact making fun of me.

"Why Richard," I began in my most southern accent. "I do so ever believe you are making fun of this southern girl's hospitality."

"Oh! I beg to differ with you," his voice silky sweet. "It is I, who is honored by your presence in my most humble home. I should never, ever, make fun of you or your splendid southern hospitality. Now, if the lady would prefer a fresh cup of coffee?"

I nodded and smiled.

"Please, make yourself at home." He motioned for me to sit. Turning, he walked out of the room.

The room was beautiful. The furniture was not at all like I thought it would be. I guess being a vampire, I half-heartedly expected him to have many antiques at his disposal. However, this furniture was very new and contemporary. The sofa, chair and love seat were a warm olive color. The pillows were a mixture of olives, browns and creams. The wood floor was partly covered by a Persian rug. Ah, I thought, now I'm really seeing the signs of money here.

Within a few minutes, Richard came into the room with a coffee cup. He handed me the cup then took a seat in the chair next to the sofa where I was sitting.

"Thank you." I turned the cup to my lips.

"So, exactly what brought you here?" Richard asked. He was sitting back in the chair. Right leg crossed over his left. His fingers clasped together on his lap. He reminded me of a psychiatrist. Only difference, Richard was a beautiful and very inquisitive vampire.

"I need answers." I was determined not to let my mind wonder. "You mentioned you know something concerning my mother."

"Yes." He nodded.

I took a sip of the coffee. Dear Fate, it was perfectly roasted. It was very smooth and with no bitter after taste. Probably the best coffee I had tasted, even better than what I was used to buying. Nothing could ever be better than Kona. But this one, Dear Fate, what was this?

"Richard, where did you get this coffee?" I took another sip.

"You enjoy it? Good. It was a gift from a friend. I believe it is called Jamaican Royal Mountain. He travels there quite a bit. We do have guests every now and then, and I do enjoy some comforts of coffee, the smell mostly."

"It is very delicious." My thoughts were distracted.

"You said you wanted answers about your mother?" he prompted.

"Yes. I also want to know about this Mithras."

Richard nodded. "He is the oldest living vampire I know. Mithras is actually so old that no one knows how old he really is. He is the vampire who all vampires fear. The most powerful one of us we have ever known. It is said he is ruthless." He shifted in his chair and brought his hand to his mouth. "I can tell you this much. It is not a quest I am so readily willing to take."

"Richard, if he knows what this item is, maybe he knows how to destroy it. We are all running out of time here." I pleaded.

"I realize this. More and more werewolves are coming in. Right now, there are more werewolves in the area of that mountain than I care to share. It is more than we can handle. Most of our neighboring covens have already left. They feel as though there is a war in the midst of us."

"And you?"

Richard's eyes caught mine. I could see the turmoil warring behind those eyes. He did want to leave. I knew it. I could see it.

"I can't leave." He finally stated. Remorse rang loudly in his voice.

"Then what can we do? I need your help." I pleaded.

"Then give me an incentive," he firmly stated. His eyes locking onto mine again.

My heart raced. I watched Richard stand from the chair. He moved slowly and cautiously toward me. Gently taking the coffee cup from my hand, he set it down on the coffee table. Turning back to me, he took my hand and pulled me to him. His eyes piercing into my very soul, sent shivers down my spine.

"Give me something to risk my life for," he purred softly.

For a moment, I couldn't breathe. His floral scented breath swept over my face. Lingering in my senses, my mind bewildered at his words. What could he possibly want? What could I offer him that he considered of so much value? My people's lives were at stake, every one of them.

"What do you want?" My breath was in a gasp.

"I promise I will take no more than you offer." He purred again. The tones in his voice sent my senses wild.

"Richard..."

"No." He stated firmly.

He gently pulled me closer to his body, pressing me against him. I could feel the hardness, the wantonness between us. My breath shuddered. His face inched closer to mine. My heart thundered. The very breath in my body caught inside my throat as his lips gently touched mine. The coolness of his hand touching the back of my neck, he pulled me closer to him. Slowly, his lips grazed over mine. I felt the coolness of his tongue against my lips, parting them slightly. The sweetness of the flavor I remembered came back to me. The floral fragrance ignited the furnace inside of me.

Slowly he taunted and teased me. Fire flamed through my veins, urging me to continue. The battle was hopeless; I was fully intoxicated by him. The softness of his tongue wrapped around mine, pulling it inside his mouth. I had no power of return under his control. Pressing myself into the kiss, I lost control. My will was lost in the

flames that burned inside of me. My body trembled and became weak as his strong arms gripped around me, holding me closer to him. He balanced me against him, supporting me in my weakened state.

There was no denying the woman who raged in my blood. I could feel him calling her to him. She ran to him, taking over what little will I had. All caution was pushed aside. It was her he sought after. It was her he called to, the woman who longed to be his lover.

My body ached. Every nerve in my body tingled as excitement ran through me. His hand slowly moved underneath my sweater. His cool fingers slid underneath my bra, gently tracing the hard points he found. A soft moan escaped his throat as his fingertips ran over those hardened points. They ached and hurt against his touch, and a soft cry escaped my mouth.

His lips left mine in search of something more. They rested on my neck, kissing the vein, which so elegantly arched herself to him. His hand moved down my stomach. Hot trails of flames burned against my skin where the coolness of his hand touched. My stomach quivered as his hand slid further down. Down to an area that was unknown to him.

"Do you know how long I've waited?" He whispered against my neck. *"Waited for someone like you to come along? To stir the feelings inside of me the way you do?"*

My body quivered again. Giving in to what he was searching for, a breath released from deep inside my throat as I felt him. Smoothly and gently he moved. My hands grabbed his arms, digging my fingers deeper into his biceps.

Again, he softly pressed his lips against my neck. His motions were light and alluring as he feathered a kiss against my flesh. My heart rushed, pounding the blood to my hot and fevered arteries. His mouth met mine again as he continued.

The coolness of his tongue breached the inside of my mouth. He purposely continued to tease me, bringing me into another realm of existence. A soft cry erupted from me, and I knew I couldn't take much more. My body gave itself completely over to him and begged him to take me further. Suddenly he stopped, pulling back from the kiss he stared into my eyes.

The need on his face was clear. It was written deep within those beautiful eyes. The brown tinted contacts couldn't hide the need. My breath was in a pant. He had brought me so far and yet I was so unsatisfied. There was something left longing inside of me.

"Now you know what it feels like to be me when I am around you," he whispered, his voice filled with pain.

I stared at him. How could anyone endure this torture? I wanted him. In that moment, I did. I was completely unsatisfied. My body burned with a need to be fulfilled. My fingers tightly gripped his arms. My breath heaved from my chest. My body ached completely as every nerve demanded total satisfaction. Was this what he was feeling? The hardness that pressed against my thigh, was this his need? Did he feel this totally unsatisfied after over three hundred years? How could he live in such torture?

"Richard," I shuddered.

"I promised you."

I stared into his eyes and for the first time I saw something I'd never seen before. He was in pain, tortured beyond all recognition. And I understood what he meant. My hand left his arm and went to his face.

"You have not known the love of a woman for over three hundred years?" The thought of it was broke my heart.

Slowly his eyes closed and he nodded. He had been alone for a very long time. He was alone. My fingers gently feathered his face. His beautiful face pressed against my hand, feeling the warmth my skin provided to him. It was so hard for me to imagine; Richard he had the ability to take what he wanted but he chose not to. He wanted me to give it to him. It wasn't about blood or sex, Richard desired more.

"You could take me couldn't you?" I knew the answer, but I wanted to hear him say it. "You could make me want you?"

Those beautiful blue diamond-like eyes opened slowly. "Yes. I could."

"But you choose not to. Why?"

Richard stared at me a moment before answering. Slowly withdrawing his hand from me, he backed away. He turned away from me, faced the fireplace and remained quiet and motionless.

"Richard?" I moved closer to him. "Why?"

He released a long sigh. "There are some things in the nature of a vampire you would never understand. What little of my human side remains, that side will not allow me to take you unwillingly. I fight hard against the vampire side of me that wants to take you, all of you. It is a battle you would not understand. I see the beauty inside of you. What you really are. My human side adores it, desires it actually. It wants the love I can still sense."

I thought for a moment. Listening carefully to the pain he was sharing. I did know what he meant. It was very clear. Who was I to try and help him? I loved Daniel with all of my heart. I couldn't understand why I was even contemplating the thoughts I was having. There was no earthly way I could be heartbroken for Richard. But yet, my heart was bleeding for him. I knew his untimely story, his tragic loss. I knew how he must have suffered. Now, I was his torture. Could this be real?

"Julie, I will help you." His voice was soft and gentle. His back was still to me. "Forgive me, please. I will not ask anything of you. Your compassion has been enough."

"Richard." I couldn't help myself at this point. "You said it would put your life in danger if you help us?"

"Yes. Mithras is the most dangerous of all vampires. We all fear him greatly. He has been known to kill covens of vampires over one disagreement."

"You would be willing to do this?"

"Yes." He finally turned to me. "For you."

My heart froze. "Then I can't let you do this."

"Julie, if it means you will be safe, I will do it. Vampires do have a heart." He said softly. Tears welled in my eyes. "Please do not cry for me. I do not deserve it."

The hot tears fell, burning against my cheek. The pain inside my heart felt like a knife had cut right through me. Richard was an honorable man. Vampire - yes, but an

honorable one no less. I couldn't help but wonder what happened to him. How did he become a vampire? He did seem to have a few human qualities.

"Richard, how did you become a vampire? What happened?"

He inhaled deeply, considering my question, as he looked into my eyes and smiled.

"It was August, 1577, when Nathaniel and I met up with the well-known Pirate Drake. He was an Englishman who despised the Spanish. He made it his goal to take down, pillage and otherwise plunder any Spanish ship he came across, in the name of the Queen." He laughed lightly.

"We met him at a local shipyard pub in San Julian. Nathaniel and I were carrying local merchandise from Panama to Cuba. We had to cross the Caribbean Sea, which was known for huge storms. Drake's reputation as a pirate was well known among any pub and sailor alike. He was famous for being fair and his men loved him. "

"Drake offered Nathaniel and me a fair share of his plunder if we joined him. I had nothing to lose but my brother. Nathaniel of course was young and loved adventure. So we joined with his four vessels and went on our way. It was December 13 when we set sail on our first voyage with Drake. In September 1578, we reached the Strait of Magellan, when we hit a horrible hurricane. We managed to make it through to the eye of the storm. But the storm was not nearly as bad as what we found in the middle of it. "

"There was a black ship, called the Black Hawk. Rumor had it that the dead ran the ship. It was a ghost ship. Our ship was the first to approach it. The captain called no warnings gave no signals and they never fired upon our ship. The whole crew, all six of them were aboard our ship before we knew what happened but they did not board our ship to collect merchandise or gold. We soon found out the treasures they sought were us. I listened in horror as our crew screamed as the bloodthirsty creatures took them. In my own fear, I tried to hide Nathaniel below in the small galley, but they caught us before we had the chance to flee. We were forced to watch as the ghostly crew was bleeding our men dry. "

"When they finally got to us, they were so gorged on blood they were not hungry anymore. Their plan was to take us aboard their ship and keep us for later. As our galleon passed through the eye, the storm began again. I could see Drake's ship, The Pelican in the distance. The high winds and rough waves tossed our ship back and forth. The vampires knew they needed to get back to their ship. Before they left, the captain stayed behind on our ship to finish us off. But he did not have enough time when he was distracted as his crew called out to him. So he left Nathaniel and me for dead, floating at sea."

"It mattered no more to me that my death had come. It was far better than the pain I endured over my loss of my wife and child. Somehow, Drake made it to our ship after the storm and took Nathaniel and me to a nearby Island; it was more or less a jungle. He would not kill us; he knew what was to become of Nathaniel and me. He had great compassion for us; he could not see killing us for something like this. If he had only known the half of what we endured, I believe he would have killed us and dropped our bodies at sea. Later, I heard he renamed his ship Golden Hind in memory of our small galleon."

"Did you ever see him again?" I asked touched by his story.

"No, actually. I have never seen him since that dreadful time." He spoke softly.

Deep feelings stirred inside of me. I realized Richard knew the feeling of loss and pain. As I listened to him, I could still hear his heart, beating ever so lightly.

I glanced at my watch, it was already twelve thirty. The time had flown by so fast. However, there was still one thing I wanted to know.

"Richard, I really hate to ask this now, but what about my mother?"

Richard's eyes lifted to mine. "Julie, I think you have learned enough for one day. Please, I may be a vampire who does not sleep but I do rest. And," He paused "You may want to leave before I do something I will regret. My will is not as strong as I thought."

"Richard, I need to know. It's bothering me. If my family has ..."

"Your family may or may not know. I am not sure." He walked over to a small desk and opened the drawer. His eyes lifted to me as he held up what appeared to be a photograph.

"What is this?" I asked as he handed the picture to me.

"It is a picture of your mother."

My eyes widened in curiosity as I took the picture from him. Once in my hands I studied it closely. I have seen every one of my mother's pictures but this one, however, had eluded me. I never remembered seeing this one.

In the picture, my mother was standing in the middle of two other people. The woman on the right of her appeared to be her mother. Although the resemblance was uncanny, the woman appeared to be a Native American Indian. The man, older and graying stood on the left of my mother. By his warm dark red skin coloring, he was definitely a Native American Indian and probably the woman's father. They were standing beside a sign that said Qualla Reservation. Well, I guess that answered my first question. Now my second question needed to be answered. Was my mother a descendant of this Qualla Tribe?

"Where did you ..." I began in a quandary.

"Never mind where I obtained the picture. But it is your mother. Julie, these are your people. It is hard for me to imagine they never mentioned her family to you."

I shook my head. "My father never mentioned anything. I remembered when I was a child that he told me she was distant from her family. He never mentioned anything again. Nor did I for that matter. I guess Dad kept me busy with other things to keep my mind preoccupied. I think Daniel may have some explaining to do when I return home." I said now walking toward the door.

"I will contact you as soon as I return." Richard stated following behind me.

"Richard?"

"Yes?"

"I'm truly sorry for your loss." My last words as I left through the front door.

CHAPTER NINE

When I arrived at the house, Daniel and Jason were already gone. Heather was waiting for me in the living room. The worried look on her face let me know Daniel had mentioned something to her about our morning's episode.

I was still not ready to confront Daniel with his actions this morning. My heart already was breaking into a thousand pieces. Before I confronted him, I wanted to make sure there was nothing else he was hiding. Especially, concerning my mother.

Heather was in shock for two reasons. One, I went to see Richard, and two, I showed her a picture of my mother and the family I never knew existed.

"Do you think your mother was a descendant from these people? Why would they disown her?" Heather's questions matched my own.

"I don't know. But there is only one way to find out." I jumped up from the sofa. "Let's find out where the Qualla Reservation is located. Maybe we can go there and find out more information."

"I hope it's not something bad. But I am curious." She was on my heels, following me to my computer.

I sat down and began typing the word Qualla in the search engine. A second later, a couple links came up, one of which gave me the map and information on the Qualla Reservation. They were located in North Carolina, not more than an hour's drive. Well, according to my driving time.

"Well, I have a plan. When Daniel and Jason get back, we'll take my car and make a trip there tomorrow. Heather," I turned to face her, "please don't say anything to Daniel about this. I hate keeping secrets from him. This time I just want to have my facts straight before I approach him. He won't let me go there alone."

"Love, neither would I. I understand, and I won't say a word to either of them. Do you think you can keep your thoughts from him?"

"Yes, I think so. I've had some pretty good practice lately. Although, it is getting a little harder. The closer we become, the harder it is. How about you?"

A smile crossed her face. "Well, let's just say I know how to keep Jason's thoughts preoccupied."

I frowned slightly, and then realized what type of thoughts she might have had. My eyebrows rose in surprise.

"OH!" I blushed. "So that's how you do it."

Heather laughed loudly and nodded. "See, there's always a way around it. Whenever you think you can't control the thought, just push another one in its place. He'll never know the difference."

I nodded and laughed with her. This time I had a comrade willing to take on a secret adventure. Now, more than ever, I wondered how much more my father had hidden from me. First hiding the fact of what he was, and then finding out what I am. Now, my mother. Charlotte's words burned against my thoughts. Remembering the time she said, "I know what her mother was." Did she really? Daniel had told me she

was human. No one mentioned she was of Cherokee descent. I was excited and frustrated at the same time. He had promised not to keep any secrets from me. If he knew about my mother, I was going to give him a mouth full as soon as I found out.

"I'll confront Daniel with this once I find out all the information. I want to visit this Reservation. Maybe we can talk to someone there, and find out if they knew my mother. Hopefully, someone will recognize the people in the picture." I glanced at the picture again.

"Do you want to go now?" Heather's voice was excited.

Well, it was a good idea. Why not? I hit the print button and took the paper up immediately. Glancing at my watch, it was still before noon. I estimated Daniel and Jason would probably be home before dinner. I grabbed my purse. Heather followed me out the door. She was as curious as I was. It may be nothing but an adventure. Then again, if the trip proved to be a valuable one, someone would answer for his or her secrecy.

Heather was no help at all with the directions. We ended up getting lost on the highway several times before I found the right turn off. After an hour and a half, we finally pulled in to the Qualla Reservation. The sign was the exact same sign as the one in the picture. It was hard to believe my mother stood here, not telling how many years ago.

The bottom of the sign had the word "Information" printed clearly and in large letters. Underneath an arrow pointed down another long dirt road. I made the turn as my heart raced a little faster.

Heather and I remained silent as I pulled up in front of an older house. The house was a log cabin and its wood exterior was still in good condition. The front porch was huge. It had several ceramic pottery items scattered about, and a few plants hung from the porch rafters. In the front yard, there were two teenage boys tossing a football back and forth.

Heather and I climbed out of the car. One of the young men held onto the football as both of their attentions were now on us.

"Can I help you?" the young man with the football asked.

I was a little surprised to see he actually had long hair. It was coal black and in a ponytail. He was very handsome, striking for a youth of his age. He had to be around eighteen or nineteen, I guessed. His muscular development and deep voice gave it away.

"Yes, I hope so." I pulled out my picture. "I was hoping to find someone here who could tell me about this picture."

Both boys walked toward us. The one with the football spoke first.

"My name is John, this is Kyle." He extended his hand.

"My name is Julie and this is my friend Heather." I shook his hand.

The two boys greeted Heather, and John's attention went back to the picture. He reached for it. I handed it to him happily hoping for an answer. He studied the picture for a moment. The expression on his face was more or less shock. I didn't know if it was because he recognized one or more of the people or because he didn't.

"Do you know who they are?" My patience was thinning.

"Hang on. May I borrow this a minute? I know someone who can help you. I'll be right back." John said as he turned and ran into the log home.

A few minutes later an older gray haired man walked out. He was a true Cherokee if I had ever seen one. Tall, lean and quite built for his age. He was a very sturdy and proud man. His dark eyes narrowed as he looked from me to Heather. My breath froze; he was the same man in the picture. Pushing through the screen door, he took another step and I watched as his dark eyes widened. Still holding the picture in his hands, he glanced at it one more time.

"I'm Willie Redbird. My grandson tells me you've come to ask me about this picture?" He waved it in the air.

I nodded, almost afraid to speak. Heather moved a little closer to me, and we watched as the elder man stepped sideways down the two-step porch. He moved over to stand in front of me and studied me carefully.

"This," he pointed to the man in the picture, "is me. This," he pointed to the woman who stood on the right side of my mother, "is my daughter, the one in the middle is my granddaughter." He studied my response carefully.

I opened my mouth. No words came out. I was in utter shock. The news I wanted to know stared me in the face. This was my great grandfather. There was so much I wanted to know. So many things I wanted to ask. My sudden elation was shot down prematurely. What if she had been thrown out of the tribe? What if she left for some strange reason? I had to hope for the best at this point.

"The woman standing in the middle..." I tried but the words caught in my throat.

"Is your mother? I see the resemblance. Our line has a way of keeping itself, especially the women." He eyed me over again. "Well, even if your blood did get a little thinned with the white man's, you still carry our blood in you. Strong too." He reared back on his heels. "I guess you could say I'm your old grandfather. Well, great grandfather that is." The lines crinkled around his eyes as his face broadened into a smile.

"My ..." I was speechless. "My great grandfather?"

He twisted his lips and frowned slightly. Apparently, he realized my shock all too well.

"Maybe we'd better go inside. You are looking a little flush." He turned to his grandson. "Boy! Get the girl here a glass of that tea. I think she's going to need it." Turning back to me, he motioned with his hand for me to follow him.

Heather and I walked up the steps into the home. It was cozy and warm. The feeling of warmth and love hit us as soon as we walked inside the small cabin. It was exactly like I would picture it. The walls were covered with Native American Indian paintings, beautiful pottery was scattered all around, and a colorful throw covered the chair.

Willie motioned for Heather and me to take a seat on the sofa. He sat down in what I figured was his favorite chair, a rather old recliner positioned in front of television. It looked as though it was one he was not willing to part with. John came in with two glasses of tea. He handed one to me, then gave Heather the other glass.

"Well, I'm guessing by the shocked look on your face you didn't know anything about us," he began.

All I could do was nod. My emotions were having a field day.

He eyed me carefully again. "Uh-huh. I guess I'm not surprised. I saw very little of my granddaughter after she married. Her mother, your grandmother, married one of them too. Not to my liking at all. Not at all."

"I never knew my mother." I began. "She died giving birth to me."

"Yes. I heard about that. It was..." He stopped short.

"It was the white man's poison that killed her." A rough husky voice announced as a tall towering figure moved into the room.

The rugged hard looking man who stood in the doorway looked very much like a warrior. It was hard to believe how muscular he was. He leaned against the doorframe to what I considered was the entrance to the kitchen. His muscled dark arms flexed as his crossed them over his chest. His coal black hair hung long and loose behind his shoulders. The black eyes peered deep into mine, sending chills down my spine.

"Taylan!" Willie snapped as he turned to him.

"I make no apologies. It is the truth and you know it!" he roared.

"Taylan, Boy!" Willie snapped again.

Taylan remained quiet. The black eyes flamed with anger, offering no apologies or sympathies for his conduct. There was something dark about him, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

"Well, now..." Willie began again. "Taylan here is your cousin. He's let's see, your Aunt Tess's younger son."

I eyed Taylan carefully. There was still something about him that I just couldn't figure out. Even his smell was different. It was a stronger scent, mostly woodsy and earthly toned. He smelled like someone who had been hunting in the woods for a very long time.

"Taylan." I nodded to him. Taylan remained expressionless and motionless, not really acknowledging me as I had hoped.

"I could better explain everything and introduce you to the rest of your family Sunday if you like. Tess would be the one who would want to fill you in on your mother. She would have me by my neck if I didn't bring you. I'm sure you have a lot of questions." Willie sat back in his chair ignoring Taylan.

"Yes, I do. I would love to come back Sunday and meet Tess. What time shall we be here?"

"Oh, I'm thinking around five or so. Meet me here and we'll drive out to the reservation. Tess and the other women will probably put together a welcome home for you. It will be their way of welcoming you back into the family. You still have our blood running through your veins." His eyes twinkled.

I blushed. Smiling politely, I wondered if he knew exactly the kind of blood that ran through my veins. Did he know my father was a Lycan? Was this why he was so upset that my mother married my father? I wanted to ask all these questions here and now, but I realized it was later than I had expected. My questions would have to wait until

Sunday. Still again, I wondered if he even knew of the Lycans.

Heather and I rose to our feet. Willie walked with us to the front door. I turned to him as I reached the porch.

"I promise I will come back Sunday. Five it is?" I smiled.

Willie nodded and gave me a wave. His eyes looked sad, but at the same time, I could understand his sadness. I gave him a gentle smile. Turning, Heather and I got in the car and we headed home.

We discussed the adventure and the questions we had found answers to. Heather noticed the same thing about Taylan that I did. She confirmed my thoughts; there was something about him. He smelled different. We just chalked it up to being outside for a while, bringing with him the smell of the woods. However, we didn't notice anything in particular different with John or Willie.

Heather and I contemplated on how to tell Daniel. I told her I would manage to tell him tonight before we go to bed. My only hopes are they he really didn't know about my mother's family. If he did, I was going to have a major confrontation with him. No lies. No secrets. No deceptions. I was done with my family hiding things from me. Daniel had promised me no secrets, and I was intent on holding him to his promise.

Daniel and Jason arrive home only moments after Heather and me, which gave us just enough time to make it inside the house. Heather went to her room and showered. I did the same. I still needed to discuss Daniel's earlier actions with him. Having a different smell on my skin would cause too many distractions and questions on Daniel's part. He was sensitive when it came to smells, and I knew he would be asking me questions before I was ready. Tonight, when we were finally alone we would have time to talk openly, and discuss his abrupt behavior this morning. My face was not bruised, but my feelings still carried the sting of his anger.

After Heather and I were dressed and ready, we made the trip for dinner to the Maxwell home. I managed my thoughts nicely. Keeping Daniel preoccupied with other thoughts as Heather had suggested. He of course, ended the evening too soon. I almost wanted to laugh out loud, but contained it to only a chuckle.

After the quick trip back to our home, Jason and Heather, tired and exhausted from a very long day, headed to bed. I guessed they would be asleep as soon as their heads hit the pillow.

Once I changed out of my clothes and returned to the bedroom, it was no surprise to find Daniel waiting in the middle of the bed. I ran my fingers through my hair as I walked toward the bed. Daniel still had some explaining to do.

"Julie, I am sorry about what happened this morning." His voice was soft.

"Daniel..." My voice was firm.

"I know and believe me, I cannot understand what was going through my mind."

"So you took it out on me?" I winced and then released a huff of air from my mouth.

"NO!" His expression was one of surprise. "It was just an overreaction to you hitting me. Julie, I truly would not do anything to harm you. It was not my intention. I promise I will never do that again. You have to believe me. It is just all this rage I feel

inside. "

"Then why don't you talk to me about it." I moved closer to the bed.

Daniel looked away and then slowly his eyes shifted to me again. "I cannot."

For whatever reason, Daniel was holding something back. His thoughts were cautiously covering something up. I couldn't tell what it was he had planned, but whatever it was he was determined to keep it from me.

I couldn't blame him at his point. I had my own secrets. But there was one I was ready to confront him with.

Climbing into the bed, I pulled the covers over me. Daniel moved closer to me and gently pressed his head against the side of my face nudging me to allow him access to my neck.

"You know, I was hoping we could talk." I began.

"Mm-hum." He mumbled now nipping at my neck.

"Daniel, "I ignored his advances. "Did you say my mother was human?"

He stopped, pulled back slowly and looked deep into my eyes.

"Yes, why?"

"Do you know anything else about her? I mean where she was from. You know, things like that?"

"No. I only know what I was told by Martin and my father. Martin just told us that she was not like us." He was now wondering where I was going. "We only guessed that meant she was human. Why?"

"Heather and I found a picture of my mother this evening." I didn't see any reason to tell him Richard was the one who gave me the picture. "She was standing with two people from the Qualla Reservation in North Carolina. Did you know my mother was a Native American Indian?"

He propped himself on his right arm and stared at me in disbelief.

"An Indian? No, Julie. I was totally unaware about your mother. How did you find out?"

"We made a little road trip." I rambled out.

Daniel's expression changed immediately. The shocked look on his face was quickly replaced by a frown. I watched his eyes slowly change from that soft brown to a deeper darker brown. He was upset. His disapproval of my road trip was apparent.

"Julie." His tone controlled. "I do not want you to go off somewhere like that ever again. You are taking too many risks."

"Heather was with me." I announced defensively.

He glared at me. "I do not care who was with you. If it was not me, then you need to stay where you are the safest. Julie, there is a war going on. The clans are in the middle of a war. Werewolves are hunting Lycans. What were you thinking? Do you know what kind of risk you put yourself into? What kind of risk you put our child into?" He snapped out, still controlling his tone although still somewhat harsh.

I studied his face for a moment. Yes, I could see his point of view, but at the same time he wasn't seeing mine. I wanted to know about my family.

"Daniel, don't you think I have the right to know? I have the right to know about

my mother. About who she was. About my family that I never knew existed. Why do you think I took a trip like this?" I argued.

He shook his head. "I understand this. I do. BUT what was the reason you did not tell me first. I would have gone with you." His voice sounded sad. "Julie, when are you ever going to learn to trust me?"

His words cut deep again. My heart dropped inside of my chest. Staring into his eyes, I saw the hurt and the pain.

"I do trust you." I spoke softly.

"Then what was the reason? Julie, if this was so important to you, a part of your life, then did you ever consider I would want to share it with you? When are you going to understand what I am to you? You are mine. Everything about you concerns me."

I waited a moment. No answer or reply was coming to me. I was hurt. I felt Daniel's pain. There was no denying that I was having a difficult time allowing him to be that much a part of my life.

"You need to learn to trust me. *Please.*" He begged.

"Daniel, I can't explain what I was thinking. I just wanted to know about my mother. I met my great grandfather. He was the one in the picture with my mother. He invited me over Sunday, for a family gathering. You will go...right?"

Daniel contemplated his answer for a moment as he hazel eyes stared into my eyes. He knew how much it meant to me to meet my family.

"Of course, I will. I want to meet this family of yours. Besides, from what I am gathering, you are already fond of this grandfather." He twitched a grin.

My eyes widened in excitement. "Yes, I am. I can't wait for you to meet him. He is so awesome. He is a true Cherokee. Daniel, there is so much to learn." I rambled on excitedly.

"Yes, I can tell." He leaned closer and kissed me on the forehead. "We will go together. I want to know everything there is about you. My mystery woman." He smiled.

My heart was overjoyed. I wrapped my arms around his neck and pulling him closer, planted a huge kiss on his lips. He pulled back from me a little shocked. A smile twitched on his lips. Daniel's thoughts were pretty encouraging as well.

"Now, let's take a look at those thoughts you're having. Shall we?" I purred softly.

He reached over and turned the nightlight off. The rest of the night there were no more conversations. Only wonderful moments of love and passion were what we shared. Even in the darkest hours, there always seem to be hope.

CHAPTER TEN

The dreaded evening approached. I was still uneasy about facing the whole clan again, but I had managed to make it through the engagement party. Now, I had one

more challenge to face, yet again. Aunt Doris. She would have another field day with this. I smiled to myself. Well, let the woman have her moment. She *was* part of my family. And news like this was sure to take her to whole new level.

Charlotte had booked the Grand Hotel again, on a Thursday, no less. I was surprised how they had put together a function so fast, and for so many people. Then again, the Maxwell family was their best customer.

The room was decorated lavishly as always. Beautiful flowers in the bright colors of fall adorned the large room. Tables were covered in white linen and set with gold trimmed china, the finest they offered.

The room was filled with people. Some I didn't even know. All were dressed in formal attire, black tux for the men and evening gowns for the women. I turned to look at Daniel. He fit right in dressed in his black tux. He looked absolutely handsome, as always. His black hair, slightly tossed gave him a sex appeal I adored. The dress I chose was elegant and appropriate for the evening: light blue, long sleeved, and floor length with a slit up the left leg. The tiny silver trim shimmered in the light as I moved across the room. My girls were covered this time, so at least I didn't have to worry about exposing them while climbing into the limo. Daniel, of course, would never let me forget. He chuckled lightly at our inside joke.

The buffet tables were covered in an array of food. The mouthwatering meat table harbored roasted herbed turkey, honey mustard roasted hens, succulent garlic roast beef and an array of seafood. The vegetable table had a variety of grilled and steamed vegetables. But the table that caught my attention was the dessert table. Daniel and I both really wanted to hit the desert table first, but as tempting as it was we both managed considerable restraint.

We moved through the buffet line with Jason and Heather behind us. I thought Daniel and I were doing well with our plates, but Jason had to make the first comment to Daniel. He said he couldn't tell which one of us was eating for two. We had to laugh with our dear friend as we looked at the plates in hand. They were piled rather high. Not exactly proper for this type of function, but we didn't care.

We rushed through all of the greetings and congratulations to find our table. With fork in my hand, I was ready to devour my food when I heard that familiar voice. Chills ran up my spine. *Was I really ready for this?* Daniel, who was seated beside me, released a soft chuckle. A quick, stern glance in his direction let him know I was displeased. He, on the other hand was completely elated to see my Aunt Doris.

"Julie! Julie my dearest." It was Aunt Doris, with Uncle Dave trailing behind her.

One bite was all I had. I chewed quickly then swallowed, preparing myself for the onslaught of preverbal questions. Maybe she truly didn't know any better. Then again, maybe she did.

"OH! I am so excited for you, dear! When did you find out?" she shrilled.

"Yesterday." I spoke softly. Wiping my mouth with my napkin, I turned my attention to her.

Yes, the gray haired woman looked good for her age. Nothing much had changed since the last time I saw her, with the exception of the twinkle in her eyes.

"See dear, I told you those books would come in handy." She patted my hand.

"Well, actually..." Daniel began.

I snapped my head toward him giving him another stern look. His mouth twisted into a grin. His hazel eyes twinkled with the urge to say something. I could tell he was not going to let the opportunity slip past him.

"We managed without the books. You know, let our animalistic side take over for a change," he shot out while giving her a little wink. He shifted in his chair and leaned forward slightly. "You know," he paused looking around. "I honestly did not know she was going to be such a howler."

Aunt Doris jerked back from me. My mouth flew open in a gasp. Jason spewed what drink he had in his mouth, and Heather lost the piece of food she was placing in her mouth. For one split second, everyone was quiet.

Aunt Doris shot a glare at Daniel that announced her shock. Then the roar of laughter came. Even Uncle Dave's soft expression lit up into laughter.

I, of course, was not laughing, and neither was my prune faced aunt. Daniel's eyes filled with tears as the laughter continued, and he placed his hand over his mouth. Heather was even laughing with the rest of them. I didn't see one thing funny about announcing to the whole world I was a howler!

Uncle David placed his fist to his mouth and cleared his throat. Daniel gently wiped away his tears, as did Jason and Heather. Finally, someone had the courage to come to my rescue.

"Well son, I know your family is pleased. Another little Maxwell," Uncle Dave said, touching his wife on the arm.

"Yes, we are all excited. It is a little Martin as well." Daniel spoke up proudly.

Uncle Dave nodded. "He was a great man." His words were soft and gentle. "We all still miss him greatly."

Daniel and I nodded. Aunt Doris still remained silent.

"Excuse me," Jason interrupted. "Daniel, I need to speak with you."

Uncle Dave and Aunt Doris bowed out gracefully and went their own way. Jason waited until they were out of hearing range before he began.

"Tell me," Jason began. "What is the Council's plan against these Dark Wolves?"

"The black wolves?" Daniel wiped his mouth with his napkin. He took a sip of his drink then cleared his throat. "As we speak, a group of Lycans is gathering to confront these rebels."

"Yes, well, you may want to rush things up a bit. I just heard they've already taken out two more clans, killing them entirely. I can't see how all this business came about. Them turning against the Council and all," Jason continued.

"Well, personally, I do not even think these rebels belong with the Council anyway." I chimed in. "These Dark Wolves, as they call themselves can't be a part of our Lycan group. They must be outsiders."

"Impossible. The Council knows all the Lycan lines." Daniel chalked up.

"Wait a minute." I began. "Daniel, are you sure? I mean what if there was a line of wolves out there the Council never knew about. What if this line is the Dark Wolves?"

"Yes, she has a point." Jason shot in. "The Council has kept record of all the births within its line for over a thousand years. But what if someone in that line separated? There would be no way of knowing."

Daniel contemplated Jason's thoughts for a long moment. There was no way the Council would be able to track all the Lycans. Not if they didn't register. The possibilities of a new line were high, a part of a Lycan group that may have left years ago.

"Well, wherever they came from is irrelevant. At the present time, they are dangerous. We will find them and destroy this group," he stated firmly.

Jason nodded. "May Fate bless you. Daniel, most of us are older and unable to fight. However, our prayers will be with you."

Now more than ever I was unnerved. The Dark Wolves were a threat to our very existence, ruthless killers and murders. The question no one could answer was why? Why had this particular clan turned against the Council? Why were they trying to turn other clans against the Council?

Daniel's hand pressed lightly against my back. Leaning closer to my ear, the warmth of his breath lingered against my neck.

"Julie, do not worry. Tonight is about our little one." He said as his left hand on my stomach.

It was an odd feeling. My stomach twitched with butterflies at his touch. Yes, our little one was well aware of its parents. I gave Daniel a soft assuring smile. It was our night. We would enjoy it to the fullest.

After my second plate of food, I felt rather full. There was something about the roast beef that satisfied my hunger. Wasn't sure if it was the extra garlic, but it was rather tasty. Heather and I made our way to the desert tables. The only thing I wanted was something fruity, a fruit pie of some sort. Taking into consideration that there was no blueberry pie, I managed with several different fruit pies. Heather and I returned to the table with two plates full of an assortment of deserts. Not a very classy act, at least not for the Maxwell family. At this point, Daniel and I were acting like a pack of wolves. When we set the plate of desserts down, Jason and Daniel immediately went for them.

There was one slice of cherry pie left. Daniel reached for it, while I was finishing off the peach pie. At first, I didn't know what came over me. My head was down. From the corner of my eye, I saw him reach for the pie. I froze. My eyes were firmly fixed on his hand. Then I gave him soft warning growl. Slowly Daniel's hand moved back away from the pie.

Jason let out a hardy laugh. Daniel sat back in his chair and joined in the laughter with his friend. It wasn't very funny to me. Actually, it was an embarrassing moment I was sure Daniel wouldn't let me forget. The blood rushed to my face. Daniel slid his arm around me, pulling me closer to him. His soft kiss lingered on the side of my rose red cheeks.

"Sweetheart, I would not take the last piece of pie from you." He chuckled.

"Sorry," I said with a mouth full of food. "Couldn't help it."

He kissed me again. I guessed being a pregnant Lycan had its challenges.

Soon enough the evening came to a close. On the way out, Daniel and I were still

being congratulated by various people. The prevailing question seemed to be when the little one was due. Jason estimated seven months. Was that the first time Daniel and I were together? Well, it didn't really matter, at least not now.

A hand gently touched my shoulder and I turned to see Thomas.

"Excuse me, but could I borrow the both of you a moment." He stepped back allowing Daniel and me to stand.

With his left hand, he motioned to the side door. This couldn't be good. Thomas wanted to talk to Daniel and me in private. My thoughts raced as we stepped outside. The air was a little chilled. However, I enjoyed it.

Daniel stood by my side while Thomas stopped short and turned to the both of us. He cleared his throat, preparing for what I thought was bad news.

"There is no other way to put this. Due to the extreme circumstances, the Council has made a decision. They want to meet with the two of you tomorrow." He was stern.

"The two of us?"

He nodded once. "To perform the Rite. The Council has changed their minds, and they feel it is necessary. Daniel needs to leave in a few days."

"WHAT? WHERE?" I became hysterical. Daniel was not going to go anywhere without me. There was no way.

"Julie, calm down." Daniel's voice was soft and reassuring.

Thomas held his expression, stern, hard and no emotion. "Daniel needs to leave to meet with the others. Then head a plan of attack against these so-called Dark Wolves. I'm sorry, but duty waits."

"So they..." I couldn't even think straight. "They are going to do the Rite just so they can place him as their new leader?" I couldn't believe it.

"No, Julie. It is not like that." Daniel tried to smooth over. "I cannot become the leader until the Rite is complete. I will just be going to meet with the others. We are not actually going into battle. It is just strategic planning."

I snapped my head to him. "You knew of this ahead of time?"

He nodded his head. "I knew what they were planning. We had no dates in mind at the present time. I will return home shortly."

"When are you going to leave?" I snapped my attention to Thomas. "When is he going to leave?"

"Sunday." Thomas said flatly.

"No. Sunday is not good. Absolutely not!" My voice tensed, on the verge of tears.

"Dad, we have an important day on Sunday. I will leave Monday first thing in the morning." Daniel pulled me in his arms.

"What kind of important day? I am not sure the Council will be pleased."

"This is something for us. If the Council does not agree, then they do not need to worry about me becoming their leader. I take my future wife seriously." Daniel snarled out.

"Daniel," Thomas warned. "You know as well as I do, the Council doesn't take kindly to threats. That is the reason we are in this mess as it is."

"I am very serious when I tell you this. Monday. And that is my final word. If you

will not tell them, I will. One more day is not going to shatter their plans."

Thomas withdrew his expression of disconcertment. He nodded in agreement. For the first time, I saw Daniel stand up for me. Not just the fact he stood up to his father, but the Council as well. Yes, Daniel just earned a few extra brownie points in my book. I slid my arms around him, and he pulled me tight to him kissing the top of my head.

"You know you mean more to me than this." He whispered softly.

"Daniel, you don't know how much this means to me. I love you so much." I was almost in tears.

He chuckled softly. "I told you to trust me."

Daniel was right. He was showing me I could trust him. I could trust the fighter inside of him. Maybe it was time I let go a little more. He had already won my heart in so many ways. I knew he would be a good leader, and not only a good leader, but also a good husband and father. I was so proud of him.

"Nothing will come between us. I promise," he swore, pulling me tighter to me.

Daniel spoke the words of truth. I knew it in my heart. He wouldn't let anything come between us. He meant it and I believed it. It was so.

We both followed Thomas back into the large room. Daniel was ready to leave, and he motioned to Jason and Heather. Thomas moved his way slowly through the crowd of people. He smiled broadly, as he greeted and shook hands with everyone. It was as if he had no worries in the world. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I couldn't help wonder whose side he was on? Didn't family come first? Or was it political with him?

As usual, we left the party slightly earlier than Thomas and Charlotte. Daniel remained silent during the ride home. He was still fuming over his father, disgusted actually. His angry thoughts were clear. Daniel saw no reason why his father was so persistent on him taking charge of the Council. He contemplated all sorts of treacherous ideas, thoughts I cared not to hear. Things his father may be thinking or planning.

"Daniel?" I finally broke the silence. He needed a distraction. Furthermore, I needed a break from his deep thoughts. "I was thinking about bringing a couple of dishes with us to the Reservation."

"Reservation?" Jason shot out.

"Yes. I found my mother's side of the family. We, and that means all of us, are going to see them Sunday." I hinted to Jason. "They are Cherokee."

"Yeah, they've planned a family gathering for her." Heather chimed in.

"Oh, well then. Is that like a cook out or something?" Jason asked.

"I think so." No, I wasn't sure. I never asked.

"Yes." Daniel announced. "They usually have a big feast and love celebrating life."

I turned to him. "You know them?"

"No, just what I have read. I did a little research of my own this morning. I did not want to go unprepared." He finally smiled. "So I would suggest some picnic type foods."

"Like?" I inquired.

"Like, deviled eggs, potato salad, pies...Julie when was the last time you went to a picnic?"

I had to think. "Well, actually never. You know as well as I, my family was limited to these kinds of functions."

Jason laughed. "Danny you need to bring her to Scotland. Get her out a bit."

Daniel nodded in agreement. "Yes, I think this outing is exactly what she needs."

"I'll help you with the potato salad." Heather spoke up.

"I can make some mean deviled eggs." Jason tossed in.

It was so refreshing. I loved it. They were all as excited to participate in my family's gathering as I was. It would be wonderful.

"Well, I guess I could make some pies." I looked up, hopefully, to Daniel.

He laughed softly. "Okay, I will help you. I did not need to hear your thoughts, that time. Your plea was written all over your face. We will make a grand impression on your family."

"OH, and I still remember my granddad's recipe for Irish whiskey braised ham. Heather and I can do the shopping for you." Jason added.

"That would be awesome. Daniel and I can do the prep work and have most of the things ready for you when you return from the store." I was so excited.

We all had a plan. No more worrying about werewolves and Dark Wolves, at least not tonight. This time my thoughts were going to be of my family. I would only allow myself to think good thoughts before I went to sleep tonight. Tomorrow would take care of itself.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The air was filled with the smell of breakfast cooking. Lazily, I rolled over in the bed to find Daniel missing. *He must be downstairs in the kitchen.* I rolled back over in the bed and glanced at the clock. It was already 7:30 and Friday. This pregnancy was really going to take a bit of getting used to.

Moving slowly because I was still sleepy, I trailed my way into the bathroom for a shower. Dressing promptly, I finally managed to pad my way down the stairs into the kitchen. Daniel hovered over the gas range cooking. Heather and Jason sat at the table with a plate of breakfast before them, watching television.

Daniel looked up as I moved past him to the coffee.

"Good morning." He was so chipper.

"Morning," I mumbled, not exactly chipper.

Daniel moved to give me a kiss on the cheek. "I have something I think will wake you up this morning," he replied, smiling broadly.

My sleepy eyes lifted to his. Raising my eyebrow, I glanced at the stove. What? What other than a strong cup of coffee could wake me up this morning? I wondered what he was up to.

"Go! Sit! I will bring it to you," he said as he slapped me on the rump.

With a slight jump, I gave him a disapproving look, telling him to “behave”. Daniel laughed and waited until I joined Heather and Jason before bringing out my surprise.

Once seated, coffee secured and fork in hand, I waited. Daniel placed in front of me what appeared to be a quiche. I twisted my lips to the right, then left. It wasn’t a dish I was prepared for. Oh well, it did smell good. Daniel waited with anticipation as I forked the first piece in my mouth. Allowing the flavors to linger a moment, I contemplated my response. Onions, ham, chives, cheese, and that’s when the tanginess hit me. It actually tingled on my taste buds. I was experiencing a very favorable sensation.

“What is that?” My eyes widened, suddenly I was fully awake.

Heather laughed lightly. Daniel and Jason both let out soft chuckles.

“That my dear is a special feta cheese. A special roasted tomato feta cheese. Heather brought it back from Scotland,” Daniel said proudly.

“It is absolutely wonderful in this quiche!” I turned to Heather.

“Actually, Daniel was the one with the idea to put it in the quiche. It’s his recipe,” Heather announced sporting a wide grin.

“We must have more of this,” I said ravishing the rest of the piece.

Daniel checked his watch. “Julie,” he began, “we are meeting with the current leader of the Council at noon.”

The way he made the statement caused my appetite to fade. I was already a bundle of nerves. The day had finally come. What was this person going to do to Daniel and me? What terrible things would we have to endure? How would all of this work to rid us of this animalistic desire? Or what if this wasn’t all they were trying to strip from us? These thoughts ran through my mind with the speed of light.

“Julie,” Daniel began softly. “It’s going to be okay. Whatever it is, we’ll make it through this together.”

I stared into his eyes. He was right, Daniel was always right. We would make it through this together. It was only a matter of time until we would have to face the inevitable.

Heather and Jason decided to be helpful by taking off to the grocery store, via limousine service. Daniel and I spent the rest of the time preparing. He drove us silently to his father’s home where we were to meet the Head of the Council.

When we arrived, I had no idea what to expect. I half expected the house to be dark, candles lit all around, eerie music playing, and men in black robes holding candles, or swords. Daniel gave me a stern look, apparently disappointed by my exaggerated expectations. I just shrugged my shoulders and walked through the front door.

Once inside, I slid my hand around Daniel’s as we walked into the formal living room. Thomas and Charlotte were sitting in their favorite chairs. On the sofa, sitting alone was one man. He appeared to be older than Thomas. Much older, around late sixties, I guessed. His hair was silver gray and his face was slightly more wrinkled, but he was tall and largely built. When he stood, he was as tall as Daniel. His eyes were a mixture of blues and browns. It was a little odd and I noticed it immediately.

“Clayton Powers, I would like to introduce you to my fiancée, Julie Knight.” Daniel gave me a push forward.

"Julie," he began with a warm smile as he extended his hand out for mine. "It's a true pleasure to finally meet you. I've heard so many wonderful things. Your father was an important person to us."

"It is my pleasure." I reached for his hand. "I hope Daniel hasn't been telling all my secrets." Humor always seemed to break the ice and my nervousness.

He chuckled softly. "No, actually that was Thomas who spilled your secrets. However, I promise to keep them." His mouth broadened into a smile. "Daniel, she's as lovely as you described and a very fine choice for you. She's a strong woman. A true warrior." His eyes twinkled with delight.

"Yes, she is." Daniel returned proudly.

"Julie, I want to personally apologize to you for the rest of the Council members not being here. It seems that we are being targeted by werewolves. At this very moment, there are two of my best men outside this house. This is why we chose to do this in the daylight hours. I hope you understand the severity of this matter."

I nodded and remained silent.

"Well, I'm a man who believes in getting to the point. So, shall we begin?" He stood back, positioning himself in front of Daniel and me. Thomas and Charlotte moved behind him.

"Julie, since your father or mother is no longer present to represent you, Thomas has taken charge for you. Is this acceptable?" Clayton Powers began.

I nodded. My heart raced. What was he going to do?

"All right. Thomas, do you agree and decree that Julie Ann Knight is of the Lycan blood line?" Clayton Powers asked out loud.

"Yes." Thomas stated.

"Do you also declare and decree your acceptance of her marriage to Daniel James Maxwell?"

"Yes."

"Charlotte, do you declare and decree Daniel James Maxwell is of the Lycan bloodline?"

"Yes, I do," Charlotte replied softly.

"Do you also declare and decree your acceptance of his marriage to Julie Ann Knight?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well then." Clayton Powers motioned for Daniel and me to move closer to him. He took a slow breath and exhaled as he closed his eyes for a long moment. I watched in curiosity as he slowly opened his eyes.

Clayton didn't speak at first. It was as if he was looking past Daniel and me, his eyes focused on something we couldn't see. His attention fell upon us, coming back into the present.

"You both have endured much, strained your abilities. Stressed and pushed Fate, wielding her in your favor. However, this is not going to be a test of your wit, my children. The Rite by itself is a mystery, an unknown force that dwells around us. It forces us into what we are to become by fulfilling the paths Fate has chosen for us. We

cannot wield a sword against Fate, for she is the only one who chooses our paths.

"By Rite, you shall have the power to control the rage that wells within you. You will have seven days to endure the Rite. If you both survive, you will have completed it.

"The Rite cannot be told or explained to you. It is something designed by your own purpose to test you in ways you could never imagine. This is the sole reason no one can talk about or explain it. For everyone, the Rite is different. For some it is painful and life threatening. It is dangerous and treacherous. But if you choose to continue, then you will reap the rewards.

"If in one moment's time your faith is broken by these tests, you will both be divided. Then you both shall fail, and the bond you share will be broken and lost forever. Please understand when I say this. It is unfortunate that you are with child."

As soon as he stated that, my heart froze in my throat. Fear ran through me like a bolt of lightning. Daniel squeezed my hand tightly, a gentle reminder he was with me.

"Because of the greatness," Clayton began again, "which Fate has in store for you both, a high call awaits you and at a very high price. You have to determine now if this is worth all that awaits you. Do you accept the challenges?"

Daniel and I looked at one another. Fate help us. "Yes." We both said at the same time.

"The first test will break your wills. The second test will test the heart of the wolf inside of you. The third test will be one of greatest importance, choice. I so decree and declare it by Fate herself. The beginning of the next full moon the Rite shall begin!"

Clayton placed both hands on Daniel and me. It felt like an electrical bolt shot through his hands into us. Whatever this man was, he was powerful. Daniel was to take this man's place? Wait, the next full moon would be Sunday! Our test would begin on the same day we were meant to visit my family.

Thomas and Charlotte moved to Daniel and me as Clayton stepped back. Charlotte of course, had tears in her eyes. Thomas appeared to be a little weary. I, on the other hand, was a little disappointed. I thought it was going to be more than this. Some elaborate beating of some sort. I could tell Daniel was thinking along the same lines. He was actually thinking he was going to have to watch me while they beat me. I bit my bottom lip, and placed my hand over my mouth, fighting the urge to laugh at his thoughts.

"Well, I suppose we will meet back up Monday morning?" Thomas stated to Daniel.

"Monday it is. Clayton?" Daniel looked up to the older man. "Thank you."

"Don't thank me just yet." He carried a look of remorse.

Daniel nodded then slid his arm around my waist. It was time for us to leave. I nodded to Clayton Powers. His eyes were sad and my heart dropped to the pit of my stomach. What had I gotten myself into? Am I supposed to expect some strange occurrence of events in the next two days? I feared the worse this time.

The tests that were to come would be of a natural occurrence. Our very will would be tested. Even our hearts and our love would not be exempt. Above all these things, we would have to make a choice. What kind of event would be as intense as this? Yes, I

feared the worst.

At least I understood why no one could talk about the Rite and explain it in detail to us. You never knew what it was. There was no way to describe it. It was a series of events to test you beyond your comprehension. How could you describe it? There were no words. I could only hope we had the strength that everyone believed we had to endure this. Only time would tell.

Daniel and I returned to the house to find Heather and Jason still out shopping. Both of us had decided to let Fate run its course, and we agreed not to worry unless we had reason.

We walked through the house into the living room. Daniel headed to the bathroom while I lingered. My mind was still in pretty much a whirl. There was so much going on around us. Sitting down on the sofa, I decided I needed something to take my mind off things. A movie would be nice.

Daniel came through the living room and paused behind me.

"I am going to run out for a bit."

"For?" I said as I turned around to face him.

"Well, I really think it is time for another car. So..." He raised his eyebrows.

"No." I said with a smirk on my face. "I don't want to go with you."

Daniel chuckled softly. "I did not think you would. I will be back soon. Promise."

"Daniel, please don't buy anything extreme." I pleaded. My words almost came out in a whine.

Leaning over the sofa, he placed a kiss on my lips. "I will only pick out something safe for you and junior."

"Junior?" I jumped back in surprise. "What makes you think it's a boy?"

"Well," he grinned. "It could be a girl."

I grinned and shook my head. "Let's just concentrate on one thing at a time shall we?"

"Car." Daniel gave me another kiss. "Be back in a few."

I suppose it was about time for a new car. I just hoped he wouldn't buy something big, like some big boat of a car. Absolutely no way was I going to drive that. I loved my little car. But this was something Daniel wanted to do, and it was a task I needed to trust him with. I was sure he would do just fine.

I turned on the television wanting something to preoccupy my mind. My thoughts of a nice movie, however, were interrupted as the doorbell rang. I leaned forward then peered toward the front door. Oh dear Fate, it was Richard again. Does he just wait for Daniel to leave, then show up? How is it he always knows when I'm alone? Was he stalking me? Warily I stood and walked to the door.

"Should I even bother asking?"

Richard's expression was grim. The purplish circles under his eyes told me something was wrong. Even as beautiful as he was, Richard looked like crap. It took an average of two seconds before his presence stirred something inside of me. Damn it! I swore to myself. What was it about him? His build? His inhumanly beautiful features? The way the soft blond and brown tones blended in those locks of hair? Was it the lean

but strong muscular build? The kind of sex appeal that made a woman weak at the knees? Could it be those lips? The lips that was capable of such a powerful and sensual kiss. To deliver such a kiss that left you breathless and wanting more of him. The kind of kiss that could make a woman swoon in his arms. The kind of kiss that made you call out his name. The name of the vampire....

"Julie..." he began. "There are some things about me you do not understand."

I hadn't realized my thoughts had drifted so far. I gathered my thoughts and returned my full attention to him.

"You're right, Richard."

He looked up toward the top of the house. There was something more on his mind. I could sense it. He was not acting like himself. Richard was always too in control. His attitude was confident. The confidence of knowing he could have anything he wanted and anyone.

"Should I take the chance and let you in?" I questioned his expression.

"Yes." His voice was flat.

I stepped aside against my better judgment, allowing him to enter. This time I motioned for him to have a seat in the living room. There at least, I could keep him at a distance. "So what's wrong, Richard? You look worse than the living dead."

His eyes narrowed toward me. "Living dead, huh?" He forced out a small smile. "The other day, when I was here...I,"

"You were going to bite me?" My eyes narrowed.

"Yes. I wanted to very badly. But when you swooned in my arms, I could not. You were so beautiful. Then when you came to my home..."

"Richard, why?" I wasn't afraid just annoyed.

"I tried to tell you. I am drawn to you. There is something about you. Never before have I come across something like this. It is *you*, Julie. I cannot help how I feel. I only want you. Not just your blood, but all of you." Richard's tone was firm.

He was not pleading. No, not Richard. He was honest. Richard sat on the sofa and rested his elbows on his knees. His beautiful face was in torment. What did he expect I could do? What did he want me to say?

"Richard." I began as I tried to gather my own thoughts. "If this is something you can't control then why are you here?"

"Because I cannot stay away from you. My desire for you has driven me to the point ...almost to the point I have to have you." His eyes locked on mine.

Cold chills ran down my spine. What was he trying to say? Should I be afraid of him? At this point, I didn't know what to think. My senses burned, warning me of him. And that warning tolled like large church bells on Christmas Day.

"Is it because I remind you of Juliet?"

"No." He frowned slightly, appearing insulted.

"What then?"

"I told you. I am drawn to you. The attraction for me is greater than you can imagine." He stood up, turned and walked to the bar. "I know you are with Daniel. This makes it an even greater challenge for me. You are something I can't stop thinking about."

You *haunt* me. "

"Richard, I can't offer you anything. I'm going to marry Daniel. I told you this. I'm even pregnant." I spoke softly. In a way, I felt sorry for him.

Richard turned. His eyes sadder than before. Hearing this news, he should know that I was truly Daniel's. Maybe this would give him an incentive to try a bit harder to control himself.

He lowered his head and inhaled a deep breath, then nodded. "You can offer me one thing." He spoke almost in a whisper.

"What would that be?" I wondered. Almost biting my tongue for asking a question to which I already knew the answer.

His eyes hopeful, he answered. "Your companionship." He paused, contemplating his thoughts carefully. "At least if I am around you more, maybe it would help. When I am away from you... I long to be near you."

I almost didn't believe him. "Friendship? Is that what you are willing to accept?"

He nodded. Richard smiled gratefully. I motioned for him to sit back down. He returned to the sofa and his demeanor was less threatening. I could almost feel the peace flow over him. Richard was satisfied, at least for the moment. I could offer him friendship. At least I thought I could. It was worth a try. Still, I wondered if he knew the effect he had on me? Did he know I was drawn to him? Could he know about the feelings of desire that his mere presence evoked?

"I will have to warn you though. If you do try anything like that again, I may kill you. Nothing personal. It's just a pregnancy thing." I wrinkled my nose then smiled.

He laughed softly. "Nothing personal? Well, I guess if I were to bite you it would be a vampire thing? Nothing personal, of course." His eyebrow rose.

"Let's try not to think about that, shall we?" I teased.

"Deal." He smiled broadly. It was good to see him smile. "But, of course, you know I am a vampire. I may not be trusted."

"Richard, a deal's a deal. I am holding you to it." I stated firmly.

I was more curious than ever. He was satisfied with our masochistic friendship. What would drive him to such levels of torture? Was he really that lonely after all those years? Did being a vampire make him half insane? Or did he have alternative reasons for this friendship? He was right. I couldn't trust him, not completely. Fear him. Now that was what I could do. I tried to think on the brighter side. Maybe he was longing for companionship. This brought to my mind, Casey, my best friend.

"Have you heard from Casey and Nathaniel?" I asked hoping to hear good news.

His face brightened immediately. "Yes, I spoke with Nathaniel yesterday. He and Casey are still in France."

"How's she doing? I mean has she..." I was almost afraid to ask the question. I mean, how do you ask if your best friend has turned vamp?

Richard nodded. "Yes, Casey has made the change. I *suppose* you could say she is doing well."

I couldn't help myself from prying. My attention was immediately drawn to the way he spoke the words "I suppose".

"What's wrong? I mean is she okay?" My voice was filled with concern.

He laughed softly. "Yes. She is fine. She..." He frowned slightly. "Appears to be having a little problem."

I wasn't exactly sure what to expect. The humor on Richard's face didn't match the fear in my heart. I soon learned the truth. Within a few minutes, I found myself laughing loudly at Casey's expense as Richard proceeded to share a few stories with me as told to him by Nathaniel.

One of which, Richard mentioned, occurred while he was on the phone with his brother. Nathaniel had taken Casey hunting, more for her benefit than his. He said Nathaniel was talking to him on the phone, and trying to talk to Casey at the same time while watching her hunt. Nathaniel would say a few words, then stop in mid-sentence and begin calling out a bevy of pleas to Casey to watch out. Richard said it was probably the most hilarious thing he had ever heard. Then all of a sudden, Nathaniel gasped a loud breath of air, and then dropped the phone. Richard said he could hear what sounded like a mountain lion in the background roaring loudly. Next came Casey screaming, followed by Nathaniel's excited and very alarmed voice swearing loudly. He assured me the swearing was not at Casey. The animal she was trying to have for dinner didn't seem to be particularly cooperative with her. From the sounds of it, the animal was trying to have Casey for dinner.

Tears were streaming down my face as I laughed. I could visualize the event as Richard told me the story. I reminded him that was pure Casey. Even as a vampire, she was never going to live down her natural blonde beauty. Richard assured me Casey would get the hang of it. I mentioned to him if anything ever happened to Nathaniel, I could only hope they would have a drive thru made for vampires. Casey wouldn't stand a chance on her own. He laughed loudly. We both agreed that we hoped it would never come to such an end.

"I suppose I have taken enough of your time." He spoke softly.

Glancing at my watch, I realized it was already four. No one had returned. I couldn't understand why everyone had such a long afternoon. Smiling to myself, I, too, had a long evening. And I had enjoyed it with Richard.

"Richard, I did enjoy this afternoon." I smiled as we both rose to our feet.

His smile broadened. "Julie, I did as well. It has been many years since I have enjoyed the company of a woman. A woman such as yourself."

I walked him to the door and he lingered a moment. The uncomfortable feeling swept over me again. It was an awkward feeling, and I wasn't sure how to approach this sudden situation. Under normal circumstances, I would have given him a hug. He looked as though he needed one. But I remained still. Inside of me, I could feel the caution ringing loudly. My heart mourned for him, but my senses warned me to be wary of this beautiful creature.

"Julie, again, it was a pleasure." He finally spoke up.

"Yes, it was." I smiled warmly.

He opened the door and stepped outside. My heart was somewhat saddened. Richard, although he was a vampire would have really made someone a wonderful

husband. He was beautiful, charming and very delightful.

"I hope to see you again." A slight frown crossed his face. "Be careful. The werewolves are still growing in their numbers."

"Have you ever found out what they are searching for?"

He glanced away, turning his attention to his car. "Not at the present time." Slowly his gaze turned to meet mine. "I will find out what it is they are searching for. I promise."

Richard was telling me the truth. He would find out. I realized for the moment, he was trying to be more human. At least I thought he was, showing me a softer side of him, a more human side. Maybe it was all that was left after all those centuries of being a vampire. Nevertheless, we gave what each of us could offer, a friendship.

"Thank you." I spoke softly.

"Julie," he paused, his expression firm and serious. "I will protect you and your unborn child. This feeling I have... I cannot deny it."

"Richard..." I began and stopped as he raised his hand.

"You have given me your friendship. I shall regard this highly. I give you protection. You should do the same."

"And is this the nature of a vampire to protect others?" I asked only because I was concerned. I didn't want to give him the wrong impression.

"It is only the nature of a vampire to protect when it is something worth protecting. Something he considers valuable." He warned.

I nodded. Richard turned and walked off to his car. I folded my arms across my chest as I watched him drive off in his manly Mustang. He was truly an interesting person. My thoughts fluttered back to Casey, poor thing. She was lucky to have Nathaniel. I knew in my heart they were meant to be together. Casey, as dingy as she was, needed someone like Nathaniel, someone who was patient and loving. It took a vampire to win her heart. And I'm sure he saved her from a lifetime of pain. Many men could be caught up in her beauty, but how many of them would appreciate her heart? I was sure in that one dreadful night, it was Nathaniel. His eyes told me he loved her. He carried the same look as Daniel did. The unconditional love, the type of love you would die for. This was what she needed. I was happy for her that she found it, even if it did come with a price. She would make it. I was sure of it.

An hour after Richard left, I prepared dinner. It was around five when Heather returned via limousine with the trunk filled full of groceries. Daniel pulled into the driveway in my car followed by Jason driving a brand new sporty SUV. It was a Mercedes. Yes, he surprised me.

Daniel couldn't resist showing off the new purchase. He stressed the importance of the safety features. Also, how easy it would be for me to access our little one. He even mentioned he special ordered a car seat for the baby. I have to say, I was a little more surprised about Daniel's enthusiasm with the pregnancy. This child was already loved dearly by his or her father.

The long day had ended, and I was exhausted as I dragged myself to bed. Daniel was still chatting with Heather and Jason downstairs, but I couldn't keep my eyes open

another moment.

Climbing into bed, my eyes closed and I was already falling asleep before my head was even resting comfortably on the pillow. Tonight, I needed the rest. Tomorrow would be another day.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sunday, the day I had awaited with happiness and dread. The happiness, because I would spend the evening with the family I never knew. In a small way, I felt the dread, because this night began the Rite. I made the decision to keep my focus on my family at this point. I wanted to learn about them, and their history, my history.

My current family, Heather and Jason included, were as excited as I was. We all spent the majority of the day on Saturday cooking and preparing the food we were going to take with us. Jason prepared his Irish Ham. Heather prepared the potato salad and deviled eggs. Daniel and I made cakes and pies. We ended up with six different pies altogether. Not to mention about three cakes. I was never so happy to have two ovens in my home as I was that day. Heather also got in on the deserts with a huge fruit salad.

We loaded up the new SUV. It took us two large coolers to manage this feat. I understood why this vehicle was so handy. We brought several cases of soft drinks, and at least three gallons of ice tea. Not to mention the bags of ice we packed nicely into one of the coolers for the tea and drinks.

Daniel drove as we all chatted about what to expect this evening. Jason thought it would be some elaborate pow-wow as he called it. I think he was looking forward to an evening complete with a huge bonfire, a traditional ceremony of Indians dancing around the fire. Daniel scoffed a laugh at his friend, reminding him that not everyone likes to dance around the fire. Jason threatened us all that if they did dance around the fire, then he was going to join in.

After an hour and a half of driving, we made it to the reservation. The map link in the car came in handy. At least Daniel didn't get lost like Heather and me. We turned down the road to my grandfather's promptly at five.

Daniel pulled the vehicle up to the front of the house. Willie and John were already loading his big pickup truck. There appeared to be some camping gear involved. That was something Daniel and I did not expect. We brought blankets and chairs for us, but nothing more. Willie looked up as we all got out of the car.

"Hey, there!" he shouted, his face bright with excitement. "I see you brought some friends."

"Yes, I hope you don't mind. This is Daniel Maxwell, my fiancé," I said as Daniel moved forward to shake Willie's hand.

"Nice to meet you, sir." Daniel politely took Willie's hand.

"Awe, now," he huffed. "Let's stop with all this formal stuff. I gotta teach this girl

here to call me Gramps. So you might as well." He looked Daniel over and smiled broadly. "Got yourself a good one," he bolted out proudly.

A smile crossed my face. "I think so."

"And ..." His eyes darted to Heather. "You pretty little thing, who did you bring?"

"This is Jason. He's my husband." Heather actually blushed.

Willie walked up to Jason and in his height seemed to tower over him. He smiled broadly and extended his hand to Jason. Jason returned his smile and grabbed his hand in a manly grip.

"Well, welcome to the family," Willie announced proudly. "We have just finished loading the truck. So if you would follow us, we'll be on our way. The Reservation's campground is about three miles from here. I must say, everyone is excited. They can't wait to meet you, Julie. Especially Tess."

"I'm very excited, too," I said turning around as we hopped back in the SUV.

We followed Willie for what seemed like longer than three miles. I suppose it was the slow speed we were driving. Not to mention it felt as though we were going deep inside the woodland area. Once we broke through to a clearing, my breath froze in my throat. There had to be at least sixty or so people lingering around the huge campsite.

It appeared the majority of the women were placing a variety of food items on tables. The men were stacking up wood for a bonfire. The thought hit Daniel and me at the same time, and we both turned to Jason. His eyes were already twinkling.

"Don't you dare," I warned toward Jason.

Jason's lips twitched fighting back the smile. His eyes twinkled. Yes, I could tell, if there was any dancing to be done tonight, it was going to include him.

"Jason, please!" I begged.

"Awe, Julie. I promise I won't embarrass ya. Just have a bit of faith in me." He chuckled.

I let out a long sigh of relief. Maybe too soon, as Daniel laughed softly as we left the car.

"Julie, why don't you and Daniel go with Willie? Meet your family. Jason and I can unload all of this." Heather announced.

We nodded to Heather, and began walking toward Willie. He was already walking toward the site with a galvanized tub full of ice, probably for the drinks.

"Tess!" Willie shouted.

A woman, about the same height as I, turned around to face Willie. Her long black silky hair was pinned back out of her way. The oval shape of her face now broadened into a smile as she walked toward us. I could see the resemblance between her and my mother. She wore jeans, like the rest of us, covered with a loose fitting sweater featuring what I thought were Cherokee symbols.

"You must be Julie. You look so much like your mother." She explained opening her arms to embrace me.

"Yes," I said moving into her embrace.

"I'm your mother's sister, Tess." She said backing away from me to have a better look. "Willie was right. You're a very beautiful woman." Her eyes traveled to Daniel.

"Aunt Tess, this is my fiancé Daniel Maxwell."

She raised her eyebrows. A proud smile crossed her face. "Well, he is a handsome one, isn't he?"

The redness crept slowing to Daniel's cheeks. It was nice for once to see him blush for a change. He leaned in to give her a hug. Aunt Tess hugged him proudly then stepped back.

I glanced behind Tess and saw five tall and very dark red skinned young men walking to the table with Taylan. Each of them had long black hair that flowed down their backs. They were all very muscular and large built. Taylan's attention was immediately drawn to us. His black eyes peered into mine from the distance. He held his gaze, which sent shivers down my spine.

"Who is he?" Daniel asked following my gaze.

"Oh, that is Taylan and his group. I'll explain about him later," Tess dismissed.

"Is he related to Julie?" Daniel inquired again.

"Yes, Taylan is her cousin. He's my son. Willie's grandson," Tess explained. "Everyone you see here is related to her and...." She suddenly stopped short. Her attention was diverted for a second or two, watching Willie and John placing food on the table. "Like I said, everyone here is related."

I frowned slightly trying to do the math in my head. Apparently, old Gramps and his family had children way beyond our years of expectation. However, my attention went back to Taylan. There was something dark about him. The type of darkness that made me feel the need to stay away from him. Soon I felt an arm around my waist. My attention was now diverted from Taylan to Daniel.

"OH, goodness! He knows better than that! John!" Aunt Tess yelled out.

Daniel and I turned around to see Gramps and John arguing over a plate of pie. This just happened to be one of the custard pies Daniel and I brought.

"I'm sorry. Let me get that boy. He's as bad as his grandfather when it comes to sweets." Aunt Tess touched my arm and darted off to rescue John.

Daniel and I lingered slowly behind her. The smell of meat cooking on a grill filled the air. The line was already beginning to form around the table of food. With Daniel's arm still around my waist, we walked forward to the crowd.

"I think your Grandpa is going to give John a run for his money on that pie." Daniel leaned closer to my ear.

"I think John might need some help. It looks as though he's losing the battle." I laughed.

We approached the table where Gramps and John were both still holding onto to the custard pie. Aunt Tess was trying to get it away from both of them. I chuckled lightly and slipped my arm around John's.

"John, why don't you take me on a tour of this lovely table?"

"But he's going to eat all the pie! I really want a piece of that coconut pie." John sounded a little upset.

I reached over and grabbed a plate and a fork. I scooped up a slice of pie from the pie pan and placed it on the plate.

"Hey!" Gramps said jerking his head around.

I smiled and winked my eye at him. "We're all a pack of hungry wolves here."

The crinkles deepened in the corners of his eyes and he let out a roar of laughter. "Yep, she's my line all right."

"Come on," I said to John.

We walked along the table, and he without hesitation named each food and who brought it. This was the most lovely set up I had ever seen. Real, homemade food. Not like the expensive dishes and layouts I was used to. And this was actually more beautiful because each of these dishes were made with love.

John took his time, and happily introduced me to the women along the way. Some were young. Some were older, way into their grandparent years. I noticed some of the younger, teenage girls watching me on John's arm. Apparently, he noticed it too. He straightened his back proudly as he sported me down through the people he introduced me to. There was no way I could help from smiling. Yes, it always takes another woman to make women interested in a man. The young girls were now much more interested in John. They introduced themselves as they approached us, only to gain John's attention.

"It seems I'm getting a little attention because of you." His face brightened with a smile.

"You know what? I bet they've been noticing you all along. You probably haven't even given them the time of day." I teased.

"Naw." His eyes traveled down to the ground. "They never noticed me until now."

I smiled while giving him a little nudge to go over and talk to the girls. With what looked like a gleeful gallop, John made his way over to the group.

Daniel and I reunited with plates of food. Heather and Jason joined us as we sat with Gramps and Aunt Tess. The rest of the evening, we ate and chatted with the rest of my family members.

The darkness had chased the sun behind the mountains, and the great fire flamed into the night. Daniel and I sat around the fire with Gramps and John. The air had become cooler and the warmth from Daniel was soothing. Gramps cleared his throat. Announcing since he was the eldest, he would tell us the story of the Aniwayah.

"Many years ago," he began, "when our time was not counted in years, but counted by the moon, the ancient elders of a distant tribe settled into an area high in the mountains. The tribe was strong with the Great Spirit of the Aniwayah. The Wolf. They lived in peace for many moons and generations.

"Until one night. A hunter was approached by a group of strangers. The hunter was in his wolf form. He had taken on the spirit of the wolf. These newcomers were strange to the wolf. He did not recognize them as one of his people. And he didn't recognize them as the pale face people he'd met before. These people were pale skinned, but more so than the white man. They had blond hair and their eyes were crystal blue, like gems. They had traveled a great distance through the night. The hunter changed back into his human form, and tried to make contact with these newcomers. They were shocked by his transformation from wolf to human. They spoke a language he was fairly familiar with, and understanding a few words, he led them back to his tribe. His hopes

were that his Chieftain would be able to communicate with them.

"The great Chieftain, Running Wolf, knew the language of these people. He spoke to them. He began calling them the moon-eyed people. They were running from something deadly. It was an evil force that chased them deeper into the heartland of the Aniwayah. Chief Running Wolf knew these people were not human. But they promised to pose no threat to the tribe in return for their help. The evil Chief Running Wolf feared these people were running from was the evil that we now call werewolves.

"These moon-eyed people found refuge and favor with Chief Running Wolf. They agreed to build a great wall around the land of the Aniwayah. Under the night of the moon, the wall was built. The wall was later named Fort Mountain. The Chief and his great warriors performed a great ceremony over the wall. Sacred symbols were written in the stones.

"There was more to these moon-eyed people. They brought with them a great item. An item the werewolves were after. The item was hidden deep within the mountain in a sacred place where no one would find it. Only the elders who could read the symbols would know where the item was hidden.

"The following night under the full moon, the werewolves approached and a great battle took place. Many died that night. Moon-eyed people, werewolves and the great Aniwayah warriors. The werewolves fled in defeat, and to this day, the item remains safe.

"The moon-eyed people moved on. No one knows to this day where they went, or even if they are still alive. When another group of settlers approached the mountain, they were the pale face people, humans. They were searching for a place to settle, and the great Chief Running Wolf made a deal with them. If they promised to protect the wall from the werewolves, they could make their home on the mountain. The humans agreed, and the great Chief introduced them to the Great Spirit Aniwayah.

"The Spirit they carried in their line was not by blood. The true Aniwayah remains in the bloodline of our tribe. The werewolves still search the mountain hunting for the item that was hidden. The guardians of the mountain remain, fighting against the werewolves.

"We stand strong still with the blood of the Aniwayah running through our veins protecting our lands and children from the dangers of the werewolves. Over the years the ones who live by the code of the Great Spirit Wolf have died. New leaders have taken over and the true nature of the wolf has faded. Only by blood does it remain true."

Gramps finished his story. Daniel's arm pulled me tighter to him. For the first time ever, we now knew the real story of Fort Mountain. Tears formed in my eyes and now I understood. My mother was not human. She was the true Aniwayah. My hand went to my mouth fighting back the tears. Grandpa Willie came over to us and held out his hand to me. Daniel lovingly stood by my side.

"Tonight," he declared in a thundering voice, "my grandchild has returned home. With her, she carries the bloodline of the Great Spirit Aniwayah. She is a true wolf, like her mother. I welcome her home." He pulled me into his arms.

Tears streamed down my face as I embraced him. I couldn't speak. My throat

strained from the emotions I carried. Why didn't anyone know my mother was the real thing? Was this something else my father had kept a secret? But why?

Taking a step back from Gramps, I stared into his eyes. Wondering. Questions reigned in my mind. The one that baffled me the most was the greatest question of all.

"Why? Why didn't my father tell anyone?" I strained out between tears.

"Because he knew it wasn't safe for anyone to know of her existence. The Council didn't know your mother was a real Aniwayah. Wolf. She would have been considered a threat to them. Their ways have long since gone from the true ways the ancients left behind for them. This is what they feared. This is why your father kept her secret." Gramps spoke firmly.

I turned to Daniel, who was now standing by my side. My eyes pleading with him, hoping he could understand what I was feeling at this point. Daniel's hand tightly gripped mine. There was no need to hear his thoughts. He was just as shocked as I was, learning the news that my mother was an Aniwayah. Not just a shape shifter from the ancient line of Indians but from the original Indians who once lived on Fort Mountain, the area once known as the Land of the Wolf.

My emotions were as mixed as Daniel's. I could feel the turmoil and excitement in his heart. The joy was overwhelming. Soon his heart swelled with honor; a certain amount of pride filled every inch of his heart. I looked up into those beautiful hazel eyes. It was then I knew Daniel was proud to have me. He was very proud of the bloodline that flowed inside of me. For in that instant, he knew I carried with me the real line. Generations upon generations of great warriors flowed through me, the ancient bloodline of the Aniwayah itself.

A smile crossed his lips. His face reflected the revelation of the moment and his eyes glistened, even in the dark. His hand slowly reached for my face, his fingers ever so softly feathering against my cheek.

"I always knew you were special." His voice was almost a whisper. "Now I know why."

"Yes, she is." Gramps stamped out proudly. "We are proud to have her back with us. She belongs to us."

"Yes, she does." A firm husky voice announced.

Daniel's head rose. His eyes peered over the top of my head, staring intently to the person behind me. The tension in his body told me it could only be one person. Taylan. I turned around slowly. Taylan stood beside Gramps. His expression was hard to read. However, he never let go of Daniel's gaze. There was an immediate tension between the two of them. The type of tension I never wanted to see.

"She belongs with us. Not the pale face." Taylan declared.

"Taylan!" Gramps warned loudly.

Daniel's eyes narrowed. His thoughts were clear. Taylan didn't recognize Daniel as being a Lycan. Nor did he see me as a Lycan. He saw me as an Aniwayah. His bloodline. Daniel bristled at the next thought.

"She is where she belongs." Daniel growled out. His warning clearly sent.

"I know who you are." Taylan's eyes narrowed back to Daniel. "Lycan. The pale

face version of our Great Spirit Wolf, nothing more than a weak imitation."

"Taylan, stop it!" Aunt Tess warned him.

Taylan clearly showed his disapproval of the Lycans. His attention went to Aunt Tess. She gave him a scowled look that showed her own disapproval of his rude outburst.

"Daniel, it's late." I turned and placed my hand on his chest.

Daniel's eyes darted back to me, the anger still welling inside him over Taylan. Daniel didn't take threats very well. The dominance inside of him was growing stronger by the day. I saw more of Thomas coming out in him, the controlling aspects of the male wolf. Daniel was growing into his position as an Alpha Male. Each day, I could see him change, the nature of the wolf clearly emerging. He was showing signs of a good leader, a good protector.

"Yes, I do have a busy day tomorrow." He leaned down and pressed his lips to mine, allowing them linger a moment.

My heart fluttered a few times. A rush of fever flew over me and I pressed myself into the kiss. Pressing against him as my hand lingered on the side of his face, the kiss had become a bit sweltering as my breath came in broken pants. Slowly we pulled back from the kiss. Daniel opened his eyes and looked up to Willie.

"Willie, I would like to come back. Bring Julie, so we may talk again." Daniel began. "I feel there is more than what you are telling us."

Gramps nodded. "Enough for tonight. You have learned a great deal. There is still much she needs to learn."

"Like what?"

"One thing, you need to learn your spirit guide. He is an important factor to you. You will know him when you see him. He will guide you into all truth." Gramps stood firm.

I nodded to him. "And my mother?"

"I will tell you everything." Aunt Tess shot in. "Don't worry, Julie. There is so much more you need to learn. We will take it step by step."

I tried to force out a smile. I wanted to know everything now. It was hard for me to leave them. These were my family. Daniel could sense the conflict that raged inside of me. His hand softly brushed against my back, distracting me for a moment. He wanted to leave before he and Taylan ended up in a fight.

Suddenly a thought hit me, strong and hard. The thought caused fear to sweep over me. My mother died in childbirth. Was it the mixture of the lines? Did her body reject me? But if she was not human, then how could this happen? Was there something I needed to know concerning my own pregnancy? I was worried.

"I need to ask this question. The lines between the Lycans and Aniwayah, are the children different? I mean, would my body reject a child if the lines are crossed?" I blurted out.

Gramps and Tess stared at me a moment. The expressions on their faces were a mixture of concern and disbelief. And yet certain remorse seemed to cloud their faces.

"We are not so sure your mother's death was caused by your birth." Tess began

slowly. “

“What?” Daniel and I voiced out at the same time.

“See, our lines are ancient,” Gramps began. “Yes, they may get watered down a bit, but she would have been able to bear a child...” he pointed to Daniel. “Of that nature.”

“Okay wait. So if what caused my mother’s death? If it wasn’t the mixing of the lines?”

Gramps shook his head. “We don’t know. I was hoping you would tell me.”

“Great!” Daniel snorted. “Now I guess we have another mystery on our hands. Julie, I truly love you...but your father kept more secrets than I imagine.”

“Well can you blame him!” I snapped.

“No, but I think I would have handled things a bit differently. I mean, my dad...”

“Daniel, Martin didn’t trust anyone with the truth. He was in love! Are you going to tell Thomas about me? The counsel?”

Daniel remained silent, contemplating his answer carefully. Maybe he would see the world from my father’s eyes. It was ironic, but Daniel was now walking in my father’s shoes and didn’t even realize it.

“I guess you are right. I would protect you. But you have to admit, Dad has been pretty good about the vampires.”

“He wants to kill them for Fate’s sake!” I shrieked.

“Vampires?” Gramps jumped in. “This isn’t good. Our legend has it that when the moon-eyed people and the Aniwayah unite once again, a great war will take place,” Gramps shot out. “I’m afraid this is only the beginning.”

“What’d you mean great war?” Jason finally broke his silence.

“What do you mean once again? Does it have to do with the battle on Fort Mountain?”

“There is evil, something which is pure evil, hidden in the mountain. If it falls into the hands of the werewolves, no one will be safe. We’ll all be in grave danger.” Tess tossed in.

“According to legend, the great war will take place on Fort Mountain. The werewolves will not be the only thing fought that night. A pure evil will force itself through. In the words of the scribe, *a pure evil shall be reconciled by the hand of its one true love*. Anyone who touches this item will be consumed by its evil power. This is what we feel the werewolves are searching for.” Gramps added.

My thoughts ran back to Richard. He said he believed the werewolves were searching for something. Still we have no idea what the item was. Something pure evil. What could it be? Was it possible that the vampires who brought the item to the mountain were still around? Were they evil? I almost laughed at my thoughts. The vampires were not saints, by any means. They were cursed just like the werewolves. Dear Fate, who would help us now? Could we really trust the vampires?

“And we still have no idea what the item is. We do not even know where it was hidden.” Daniel shifted still holding me tightly.

“No. The only ones who knew what the item is are the moon-eyed people, the vampires who hid it. Well, yes, the Chief knew. The ancient carvings give its location.

We fear the item. We will not remove it." Gramps stood tall and still.

"Wait. You said you would not remove it?" Daniel narrowed his eyes toward Gramps. "Then if the werewolves get their hands on it they will become pure evil. Unstoppable. How can you allow this to happen?"

"Daniel, we can't touch it. You don't understand. The evil consumes those who touch it. We can kill evil only in its natural form. We can't kill an item." Aunt Tess returned sharply.

"So you are saying you want the werewolves to retrieve it? So you can kill them with the evil it contains? What if you fail? "Daniel's frustration was now becoming clearer.

"We have faith, Daniel. Faith in our belief that good always overcomes evil." Gramps stated firmly. "We will be prepared. " Gramps said, staring up into the night sky. "The scribe says to watch for the Blood Moon, a red moon. This will be the first sign of the beginning of this war."

We all looked to the sky. The silver moon, shining bright and full had no appearance of any redness. I let out a sigh of relief. Daniel and I looked at one another carefully. What were we to do? Did this mean we were going to have to find this item? Were we going to hunt for it in the middle of a huge pack of werewolves? Even if we did search for it, we had no idea what we were looking for. Something of pure evil. I didn't even want to think about it anymore.

Daniel let loose a sigh. He felt like I did. Not only did we have the clans to worry about with the Dark Wolves, but the werewolves and the evil that resided somewhere deep in Fort Mountain. This life just keeps getting better and better. The more the mysteries begin to unfold in front of us the more danger we found ourselves in.

With no more words to say, we graciously parted with my family. The sadness in their eyes proved their own concerns. Daniel made a promise to them to keep the secret safe. He also promised them he would do everything he could to protect me. I knew in their hearts they felt the torment of my mother's loss all over again. Watching me leave with Daniel was, in one way, a repeat of history.

I couldn't dare bring myself to tell them I was pregnant, to give them any more to worry about. My mother's tragedy dealing with Dr. Miller had brought shame and remorse to them. Not to mention, Taylan. Taylan was very proud. It was evident he was not thrilled with Daniel or the Council. According to them, the Council has gone astray from the old ways. Could Daniel rectify this? Could he be the one to bring peace to all the clans and unite the entire bloodlines? Was this even something my father had considered?

On the drive home, I remained silent in my own thoughts. Not to mention my own fears. Daniel knew he could never tell anyone what my mother was. Or who I was for that matter. Did Charlotte know? Did Thomas? She had said to Thomas and Daniel that she knew what my mother really was. Did she really know?

As I stared blankly out of the car window, I felt Daniel's warm hand on mine. I turned slowly to him and he glanced to me, a gentle and assuring smile crossing his face.

"It will be all right." He assured me.

I nodded and wrapped my fingers around his. He knew he had a lot to deal with. At this point we all did. It was left up to us to decide what to do with our newfound information. Daniel was already in the lead position for the Council. I wondered if he would wait until the Clans were united and the Dark Wolves destroyed. My thoughts were so distraught I couldn't clearly hear him.

Heather and Jason remained silent as well. I assumed they were chatting amongst themselves quietly, debating their own plan of action. I knew they were with us no matter what Daniel decided. There again, I had a few options opened to me.

Tomorrow, I was going to see Richard. That is, if he hadn't already left to meet with Mithras. I would take my chances that he would at least help us. Maybe Richard could find out what type of evil lurked in Fort Mountain. Maybe even find a way to destroy it. Maybe, I thought, Richard was our only hope. I would try.

Daniel would have his hands full with the Council tomorrow, which left me to Richard. I was sure Daniel would take Jason with him. This was a battle they were preparing for. The strongest of the Alpha males would be present and there would be no need for women. Heather could go with me to see Richard. I knew it would be wise for my safety as well. Soon we would know where we stood.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Our Monday morning started out as usual. I overslept. The chattering of voices and smell of coffee drew me to the kitchen. Daniel was downstairs with Jason and Heather eating breakfast and drinking coffee. I walked through the kitchen, and Daniel's eyes lifted to me as I made my way to the coffee.

Jason glanced up, giving me a smile as he continued with his breakfast. I looked around the kitchen to see what Daniel had prepared. It seemed he went a little overboard with breakfast again. I grabbed my coffee and seated myself beside him at the table. Leaning over to me, he pressed a kiss to the side of my face.

"Good morning." His smile was radiant.

He was always such a morning person. It took me a few moments to wake up, even after a shower. I forced out a smile and grumbled my good mornings, trying to focus on waking up. Heather read the paper while sipping on her coffee, and Jason steadily enjoyed his breakfast. I reached over to Daniel's plate and picked up one of the sausage links.

"So what's on the agenda for today?" I asked as I bit into the sausage.

"Well, Jason is going with me to meet with the group the Council has rounded up to take out the Dark Wolves. Mom called this morning and wants to make the final arrangements for the wedding this weekend. The caterers are all in order. The flowers, etc. Oh, and she said to tell you not to forget to go by Nancy's to pick up your dress. She has a family dinner party planned for Saturday night." He made his announcements.

Saturday. Sunday was the big day. For some odd reason I had more on my mind than the wedding. Daniel made it sound like everything was normal and going as planned. We had not even discussed a honeymoon. Most of the wedding plans were already taken care of by my soon to be mother-in-law Charlotte. I felt a little bad for almost forgetting Sunday was the day Daniel and I were getting married. There was so much else I needed to do.

"I'll go by and see Nancy this morning. Heather, did you want to go with me?" I turned the coffee cup to my lips.

"Sorry Jewels, I need to run into town with Charlotte. She has some errands to do. Something about the cakes." Heather smiled gently looking up from the newspaper.

Great, leave me to my own demise.

A precarious look crossed Daniel's face. "And what would that be?"

"What?" I almost choked on my coffee. Darn it, I needed to watch my thoughts.

"What kind of demise are you planning?" he persisted.

I gave him a blank stare for a moment. "I was going to check on the wedding gown. And do a little research." It was the truth. I just didn't tell him what else I had planned.

Daniel eyed me carefully and his eyes narrowed slightly as if he didn't believe me. He slowly let his eyes drop back to his plate. Picking up his fork, he laid it across the plate then let out a sigh. In a quick motion, Daniel pushed himself back from the table. He picked up his plate and went into the kitchen. I glanced up at Jason. Jason's eyes followed Daniel, and then looked to me.

"Jason, love, are you finished?" Heather broke in.

Jason nodded. Heather pushed away from the table and took their plates. An uncomfortable feeling that ran through me. Daniel was upset. Jason and Heather noticed it. I had to deal with it. The door to the patio slammed behind him. I jumped, spilling my coffee. Daniel was far more upset than I had imagined.

I sat motionless in my chair as fear crept inside my heart. I took a deep breath and pushed my way from the table. Jason eyed me carefully. I could tell he saw the hurt in my eyes. Maybe it was a bewildering look. I wasn't sure which one it was. I walked back through the kitchen. Opening the door, I saw Daniel standing on the patio. His back was turned to me. He stood motionless staring out beyond the trees.

The chill of the morning air swept over me. It sent a shiver down my spine. Daniel was staring out into the woods. He turned his head slightly to the side as I touched his back. Raising his arm, he slid it around me. I looked deep into his eyes and the heart inside of me shattered. Daniel's teary eyes met mine. He was in pain, a very deep, emotional pain.

"Julie," he began softly. "When are you going to learn to trust me? I couldn't bear it if anything happened to you."

"Daniel..."

"Listen to me." He cut me off abruptly. "You are going to have to learn to trust me with your very life." His voice was firm and forceful.

Daniel let me go and turned his attention back toward the woods. "You don't know how much you are hurting me. Julie, I am not the same gangly young boy you once

knew."

"Daniel, I know this. You have grown into a wonderful strong man, who I love. The man I want to marry."

"Do you? Do you really love me? Do you really want to marry me?" he sneered.

Again, the pressure pierced around my heart. "What exactly is that supposed to mean? Of course, I want to marry you! I love you!"

"Then you are going to have to trust me." His black eyes peered deeply into mine. "Richard will be here in a few minutes. There is no way of putting this off. I have to leave and go with the Council for about three days. Mom and Dad will be going with me, as well as Heather and Jason. Unfortunately, as bad as it sounds, the only ones I can trust at this point are the vampires to keep you safe."

"You're kidding me ...right?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

Daniel's face shows no signs of humor, nor did he show any signs other than grief. "No, I am not kidding you Julie. I discussed this with Richard earlier this morning. We have an agreement."

"Agreement?" I snorted. "What kind of agreement?"

"The type of agreement that will keep you safe and alive until I return home."

"What about you? Who is going to keep you safe while you are out chasing these Dark Wolves?"

"I have Jason and Heather. They need to come with me. You, on the other hand, need to stay here. AND I mean stay here in this house. Lance and Richard are going to keep an eye on you."

"Daniel, I can't bear the thought of being away from you. Isn't there any other way around this?"

"No, Julie. This is the only way. I hate the thought of leaving you as well. Believe me when I tell you how much it torments me to have Richard around you while I'm away. But I know if he has any love in his cold body for you, he will be the best one to protect you while I'm gone. I see the way he looks at you. Believe me, if he loves you half as much as I do, you will be safe."

"Daniel, I really don't agree with this." I stated firmly with my arms crossed over my chest.

Daniel didn't speak. He turned and walked away from me. "It really does not matter at this point Julie. I am doing the best for you and my child. Conversation closed," he said as he walked back through the patio door.

What in the hell was he thinking? Were we living in a time that called for drastic measures as these? Did he really trust Richard? Or was it me he was trusting. What kind of agreement did the two of them come to? I turned and followed him back through the house and froze.

Daniel wasn't joking. Richard and Lance stood before me. My heart started fluttering when I saw Nathaniel. And then a tall blond stepped from behind him...Dear Fate it was Casey. She was breathtaking. The first thing I noticed about her was the once gold sun kissed skin was now pale. Her features were definitely hers, except she blended in more with Nathaniel. If there had ever been two people who looked as though they

belonged together, it was Casey and Nathaniel.

"Casey?"

"Jewels?" She spoke softly, the tones in her voice tingled in my ears. She moved slowly around Nathaniel as he let her hand go.

We met in the middle of the living room, embracing one another in a tight hug. A little too tight for my taste, she was stronger than what I had imagined.

"Casey! Oh it is so good to see you! I can't tell you how much I've missed you!" I streamed out.

"I've missed you too! By the way, Jewels, you smell funny." She stepped back and wrinkled her nose.

My eyes widened as I backed away from her. What on earth? My smell?

"Casey, Julie is pregnant," Richard spoke softly.

Casey turned towards Richard then back to me. "Pregnant? When? Why am I always the last to know anything around here?" She pursed her lips together, with hands firmly on her hips.

"Because you decided to go off somewhere and go vamp on all of us!" I teased.

Casey laughed and turned her attention back to me. "Well, I see I have missed quite a bit. We need to catch up. Dear brother here says you need a baby sitter. Now I know why."

"Yes, and I hope you are in control of yourself." Daniel said giving his sister a stern look.

"Daniel, really." She huffed and rolled her eyes. "So what do we do? How about a trip to the mall? Shopping and..."

"Um, Casey, I do need to remind you that you are not supposed to be around humans at least for a little while longer." Nathaniel spoke softly.

Casey's bright expression changed to one of sadness. "Oh, yeah." Everyone could hear the disappointment in her voice.

"Hey, I know something we could do?" My eyes widened with excitement. "Let's go for a walk and catch up."

"Um, Jewels, I need to remind you," Daniel began. "You are not to go out of this house unsupervised. You may consider the fact there might be werewolves lurking in those woods."

At that point, Casey and I both let out a long sigh as we looked toward Daniel. It appeared we both were in a precarious situation. I was pregnant, and she was a new vampire. Interestingly enough, we both needed to be supervised.

Daniel turned to Richard. "So I trust we have an agreement?"

"You have my word," Richard stated firmly. "And you?"

"Of course, if it ever comes to that." Daniel stated flatly. A certain amount of remorse lingered in his voice. What type of agreement did they make? This was killing me.

Casey glanced toward Daniel. "I'll make sure he behaves himself."

"I am counting on it." Daniel said as he walked over to his sister. "By the way, you smell funny too." He wrinkled his nose. "You smell like a funeral home or something."

Casey stared at her brother a moment then let out a soft laugh. "You do realize, I haven't changed that much," She said as she reached for her brother.

Daniel held his arms opened as Casey went to him. Her arms wrapped around her brother as he embraced her tightly. Suddenly, her body stiffened and she jerked back.

Daniel studied her face for a moment with a look of curiosity then a cloud of horror covered him. With a flash, Nathaniel rushed over to her side, clasping his pale hands around her arms. I heard Heather and Jason take gasp as Richard moved toward Daniel.

"Apparently, my dear, we need to do a little hunting." Nathaniel spoke softly as he led Casey away from her brother.

Her eyes lifted to mine as Nathaniel lead her out to the patio; even her brown contacts couldn't hide the hunger. The linings of her eyes were blood red, and the whites of her eyes had become bloodshot.

"Sorry," she strained out as they left through the patio door.

"She is still adjusting." Richard spoke softly.

Daniel couldn't speak. He nodded toward Richard then looked to me. Overwhelming sadness filled his heart from seeing his sister struggle with this new venture.

"Nothing has really changed," he mocked Casey as he watched them leave through the woods.

"Well, some things have. But she's still your sister, Daniel." Heather's words appeared to be encouraging.

"Yes, my sister," he forced out sarcastically then looked down at his watch. "We must be leaving." He turned to me. "Please be careful and at least stay with them."

"We will protect her Daniel. You have no need to worry." Lance offered.

"I hope not," Daniel stated flatly.

"I'm going to miss you. I just don't know what I'm going to do without you for three days." I spoke softly as I moved closer to Daniel.

"Not as much as I will miss you. Do you realize we have not been apart since the first time we...?" He lost his thought as I leaned forward to kiss him.

Our kiss was soft and lingering. I couldn't believe I was going to have to endure three whole days without the man I loved. It seemed almost an impossible task.

Heather and Jason were standing at the front door ready to leave. I hugged the both of them tightly. They walked out of the door to the car, and I followed Daniel to the front door, where he stopped. He turned around to face me and the pain in my heart welled tightly. His eyes were soft and filled with pain as he leaned down and gently placed a kiss on my lips.

"I promise I will return." He spoke softly.

"I will hold you to your promise." I replied.

Daniel kissed me on the forehead, and then he glanced toward Richard and Lance. He gave them both a nod and turned. And left. I stood at the door and watched Daniel drive off with Heather and Jason. Tears poured down my face. I dropped to my knees and placed my face in my hands. It was worse than I had imagined it could be. The torment of love was miserable. In my mind, I knew it was only going to be three days,

but I suddenly realized I couldn't live without Daniel for one moment. As I watched the car leaving, my heart tore into several pieces. I wanted to be with him.

Richard knelt down beside me and pulled me to his cold body. My hands fought fiercely with his while I tried to push him away as the sobs came louder. He refused my protest and only pulled me closer to his chest with his strong arms. The mournful cries now erupted loudly as the pain wailed out of me.

The storm of emotions found me once again in the open seas, whipping at me and tearing at my soul in a depth I never imagined possible. I cried out loudly as the waves crashed against my heart tearing it away piece by piece. I shook and trembled as the wind blew against my body, slamming it against the rocks of the mountain from which I had fallen. The once blissful moment of love I endured had now turned into a torment of undeniable pain.

Another burst of air erupted from my lungs as the uncontrollable cries continued. Richard held me closer and softly whispered to me, his body, a cold hard mass was no match for the storm that tormented my soul. He rocked me slowly in his arms as the wails continued. Deeper and deeper I sank into the depths of the ocean. I wished for death to claim me, only so that my heart would stop beating. If my heart stopped beating, then it would stop hurting.

Desperately, I needed my father at that moment. My body trembled against Richard's chest as my tears poured out. My father was not here to protect me and to talk to me. He was not here to give me words of wisdom and to tell me what to do. I was alone once again.

Richard rested his head on mine as he held me tightly in his arms. My body shook violently again against his chest as he continued whispering.

A fragrance I remembered all too clearly was like a cool breeze on my face. My crying soon slowed to a snuffle as my body and senses went numb. I rested my head on the cold hard chest as my eyes closed and my body relaxed. I drifted, unable to move. The pain had numbed me, but the storm was not over. I was just in its eye waiting for the aftermath of the fierce winds to approach and finish what had already begun. I was prepared for my fate, prepared for the storm to take me to my death. Death would be better than this torment.

The seconds turned into minutes and the minutes turned into hours. The sun set, and darkness filled the inside of my home. I was still in the arms of the vampire who held me too tightly. The tears had ceased as he quietly held me and no more words were spoken. I remained a piece of flesh that he held on to so tightly. I couldn't move. My body was now cold, but I didn't care. Maybe, I thought, the cold would freeze my heart and end this pain.

It was only when I realized I heard a soft thumping, that I slowly came to my senses. I listened closely as I heard the sound of Richard's heart beating faintly in his chest. Nathaniel was right, vampires do have hearts and they beat as ours do. They are a type of living creature. Interesting.

There was no way I could move. My thoughts were just now coming back to me. My body hadn't caught up with my mind or my ability to speak.

I listened as I heard the patio door open and two sets of footsteps entering.

"Oh my God!" I heard Casey's voice as it tingled my ears with a chime. "Richard? What happened? You didn't...OH GOD PLEASE TELL ME YOU DIDN'T!" Her voice went into a higher pitch.

"Brother?" I heard the caution in Nathaniel's voice.

"No, I didn't. She's well...I'll let her explain." He gently moved me.

Casey came to the front of me where I was curled into a fetal position in Richard's lap. I noticed she had removed her contacts. Her once beautiful brown eyes were now a clear crystal blue. They reminded me of a blue diamond, like Richard's. My eyes went to hers.

"Julie?" Her voice was soft as she reached for me. Her cold hands slid under my arms and lifted me up like a baby away from Richard.

"Casey?" I strained out as I felt the pain in my throat from the excessive crying. My body was stiff from staying in one position too long.

"Come on; let's get you on the sofa." She paused. "Nathaniel, could you go upstairs and find a blanket? She is freezing. Richard I think you over did it a little." She scolded him.

"She was in pain," he whispered softly.

My legs buckled under me as Casey's arm went around my waist and lifted my body away from Richard. She guided me to the sofa and set me down. Nathaniel covered me with a blanket.

"I'm going to get you some hot tea, okay? I'll be right back." I watched her dash off toward the kitchen.

"Richard?" Nathaniel began in a stern voice. "Where's Lance?"

"He went off hunting after you two." Richard stated flatly.

"Did you hurt her?" A frown crossed his face showing his discontent.

Slowly my eyes traveled up to see the muscles in Richard's jaws flex. His eyes shifted to mine as I could see for the first time the reflection of my own pain in his eyes. Finally, his attention returned to Nathaniel as he shook his head and slowly turning he walked away towards the front door.

Casey returned with a cup of hot tea and placed it in my hands. I took a sip as the warmth of the liquid burned the back of my throat.

"What happened?" She asked peering into my face.

I shook my head. My senses were still a little numb.

"Oh, Jewels. I'm so sorry. I forgot how strong the bond between Lycans can be," she said softly.

"Casey, this hurts worse than when I lost my father. Casey?" I whined. "I don't know how to deal with this."

"Julie, I'm sure he's feeling the same pain right now. It's going to be all right. I'm here for you," she spoke softly.

"There is so much I need to tell you. The werewolves. The Dark Wolves. Honestly, I fear for my life, but I fear for Daniel's more." I spoke softly.

"If any of those things come near you, I will kill them." Richard shot out harshly.

"Richard?" Casey called out in a warning tone. "You need to go hunt." She pointed toward her eyes.

The room fell silent as everyone's eyes were on him. His eyes looked very much like Casey's did a few hours ago. I turned my head slowly to see the anger and hunger on Richard's face. I believed that Richard would protect me. But who would protect me from Richard? We all realized at that moment, even Richard knew, that he let more than his anger slip out. I shivered as Casey's arm reached around me. Her long blond hair fell over her shoulder as she leaned closer to me. Her lips touched my ears as a tingle ran through my body.

"I think I need to talk to you in private." She whispered so low I could barely hear her. I nodded. "Nathaniel, I am going to stay here with Julie for a little while," she said as she stood up.

Nathaniel's eyes dropped to the floor. Slowly his gaze lifted as he looked back to her. He nodded. I knew he understood the severity of the situation.

"I'll bring you some clothes and your contacts." He motioned to her eyes.

She grabbed his arm and Richard's then headed toward the front door.

"You boys behave yourself. I'll be home as soon as I take care of this."

"She could stay with us." Richard began. "They wouldn't dare cross a house full of vampires."

"Richard." Casey warned softly, "I can handle this. She will be safe. I love her, and I will not let anything happen to her. Do what you are supposed to do." She smiled as she opened the door and pushed the both of them out. "Call Lance and let him know. Maybe you can pick him up on the way back."

Nathaniel lingered behind, only to get a lasting kiss from his new bride. Her hand went gingerly to his face as their noses touched slightly. They showed so much love toward one another. She gave him a warm smile as the door closed behind them. Turning to me her lips pursed as she paused to look at the broken glass on the floor.

"Well, I guess we need to talk, huh?" she said clasping her hands together. "Now tell me exactly what the dream was about."

Casey walked back to the sofa and sat down beside me again. I knew she was a vampire, but she was still Casey, my best friend. I sat the cup of tea down, reached my arms around her neck, and hugged her tightly.

"I love you, Casey." I began as the tears welled in my eyes.

"Oh Jewels. I love you too." She wrapped her cold arms around me and held me close to her. "I'm so sorry about the separation with Daniel. I know it's very painful for you. Mates often feel the harshness from separation anxiety."

My hand went to my eye to wipe the tear away as I released her and sat back on the sofa. There was no way I could tell her how much I was hurting at this point. In some small way, I knew deep down inside, she understood.

"Casey, it all started with the werewolves and then the Dark Wolves." I began. "The Council wanted him to become their leader. I just never thought we would be separated like this."

"Jewels, listen to me, you are going to get through this. Daniel is doing what he

feels is necessary. He is his father's son." Casey's gaze shifted. "I hate to ask this question, but what's the deal with you and Richard?"

"We talked, had coffee, and..."

Her eyes squinted letting me know there was a difficult question on the way. "You haven't...I mean well..." I knew what she was implying.

"No!" I replied. "Casey, no, I haven't had sex with Richard. Yes, he gets me all flustered, but I have not, nor has he ever crossed that line. Did he put some spell on me?"

Casey laughed lightly and shook her head. "I warned you about Richard. " She laughed. "I think you have had firsthand experience of how seductive Richard can be."

"So he seduced me?"

"Julie, Richard is a vampire. I think part of it, honestly, is that you are attracted to Richard. He is a gentleman. I don't think he would do anything to you that you didn't want," she said looking into my eyes.

"He told me the same thing." I paused looking down at my hands. "It is difficult for me to be around Richard at times."

She nodded. "I can only imagine."

Casey stayed with me the rest of the night while I slept. I felt some type of security knowing she was there. Sleep didn't come easy for me as I tossed and turned all night. Casey lay beside me motionless, as I slept. There were times I would open my eyes and look at her only to fall back asleep. Her soft fragrance reminded me of Richard.

The pain of separation still burned in my heart. No one knew the torment I was enduring. Could this be a part of this Rite the Council spoke of? I wondered. The only hope and prayer I had was the next two days would come and go quickly. My heart and soul were truly in torture.

So I would endure this pain. Deal with it, until my loving man returned home. And I made my mind up; he would never leave me again.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The next day came, Tuesday, Day One of my separation from Daniel. No phone call from Daniel, and I was still walking around in a daze. Casey stayed by my side every moment of the day. The only time she managed to leave was when Richard relieved her, and only then so she could hunt with Nathaniel. Mostly, I stayed in my room in bed, attempting to sleep my misery away. I would wake only a few times to see him sitting quietly in my room. He never really spoke much, just watched me intently as my eyes would open and close. Most of the time, I slept trying not to cope with the separation from Daniel.

That night was a vague memory. I wasn't sure if it was a dream. I remember I woke up suddenly, tears streaming down my face; the dream I was having was unclear. All I know is that my heart was crushed. I remembered hearing Richard's soft voice as he

spoke to me.

"I am here. You are safe. No one is going to hurt you." I remember the words clearly as his cool breath gently brushed over my face. *"I swear it, with my life."*

My eyes closed, feeling the relaxing tones in his voice, so soft and soothing. The cool finger gently running down the side of my face and I felt safe again. Whatever my dream may have been, I must have called his name out in my sleep. He was there, watching over me while I slept, my guardian angel.

It was Wednesday, Day Two of my separation. I think it was late in the evening when Casey picked me up from the bed, and walked into the shower with me. She held me under the water. The fog had not lifted from my loss, and I couldn't even fight against her as the water poured down my grief stricken body.

She mentioned she had something exciting for me. My remark was asking her if I was going to be the main course at a vampire buffet, a sad and sick joke as she called it. I dressed while she acted as my coach, pushing and rushing me to hurry. I almost fell twice as she pulled me down the steps towards her little black Mercedes. Nathaniel and Richard must have dropped the car off sometime during the week. I don't ever remember seeing or hearing them.

Casey drove past Atlanta and circled around on the Atlanta beltway. She pulled the car up to Atlanta Speedway. As she pulled in, I noticed the large trucks and stock cars. We drove around until we made it to a decent parking spot. I turned to Casey, as she looked to me with a glimmer of hope.

"I said it was a surprise. You are going to have a ball. Trust me." She smiled broadly.

We left the car, and walked to the trailer that had the number sixteen pasted on the side. We walked to the back of the huge black trailer, and stopped as Nathaniel popped his head around the corner. She gave a little jump into his arms as he grabbed her and held her to him. He flashed a toothy smile toward me as he sat her down.

"Julie, I am so glad you could make it. I hope Casey didn't ruin the surprise."

I shrugged my shoulders, "I still have no clue."

"Julie!" another female voice said as I looked up and saw Adrianna walking toward me. Her French accent definitely gave her away. She held her arms wide as she grabbed me and gave me a gentle hug. "Oh, it is so good to see you again. Come," she took me by the hand.

I glanced over my shoulder to Casey. Casey nodded and smiled as she waved me on. My frown clearly showed her I disapproved of leaving me alone with this woman. Adrianna took me down to the garage area where a crew was already working on the number sixteen racecar.

"I'm going to need a new distributor!" a voice shouted out from under the hood.

As we walked closer, the mechanic's head popped up and looked around the car. It was Raphael. He was wearing a crew uniform and began wiping his hands with a shop towel.

"Hey babe," he spoke excitedly as Adrianna walked toward him. His gaze immediately settled to me. "Julie? Hey, it's great of you to join us tonight. Do you know

anything about cars? I'm going to need an assistant if my brother doesn't find me a distributor soon." Raphael said as he looked towards Lance.

"Slow your roll, brother!" Lance shot back.

"What are we doing?" I asked looking at the racecar.

"Racing!" Lance said handing his brother the part he needed. "How's she looking?"

"Great, I think. The damn thing was shot when he did the final run last night."

Raphael's hands moved so fast I could barely see them as he placed the part on.

"Hey, get her suited up and we'll take her down to pit row with us." Lance said smacking Adrianna on the hip with the shop towel. She laughed as she grabbed it and threw it back in his face.

"Great idea! I think we have another uniform that will fit her," she said as she grabbed my hand.

"Wait. What...I don't know anything about cars!" I trailed off as I was lead outside the garage.

"Nonsense. Don't worry, Julie, it'll be fun. You'll see. There is nothing like being on the pit crew."

We walked back to the trailer, and she found a uniform that looked as though it would fit. Pushing me into the changing area, she closed the door as I changed. I stepped out and everything was in a rush from there.

Nathaniel pulled a new black Dodge truck alongside us. Adrianna climbed into the back and held her hand for me as I climbed in. We held onto the cab as Nathaniel drove us down to the pit crew area. I looked around and saw about ten other cars lined around the track.

"Okay, are you going to explain?" I asked Casey as she walked up to me.

"Twice a year a group of, well, their friends," she motioned toward Lance and Raphael, "join together and meet here to race their cars. It's kind of a tradition. There are fifteen cars total racing tonight."

"Are all of them...?" I asked looking around. Vampires? I couldn't believe it.

Casey nodded and smiled.

"How?"

"They put together their own organization. It's just for fun. They rent the speedway out for the night. Come on," she said looking up as they placed the number sixteen car in line.

"This is our pit crew, Raphael, Lance and Nathaniel. Leona is our crew chief on the radio up there." She pointed to a tower. "Adrianna stays here relaying messages to the crew. We're going to hang out here and have some fun."

Just then, Nathaniel pulled the black truck in front of us. The door opened and Richard stepped out. The fog began to lift a little. His smile broadened when he saw me.

"So you came to join my pit crew?" he asked as he strolled toward me. "Well, you are going to need..." His hand slowly moved to his head as he removed his hat. Richard took a step closer and placed it on my head. "A hat to make it official."

"Well, I wasn't sure I volunteered." I muttered as he arranged the hat on my head.

"Julie, it is very good to have you here. Maybe you will bring me some luck." He

smiled as he stepped back.

My luck wasn't so good right now. How in the world did he expect I would bring anything but bad luck? I forced out a smile as Casey reached for my arm and pulled me back as the announcements began.

"There is a monitor over here where Adrianna watches the race. We can watch with her." She pulled me to the inside.

After a few announcements and the National Anthem, I heard the words that every racing fan loves to hear, "GENTLEMEN START YOUR ENGINES!"

I looked at Casey as I heard the words, "Let's go racing boys!"

"Is that?" I said as my eyes widened.

"You mean DW?" She smiled.

Surely, it couldn't be. No, I shook my head, no way.

The racecars roared to life and the sound was louder than thunder. I turned to watch as I saw Richard pull out onto the track. For some reason, my curiosity was perked as I watched the other cars follow behind him.

Casey and I returned to Adrianna's side as we watched the starting pole positioning line up. Richard's number sixteen was in third position. A bright red corvette, the pace car, lead the pack around the track. After almost a complete lap around the track, the corvette veered off into the pit lane as the green flag waved. The sound of the engines roared, and the cars sped out.

"Richard is in third position. His partner Mickey is in eleventh." Adrianna pointed at the screen.

"I don't understand." I said.

"Well, this is a tough track. Richard is going to need Mickey closer to help him during the last laps. They are running two hundred laps tonight."

I watched as Richard closely followed the car in the lead.

"Back off, Richard!" Leona warned over the radio. "Save it for the last few laps. You don't want to burn too many tires up in the first laps."

"I want him this time." Richard voice replied over the radio.

I looked to Adrianna trying to figure out what he was talking about.

"Jeremy Winters. He's won the last two races. Richard almost had the win at the last race when Jeremy's partner rubbed Richard's car too hard, and they both wrecked. It left the win for the last lap open for Jeremy."

"So they don't play fair."

"Vampires never do," Adrianna said smiling. "That's okay. I think Richard's got a few tricks up his sleeve this race."

During the next few laps, we watched as the cars continued switching positions until the ultimate happened. Someone had a tire blowout that called for a caution. We watched as the rear side of the car hit the wall and slid down the track.

"GO HIGH - GO HIGH!" I heard Leona shout over the radio.

"I can't see! The smoke!" Richard called out.

"GO HIGH!" she shouted again.

I held my breath as I saw Richard's car enter the smoking area where the car was

sliding down the track. My heart pounded in my chest as his car disappeared in the thick of the smoke.

"FLOOR IT!" Leona shouted.

We all stared at the screen as we saw his car come flying through the smoke undamaged. Everyone, including me, was jumping up and down screaming for joy.

"Caution flag, Richard. Come on in. Good job!" I heard Leona coach.

We saw the yellow flag as the pace car pulled back onto the track. Nathaniel grabbed the gas and Raphael and Lance grabbed tires and headed out waiting on Richard.

"Two tires - Right side only." Richard said as he began his approach down pit row. "She's shuddering on the right side."

"Check the tire pressure guys!" Leona replied.

I was amazed how well she was tuned in to the racecars. "She's pretty good."

"She love's stock car racing." Casey stated. "She's probably one of the oldest living fans."

"She is the oldest living fan, Mon Cheri." Adrianna said laughing.

I couldn't help from laughing as I watched the two of them. This was exactly what I needed to bring me out of my desolate state. Casey, again, was the friend and sister that I truly needed.

She glanced to me and smiled. "Having a good time so far?"

I nodded. "Yes."

We watched as Richard approached and the car skidded to a stop. Nathaniel ran out with lightning speed and changed the tires as Lance reached down and lifted the car for him. Raphael filled the car with gas. I thought for a moment that NASCAR could only wish they had a vampire to change tires during their pit stops. I had to laugh at my sick sense of humor. Nathaniel checked the air pressure in the right tire then tapped the hood of the car.

Richard pulled the car off and headed back on the track. The pace car veered off again and the green flag was flying. The cars roared once more as the pack separated.

We were finally down to the last five laps. The past caution flags and wrecks had whittled the pack down to only eight cars. Richard had made it to second position after his caution during the previous lap where he had a tire blowout. I had never seen any driver drive the car as hard as he did to catch up to Winters. Winters was now in first position and Richard was closing in tight behind him.

"Careful, Richard," Leona cautioned.

Winter's partner was coming close behind Richard's car.

"I'm seeing red! I'm seeing red!" Richard began on the radio.

I looked to Adrianna for an explanation. "Winter's partner is in Richard's sight. He's nervous at what he will do on this last lap."

"White Flag! Hold it, Richard. Hold it! Help's coming!" Leona shouted.

The cars were now on the last lap of the race. Richard's partner was on the tail of Winter's partner. We watched as Richard's partner gave Winter's guy a huge bump in the rear causing him to lose control. His car hit the wall and bounced off into a spin.

"GO! GO! GO! GO!" Leona screamed over the radio.

Richard came out of the last turn and floored the car. The two cars were now nose-to-nose. Winter's turned his car down to bump Richard.

"HIT AND RUN!" Leona shouted.

"I GOT HIM!" Richard shouted back.

Richard tapped the brakes as Winter's car went down to tap his car. Richard hit the gas and bumped the rear of Winter's car causing it to spin upward in front of Richard. Richard moved the car down only to tap the front of Winter's again as it spun around. We held our breaths as we watched Richard gain control of his car and head for the finish line. The white flag waved as Richard crossed.

"HE WON!" everyone screamed around me.

I watched in amazement, and finally had to ask the most stupid question.

"Is that allowed?"

"Of course. Vampires don't play fair remember?" Adrianna said as she continued cheering.

Well, it's a good thing vampires don't race NASCAR or they would all get expelled! Worse yet, they might eat the other drivers if they lose.

I put my thoughts of the recent horrid events aside, and joined in with the laughter and cheers. Yes, this was going to be a day for me to remember. Vampire racing, and I had a great time. We all headed out to meet Richard as he was making his last victory lap with the white flag.

Pulling down to his pit stop, Nathaniel all but pulled him out of the car. They were all cheering loudly. Richard was smiling and dodging the champagne spraying in the air. Adrianna handed him a towel as he began running his hands through his wet sandy brown hair. Looking up, he saw me standing behind a few people.

"My good luck charm!" he shouted as motioned for me to come to him.

Casey gave me a push forward and I stumbled in shock. I moved through the crowd of people making my way to him. Another person walked to him carrying a trophy. She was a beautiful, curvy and exotic blond even with her pale skin. I couldn't help from noticing her jacket was unzipped low enough to expose her well-endowed breasts. She seemed to be a little disappointed as she looked to me then Richard when she handed him the trophy.

"KISS!" Someone yelled out among the crowd. My head snapped around to see who began such a craze as the whole crowd followed by chanting the same words.

Richard held the trophy in the air, reached around my waist, and pulled me to him. He looked down at me and smiled. Leaning closer to me, I heard him whisper. "Do you mind? It's kind of a tradition. The winner gets a kiss from his good luck charm."

I gave him a puzzled look as I mumbled something like it was okay. It wasn't exactly clear as to how it came out but he knew what I meant.

"Make it a good one brother!" Someone yelled out. Probably Nathaniel.

"Yeah!" Another male voice roared. That voice was definitely Lance.

Richard turned to smile at the crowd and leaned in to kiss me. He stopped as he came only inches from my face. A wicked grin crossed his lips as he took a step away

from me and held the trophy out for someone to take it.

"YEA-AAH," I heard a deep voice roar.

The sound of the Beastie Boys playing *Fight for Your Right* played over the loud speakers. You have got to be kidding me. My eyes rolled in the back of my head. I was not going to like this one bit.

As soon as I heard the words of the song, *Kick it*, my heart began beating wildly. His hand slipped around my waist and he pulled me closer to him. Richard leaned forward arching my back in his arms; his hand went to my face, gently moving to the back of my neck. My pulse pounded in my ears as I watched his face coming closer to mine. I trembled when his cold lips touched my lips ever so lightly. A ragged breath escaped my mouth as my lips parted to his. Gently, he moved in closer and the kiss became more passionate. I could feel the coolness of his tongue tracing the inside of my mouth. As my knees went limp, he caught me in his strong arms and pulled me deeper into the kiss. I melted in his arms. The taste I remembered soon overtook me. I could faintly hear the screams and cheers of the crowd around us as my hand went to his neck. He pulled back from the kiss and looked at me. I was woozy with intoxication and he knew it. Holding me steady with his arm, he turned back to the cheering crowd.

At this point, I had to hold onto the car just to stand up. My God, I thought this man is unreal. I had lied to myself. His arm still held me tight against him as he knew I wasn't ready to stand on my own yet. He looked down at me once again and smiled. Damn him. I shook my head as I saw Casey and Adrianna making their way through the crowd to take me away.

Casey's hand covered her mouth, trying to hide her laughter. Adrianna at least had the decency to bite her lip until they got me through the crowd. Once we were through the crowd, Adrianna let it slip. Casey couldn't even talk to me, she was laughing so hard. I stood there in front of them with my hands on my hips. Casey finally gained a little control of herself. She walked over to me, put her arm around my waist and pulled me close to her side.

"Julie, I'm sorry but it was just the expression on your face," Casey laughed.

"He is known for being a great kisser." Adrianna smiled having some consideration for me. "There are probably twenty-five women out there waiting for him to win a race. You just happened to be his good luck charm tonight."

"So?" Casey shot out, "Is his reputation ruined?"

I looked at both of them and shook my head. "Damn ya'll." I laughed with them. For the first time, I actually felt like laughing. Tonight was a surprise in more ways than one. For some odd reason, it reminded me of my fourteenth birthday party when Casey dared Daniel to kiss me. Again, she puts me in the middle of a situation where I have to kiss someone, a definite feeling of *déjà vu*.

"Well, I probably need to get her back home. I don't exactly think she would enjoy the celebration party," Casey said.

"Why? What happens? Please don't tell me you go out and drink human blood," I tossed out.

Adrianna looked and Casey then to me. "Well, some of them have what they call

groupies. We usually don't participate and leave early. We have a few glasses of wine and celebrate at home."

"Will all of you leave?" My question was mainly interested in whether Richard was going to participate in the group activities.

My question was not answered as Richard and Nathaniel were walking up. I loved to watch him walk. He had the sexiest walk I have ever seen. It was something about the way his legs moved, his back and shoulders straight, he walked proudly, like he was a great ruler from a time long past. Casey left my side and went to Nathaniel. Richard moved closer to me. He shot a quick glance to Adrianna and smiled.

"So, have they invited you to our home for the winner's party?" he asked as his eyes trailed to me.

My heart started that rapid beating again. I wondered if he was thinking I would be a part of his groupies. I cleared my throat as I considered the visions of vampires feeding off young women, and passing them around like whores.

"Well," I wrinkled my nose. "I'm not into the group thing." I watched as his eyebrows rose and realized I may have said the wrong thing. I always manage to say the wrong thing to him. "I mean a groupie. Group. The group thing ... I mean." Oh, I realized I was making it worse. My face burned as the blood rushed to the surface.

Richard chuckled lightly. "Oh, I see. Well, neither am I. We basically head back home and have a few glasses of wine to celebrate. I am sure I have a type of wine that would satisfy your taste buds." He smiled.

My heart stopped suddenly and began again. I wasn't sure how to take his offer. I glanced at Casey. She only smiled and turned her head away from me to face Nathaniel. Adrianna was the only one who came to my rescue.

"Yes, that is a good idea. Richard owns a vineyard in France. He has an exquisite wine collection."

"I would be honored if you joined me, Julie." He voice was velvety smooth and alluring.

"Well, sure, why not." I spat out.

"Great. You can ride back with me. I need to change, so don't disappear on me." He said as he walked off and slapped Nathaniel on the arm.

Nathaniel shot me a warm glance and smiled as he trailed off behind Richard. Casey's eyes twinkled with a humor that made me uncomfortable. I know she wanted to say something, and I was very proud of her as she kept her thoughts to herself. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but at least it had pulled me out of the dark hole I had been sucked into.

"Come on, Julie, let's get you changed." Adrianna said now taking me by the hand.

The thoughts traveled through my mind how different these people were from the snobbish family I was used to. The change of pace was refreshing as I could see why Casey enjoyed being with Nathaniel. Most of my life, I was raised around social events and high priced dinner parties. Rarely did our families go to a race, even though we lived so close to the track. My father's hunting outings with Thomas consisted of killing werewolves. Here, I saw the vampires live a more relaxed and enjoyable life than the

rich and uppity Lycans.

I changed clothes and joined Casey and Adrianna outside the trailer. We were discussing the periling moments of the race when Richard pulled up in his black mustang. The driver's side door opened and Richard eased out of the car. We all watched as he walked smoothly around the front of the car to the passenger side and opened the door. I couldn't help from taking notice of how nice he looked. He wore a pair of dark blue jeans, with a black dress shirt un-tucked and the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. His hair was still damp, and he had it combed straight back revealing a clearly defined widow's peak. His sandy brown hair looked darker wet, giving a more surreal appearance to the mysterious vampire he really was.

Taking a deep breath to prepare myself, I turned to Casey and Adrianna. "Okay guys, I'll see you back at the house." Raising my eyebrows, I turned and walked to the mustang that waited.

Once seated inside the incredible man-car, I couldn't help from getting goose bumps on my arms as I heard the engine rumble as the car took off. My old mustang was nothing compared to this horse. I smiled to myself as I realized the car fit Richard. It was stylish, but masculine, power behind a sleek appearance and muscular underneath a hard exterior. Yes, that would pretty much describe Richard.

I sat quietly, watching him pull out onto the main road. Slowly he leaned over, reaching for the stereo controls. He paused for a moment and glanced over to me.

"What kind of music do you prefer?"

For a moment, I couldn't even remember as my gaze lingered on those lips that had kissed me so passionately less than an hour ago. Tightly I closed my eyes and concentrated hard.

"I like almost everything. What about you?"

"It depends on my mood." A sly grin crossed his face as he pushed a couple of buttons. His hand returned to the steering wheel and a smooth jazz song came.

"Feeling mellow?" I asked smiling.

He glanced at me and smiled. "Somewhat."

A smile crossed my face as I turned my head and looked out the window. Funny, I imagined Richard more of a gothic rock fan. However, I enjoyed the soft and soothing sound of jazz. I leaned back against the leather seat and relaxed.

"So, did you have a good time tonight?" His voice was so smooth it sounded as if he almost purred.

"Yes." I nodded feeling the beat of the music. "I had a very good time. I loved being in the middle of the action. Watching the monitor with Adrianna and Casey. Not to mention listening to Leona. She's awesome. Especially, when you ran through that smoke. We all froze while watching you. I'm surprised you didn't hear us all cheering." I rambled on in an excited voice.

He chuckled lightly. "I *did* hear you," he said motioning to his ear.

"Oh. You have extended range hearing." I said nodding my head. Of course, I thought, he was a vampire.

"So how exactly did you manage to start racing cars?"

Richard relaxed back in the seat and dropped his right hand down across his leg. I didn't realize at first that he was tense.

"I guess you would say I have always had an interest in cars. Ever since Ford began." He looked at me and smiled then turned his attention back to the road. "A few of us got together and went to the car races at night back when racing began. Soon, there were more of our kind joining in with us. There was no way we would be able to compete with humans without exposing ourselves. So we just decided one night we would get some cars and have our own race. Over the last few years, we have developed quite nicely."

"So you just race twice a year?"

He nodded.

"How can you stand it? If it was me, I would want to be out there every weekend."

"So you are a groupie?" He glanced toward me with a wicked grin and then he laughed lightly.

The vision returned of those young girls.

"No! You know what I mean. It's just exciting."

"Yes, but it's even more exciting when you wait. Sometimes the waiting makes the win so much sweeter." His right eyebrow rose, and a wicked grin crossed his beautiful face.

For a moment, I wondered if we were talking about the same thing. Apparently, my mind went in another direction as my face became hot. It was a good thing the inside of the car was dark so he could not see the red glowing on my cheeks.

"So how many wins have you had?" I managed to recoup.

"A few."

"How many is a few?"

"Five in the last twenty years, none in the last five years. Like I said you brought me luck tonight."

"So it was a sweet win tonight then?" I teased.

"Very sweet." He smiled broadly, and I could see his brilliantly white teeth shining through the dark.

I turned back and stared out the window as I listened to the music. The rest of the ride was quiet as we turned down a paved road and headed deep into the wooded area. It reminded me of my driveway. Secluded. Soon we arrived at a large two-story home. We pulled around to the garage where he parked the car. Before I had a chance to open my door, Richard was already standing beside my door opening it for me. He held his hand out for me as I stepped out of the car.

We walked into the huge living room where Richard picked up a remote control and turned the stereo system on. A different type of music played. I listened carefully and noticed it was gothic rock. I laughed a little as he turned to me.

"What?" He asked looking at me in surprise.

"Nothing."

"If you do not like it, I can change it."

"No, no it's fine."

"I will be right back," he said as he dashed off.

A few seconds he returned with a glass of white wine. He handed it to me proudly.

"This is from my vineyard in France. It reminds me of you."

I took the glass and inhaled the fragrance.

"A light fragrance. Floral and fruity." I took a sip and let it settle on my tongue for a moment. "It is excellent."

A huge smile crossed his face. "Yes, it is Le Croux De Grave'. One of my favorite rum wines."

"I didn't think vampires could eat or drink." I said taking another sip.

"Actually, we do not eat human food. However, I have not lost my taste for a good wine, and do indulge in it every now and then. The other's usually made a cocktail mixture with the wine to make it more palatable for them to consume."

"Palatable?"

"Well, we will just say it gives a new meaning to a Bloody Mary."

I gasped as I set the wine glass down.

"Oh," he said in surprise. "I am sorry. I did not mean that your wine was spiked. Your glass is fresh from the bottle."

My eyebrows rose. "I'm only joking. Your wine is very delightful." I said as my lips curled into a smile.

We both turned as I heard the door opened and Casey and Nathaniel appeared. Leona and Lance followed them into the room. I looked for Adrianna and Raphael, but didn't see them.

"Adrianna and Raphael are coming a little later. They need to hunt first," Casey stated as she walked toward me.

"Anyone up for a drink?" Nathaniel shot out.

"Two!" Lance yelled out grabbing the control from Richard.

"Let's get this party started, brother!" he said, changing the music to a sultry Latin salsa.

Leona walked over to Lance bringing him two shot glasses of a red substance; I didn't dare ask. I glanced to Richard, and he rolled his eyes and smiled. They downed the drink together as Leona moved with Lance dancing around the large room.

"Here you go." Nathaniel handed Casey a glass of what I was guessing was a red wine cocktail mixture.

I watched as she took a sip, then turned the glass up and finished its contents. She stood and held her hand out for Nathaniel. He finished off his glass and set it down on the coffee table beside hers. I watched as they strolled off to the middle of the floor. I forgot Casey knew how to salsa.

"Do you salsa?" Richard asked.

I frowned slightly as I watched the four of them on the floor. Pursing my lips together, I looked up to him and smiled. "Not very well."

"Come on. I am a very good teacher." He held his hand out.

I took his hand and we headed out to join the rest of them. Slowly, I turned to face him as I glanced around at Casey and Nathaniel. A cool finger under my chin directed

my attention to him.

"Stay focused," he cautioned as his hand slipped around my waist and he took my free hand in his.

I kept my eyes locked onto his. Richard moved on the beat of the music. He stepped to me, and I took a step back. We did it again. Soon, his cold hands slid around my hips as he moved me, guided me, more fluidly with him. I wasn't sure if it was his cold hands that sent the shiver up my spine, or my own desire for him. Concentrating on the movements, it wasn't long before I caught on. He smiled as his hand returned to mine, and he pulled me closer to his body. It almost felt like we were doing a mixture of a salsa and a tango, the way Richard moved me. He let me out on a spin. When I returned, I could feel his knee between my legs, and he moved me against his body. He was an awesome dancer; I gave him that. Not to mention, I loved a man who could take the lead.

After my initial shock was over, I had the hang of it and we were dancing. Our bodies moved together in a beautiful rhythm, sultry and seductive. What else would I have expected from Richard, a waltz? No, not Richard, he had style and finesse in everything he did. He was a model of perfection and definitely too good to be true. The muscles in his arms flexed against my fingers. He moved me gently, with ease, pulling me closer to his cool body, my hot body melting into his. Our hips met, closely and tightly we moved together as one to the rhythm of the music.

I had begun to let go and have fun. Casey and I even switched with Richard and Nathaniel a couple of times on a spin. We laughed as we switched back partners. It wasn't long before Richard appeared to keep me on a tighter lead. He spun me out and pulled me back to him as we kept dancing. His hand pressed flat against my stomach holding me close to him as we moved together. My hands instinctively went up over my head, feeling his fingers trace up my side to my hand. He gave me a little shove, and pulled me back to face him.

The world I knew spun around me as his hand gripped the back of my neck. My body pressed tightly to his as we moved together. I felt his leg slip between mine again as he pulled me backwards in a dip in his hand. He then, with one hand resting on the small of my back, pulled my body up along his leg. My breath caught for a second in my throat, and then I exhaled when he pulled me tight against him. It was a feeling that made the blood suddenly rush through my veins. His hand cupped the back of my neck and pulled my face only inches from his as we kept moving to the rhythm of the music. We were eye to eye, as the world disappeared from us.

He turned me into a spin and pulled me back to his hard body as the music ended. The heart inside of my chest pounded, not from the dance but from the look on Richard's face. Our faces were close enough I could smell that faint floral fragrance. His eyes stared deep into mine as we held each other for a moment.

Slowly his eyes traveled down to my lips, then back to my eyes again. My heart beat loudly as I could feel the fire flaming through my veins. He held me tight against his body, but did not move one inch toward me. My thoughts traveled back to the first kiss.

"The first kiss. Why did you..." I stopped.

The expression on his face changed, his face softened. He turned his head slightly to the side and exhaled. He had been holding his breath.

Turning back to me he looked deep in my eyes. "I was afraid it was the only chance I would ever have." He paused, his attention directed toward Adrianna and Raphael who had just entered the room.

Richard loosened his hold on me as I stepped back. He glanced at his watch, then at Casey. I looked down at my watch and realized it was already three in the morning. Casey walked over to me and put her arm around my shoulder.

"I better get you back home. It is late and you need to get some rest," she said lightly.

I glanced back to Richard, then again to Casey. "I guess you're right."

"Come on. I will walk you to the car." He said as he slipped his arm between Casey and me.

We walked out the front door, to the car where he opened the passenger door for me. I eased into the seat and turned to see him with one arm on the car door, and the other on the hood hovering over me. He frowned slightly as he looked down at the ground then looked at me.

"I really hope you had a good time tonight," he said softly.

I smiled. "Yes, Richard, I did. Thank you. OH! And I loved your wine," I said smiling.

He chuckled as a smile crossed his face. "Good," he said, then his eyes narrowed. "Until next time." He reached down, took my hand, and pressed it to his lips. Moving back, he closed the door and gave it a little tap.

Casey started the car and pulled off. I couldn't help but look in the mirror as I watched him standing in the driveway watching us drive off. It was such an odd feeling, watching the distance become greater between us. It was a feeling I couldn't put my finger on. Curiosity, admiration, respect, none of these words could fully express what I was feeling. Richard was the most charming man I had ever met, and I truly respected him.

I was surprised, as Casey remained quiet while we drove back to the house. Though at this moment, I was glad she did. I was tired. When we made it back, it was all I could do to walk up the stairs and crawl into my bed. Within seconds, I was out and in a dream world. Sleeping softly as the day's memories flooded my dreams.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Devastation is a word that I am very familiar with when it comes to delicate matters of the heart. When a heart is shattered into a billion tiny pieces, it's a wonder it can ever be repaired. We search for answers to our brokenness, looking for a way to cope with

our devastation. The heart is the toughest organ in the body, and the hardest to burn. It's not a wonder that the pain we endure is even so much greater when it comes to deep emotions. This is pretty much what I had been feeling because of my separation with Daniel, totally devastated.

I lay on my back as I realized it was daylight. Slowly, I turned to the alarm clock, it was already twelve thirty. Memories of yesterday and last night came back to me as my mind awoke to reality. At least, I thought, I was out of my fog thanks to Casey. Today was Thursday, the last day, Day Three. Daniel would be home today. Excitement overflowed my soul and heart, which caused me to look forward to the day at hand.

An hour later, and I was ready to meet the challenges of the day. Casey was nowhere to be found. I wasn't sure if she was back home or out for a few hours. Last night, I remembered her coming inside the house with me.

The smell of coffee lured me into the kitchen, like a moth to a flame. Casey had made a fresh pot of coffee for me and left me a note:

*Hey sleepy head! Coffee's fresh just for you. I knew you needed the sleep.
I had to go and find lunch. It was that or you really were beginning to look a
little tempting. Shouldn't be long!
Luv- ya! C.*

The girl is a nutty vampire, I thought, setting the note down and laughing to myself. I love her no matter how nutty she is. Laughing again, I almost forgot her new needs. The thought of her being a vampire seemed unimportant anymore. I realized as I was with the group of them last night, I barely noticed they were vampires. Well, with the exception of the Bloody Mary thing.

With my coffee cup securely in my hand, I headed to the office. It was time to see what needed to be taken care of in the real world. I sorted through all the mail Casey had piled on my desk. There appeared to be a list of things I needed to do now. Transfer funds, pay bills, check wire transfers and review financial statements. Not to mention balance the checking accounts. Maybe this was the reason my father had a personal assistant. Maybe I should consider the option for the future.

Deep into reconciling the bank statements, the doorbell rang. I cursed under my breath and saved the information. Walking through the living room, I noticed a man dressed in a delivery uniform. Opening the door to him, he smiled and looked at his clipboard.

"Julie Knight?"

"Yes?" I said looking past him to a small brown delivery van.

"I have a delivery for you, if you would please sign here."

I took the clipboard and signed my name at the bottom of the page. Curiously, I watched him walk around the van and return with a large crystal vase full of white roses.

"Here you go, ma'am. They were special ordered; it took us a little while to collect them, sorry if they are late. Enjoy them and have a great day."

The smell of the flowers was incredibly fragrant. I had never smelled a white rose

that smelled so sweet. Walking into the living room, I searched for a card. I set the vase on the center of the coffee table. There had to be at least two dozen roses in this vase. Finally, I found the card and opened it.

I was walking through a rose garden and thought of you. There was a white rose, so breathtakingly beautiful, so pure, yet so fragrant. Its name is called Peace. I hope it brings you as much peace as you have brought to my life. I look forward to seeing your beautiful smile again.

Richard

A smile immediately crossed my face, followed by those warm feelings I had last night. They were the loveliest flowers I had ever seen. Charlotte's rose garden was beautiful, and she had the Peace rose in her collection. These were very different, probably because they were a gift, and what a beautiful gift it was. I exhaled as my fingers touched the soft petals. They were so velvety soft; I couldn't resist the temptation from leaning over and smelling them again. Closing my eyes, I allowed the fragrance to fill me.

The door to the patio door opened breaking me from my moment of bliss. I turned to see Casey walk through with her shirt torn and ragged. A frown crossed my face as I watched her close the door behind her.

"Hey!" she said as if nothing was wrong. "Ooh, who sent those?"

"Richard. Casey, what happened to you?"

"Oh. I might need a new shirt," she said casually looking at the flowers, again. "My, um, lunch decided to attack back."

I stared at her in disbelief as if it was no big deal to her. The memory of the story Richard had told me about Casey's little hunting problem flashed through my mind. "What on earth were you having, that attacked you like that? A grizzly bear? Where was Nathaniel?"

"He was with me. It really wasn't all that bad," she replied, taking the card out of my hand to read it.

I grabbed the card out of her hand and pointed to the stairs. "You know where they are."

She smiled as she headed up the stairs. "Richard, huh?"

"Okay, please don't start." I begged as I heard the all too familiar "hee-hee-hee."

I took the card with me as I went back into the office to finish the bank statement. A few moments later, Casey strolled in and sat down in front of the desk.

"Have you called to thank him yet?" she asked leaning back in the chair crossing her legs.

"I don't have his number, and there isn't one on the card," I said as I continued looking at the computer. "Besides, I don't want to encourage him. Daniel is going to be home today."

"Hey babe, is Richard around?"

My mouth flew open as I saw her holding her cell phone next to her ear. It was already too late to protest.

"Hey Richard, hold on, someone wants to talk to you." She said and handed me the phone.

"I am going to kill you." I mouthed to her. She made a motion with her hands and silently mouthed back "*Bring it on.*"

"Richard." My voice was a little shaky.

"Hello, Julie." His voice was soft and smooth.

"I just wanted to thank you for the beautiful roses."

"You are most certainly welcome. I am very pleased you are enjoying them."

"Yes, I am. I love roses. Peace happens to be my favorite. How did you know?" I glared at Casey who looked away with a grin on her lips.

Richard laughed lightly. "Well, I would never divulge my source. The main point is that they have brought a smile to your face."

A smile broadened across my face as I answered. "Yes, they did."

"Excellent...I can actually hear your smile. Well, enjoy them and keep smiling. I will talk with you later."

"All right," I said as I heard the phone click. I closed the cell phone and handed it back to Casey.

"You are a dirty dog," I sneered at her. "Whose side are you on, anyway?"

"Oh, get over yourself, Julie!" She laughed. "I'm on your side, remember?"

For a moment, I considered her statement and my eyes narrowed as I looked at her.

"Are you playing match maker again?" I asked firmly.

"Nope."

"Casey?"

"I swear it!" Her eyes widened as her voice rose to a tone that stung my ears. "I just know that you were in a gloomy situation. Everyone noticed it. Well, it seemed that Richard brightened it up a bit for you," she said, bobbing her foot up and down.

The rest of the evening, I worked on taking care of business matters. I managed to convince Casey I would be safe long enough for her to go and spend some time with Nathaniel. She hesitated, but agreed that she missed him and promised she would return later on in the night to check on me. I couldn't help from feeling alone after she left, but I knew it was the best for her and me. Casey had a mate now, and she needed to be spending her time with him and not protecting me. Besides, my danger must not be that serious, as I had not heard from Daniel in three days. There was still pain in my heart over our separation and I worried about him. What if something had happened to him? What if something happened to all of them? Who would call me and let me know? Would someone even know to send me word? What were they all doing anyway? Why was it so secret?

Fear grew inside of me at all of the "what ifs". The only thing I could do at this point was wait. I didn't want to over speculate.

It was already dark outside when I decided to leave the house and go into town. Hunger had settled in, and I was in the mood for something different. I had decided Italian was a good choice, so I stopped at Antonio's Italian Restaurant. A table for one was not as bad I had thought. The restaurant was dimly lit, and they managed to seat me

in a nice quiet area. I nestled in my chair and read over the menu quietly.

The choices were almost too many to decide, but since their lasagna had always been a favorite, I ordered it instead of the spaghetti. A few minutes later, my waitress brought out my salad and drink. I was hungry, so I couldn't understand why I was picking over my food. It was odd to be here by myself. My father and I would always come here at least twice a month before I left for college. Maybe this was what was bothering me.

The food was as excellent as I remembered. The waitress arrived and brought me a take home box as I slipped my credit card out of my wallet. She returned shortly with the bill for me to sign. In a hurry, I signed the receipt with a tip, and left it on the table as I exited the restaurant.

The anxiety crept back into my heart. I tried very hard to remind myself that Daniel was on his way back home. He told me it would be only three days. Well, today was the last day. He was due to come home this evening. So my excitement began to build. I couldn't wait to see that handsome man of mine.

Maybe I could make it home before he did. However, I was a little concerned because there was still no call from Daniel. I wondered if something was wrong. I shuddered at the thought, and climbed into my car. It might be a good idea to make it back home before he did. At least then he wouldn't have to know I was out having dinner by myself.

The interstate was in sight and I could make it home in time. Pressing the accelerator to the floor, I raced down the newly paved road. The cars were few on the highway, which was good for me as I continued my race home.

Suddenly without warning, my car jerked forward. I glanced down at the controls, then in the rear view mirror. It was a white truck, and it had just rammed into the back of my car. My foot hit the accelerator hard, the car in front of me slowed down, as the truck behind me rammed me again. This time he meant business as I weaved and tried not to hit the car in front of me. I slammed on the brakes and my car skidded sideways to a stop.

Everything was a blur from that point, moving in slow motion. The white truck skidded to a stop behind my car. Two men got out, I tried to start the car and one of them ripped the door off its hinges and pulled me out. Dear Fate they were werewolves! The stench overwhelmed me as I struggled to free myself from the steel grip on my arms. The other one pushed my car off the embankment, into the trees down below.

The next thing I remember, I jerked free from the one, and punched him in the stomach then brought my knee up to his head. The other one grabbed my arm and spun me around. I blocked his punch and landed him a close right as hard as I could, sending him back a few feet. Suddenly, the other one grabbed me around the waist pinning my arms to my sides. I pushed my back against his chest and stomped down on his foot. He bent forward as I tried to flip him when I felt something hard come under my chin. The world around me spun out of control as I fell deep into a spiral of darkness.

* * *

Vague voices and some unknown noises faded in and out as I came around. Slowly,

my eyes fluttered open. My head pounded from the excessive blow to my jaw. The light from the darkness I had sunk into diminished, and I became aware of my surroundings. I sat in a chair with my hands tied behind my back. This was not good. The stench from the smell of werewolves was strong, way too strong for me to breathe.

"Yeah, she's awake." I heard a male voice say. A chair slid across the floor.

Footsteps were heard on the floor and they moved slowly. From the sound of them, it was two men walking toward me. The stench of them was unbearable. I managed. I had no choice.

One of them stopped before me. I didn't raise my head high enough to look into his face. My head still felt like someone set loose a jackhammer inside of it. He squatted down in front of me. Probably so he could look at me eye to eye.

"Yeah, Paul you're right, she's the one. She is a pretty thing," he said eyeing me.

The man in front of me was of stocky build. Thick. He wore a plaid shirt with the sleeves ripped out, and his thick arms were covered in tattoos. Even his bald head had tattoos on the side. He took a drag of his cigarette and blew the smoke in my face. I turned my head and coughed.

"Yeah, she's good," he said then backed away.

Another man walked in front of me. He was around the same height as Baldy, but was slender in build. His hair was dark blond and slicked back on his head. The jeans he wore indicated he had somewhat good taste and the shirt was a fairly expensive brand.

"Yes, I think we got the right one this time. This is his bitch," he spoke up and then smiled at me. "You, my dear, have been a bitch to get a hold of."

"What do you want with me?" I hissed between my teeth.

He eyed me over a minute. He inhaled deeply. "Mmm, you know you are so damn tempting. See, right now you are like a bitch in heat to my boys. So if you don't cooperate, I might let them...let's say, have a very good time." He narrowed his eyes, "If you know what I mean."

I growled a throaty growl as his hand touched my leg. "What do you want?" My eyes narrowed against his.

"Your mate actually. See, I hear he's up for the Lycan council. Frankly, we are a little tired of you wolves killing our boys out there. So, we are going to pluck you apart one by one. I figure we will tempt them into a little fight with us. Once we rid ourselves of the Lycans, we will then take care of your family, Those Dark Wolves which have provided such a distraction to the Council."

"You LIE!" I spat out.

"No, my dear." He laughed lightly. "I take it you don't know your family of Indians are the Dark Wolves. I must say they have given us a run for our money as well. But it will be over soon. My plan worked very well to create a Civil war between the clans and the Dark Wolves. It was actually very easy. I just had to set the right trap, and let the Dark Wolves know the truth about what the Council was planning. I don't need anyone in my way at this point. Not even your precious Daniel."

"Daniel will kill you!" I sneered.

He laughed, and then looked around to the other three men that stood by.

"You know, I really think he'll kill you first when he finds the scent of a vampire on you." He laughed loudly, and then became serious. "*But that will be our little secret.*" He whispered.

"Fuck you!" I hissed at him.

"Oh honey! Don't tempt me, because after I fuck you I'm going to enjoy what's left of your flesh. You are just simply mouthwatering." he sneered into my face.

I turned my head, to keep the stench of him from my face.

"Now tell me where the Council is meeting," he stated firmly, planting his foot between my legs on the chair.

"I don't know."

"Wrong answer." He drew back his hand and slapped me.

Anger welled inside of me. I snapped my head back to him, and fire flew through my veins as I glared through my narrowed eyes.

"You pussy bitch!" I spat out, "You want a piece of me, then let me loose!" I growled.

His eyebrows rose as behind him one of the other men let out a chuckle.

"She's a feisty one, better watch out! She might bite you!" Baldy roared out in laughter.

"You really want to die, don't you?"

"Not before I kick your stinky wolf wannabe ass!" I was furious; my teeth were clicking inside my mouth.

Judging from where I was located, it appeared to be an old warehouse. Several cars, some dusty and some covered in white cloths were around us. It could be a body shop. The smell of auto paint filled the air. Yes, it was definitely a body shop. Glancing up, it was still daylight outside, so I knew they couldn't change. I had forgotten whether tonight held a full moon or not.

"Now I'm going to ask you nicely one more time. Where is the Council meeting?"

"I told you I don't know!"

The back of his hand came across my face so hard, tiny stars beaded in front of my eyes. Another shot of anger welled inside of me to the point of rage. I wanted nothing more than for him to feel my teeth as they tore out his flesh.

"Stop!" Another voice said as I heard a door shut.

Footsteps came up from behind me. I could tell it was another werewolf by the stench. My senses ran wild. He placed his hands on my shoulders.

"Julie Knight, daughter of the infamous Martin Knight. Soon to be the wife of Daniel Maxwell." He moved in front of me.

Instinctively I released a warning growl at him. It was Brendan Phillips.

"From what I hear, Thomas Maxwell is trying to find me. Wonder what for? I suppose because of Dr. Miller. Yes, I had a little run in with Dr. Miller quite some time ago. I must say, what he had to offer me was something. As you can see, I decided to make the most of what I have. Unlike you and your wolf kind."

"Why are you doing this? Daniel could help you!"

"I don't need any help! The only thing I need is to get rid of you and your kind. My

brothers have run from you for far too long. I have bigger plans than you could ever imagine."

"You won't survive! I promise you. If you kill me, you will have a fight on your hands, more than what you've bargained for," I hissed.

"Yes, I'm sure your little vampire friends will come for us. I have a little surprise for them as well. Something they should favor very well. The military has a large amount of weapons at their disposal. Some just take a little modification. Just enough to take care of our dear friends the vampires." He smirked out a grin.

Oh dear, now Richard and the rest of them were in more danger than I realized. These guys were not planning on playing fair. They had pulled in military weapons to kill vampires. The odds were not in our favor. Apparently, the Lycans were not the only ones walking into a trap. These guys meant business.

Brendan turned to the one named Paul. "I know where the Council is hiding. Assemble your group, and we will meet them tonight. I've sent word out to Mr. Maxwell. If he wants his darling little mate back alive, he will meet us in hanger one of the airport. We've got approximately two more hours before dark. I am sure they will be there waiting, so let's not disappoint them." He turned back to me. "Make sure she is unable to change, but don't kill her. I need her alive."

My heart slammed inside my body as I watched him walk away. Visions of Casey flashed through my mind, and I knew what they had in mind. Fear ripped through me. I thought they could at least give me a fighting chance. Maybe I could kill one of them before I was beaten nearly half to death.

The door opened and closed behind me. This was it. Someone stood behind me and the restraints on my hands loosened. The only rational thing for me to do was run. I had to get away. Save myself. Save my child. Daniel had no idea he was in this much danger. The werewolves were separating us from the Council, leaving the Council members vulnerable. No one knew the trap was set so thick. If the vampires showed up, which if I knew Daniel, in my absence he would have already contacted Richard somehow. Richard would show up with his brothers and be destroyed. Someone was going to die tonight, but who I was not sure.

I pushed up from the chair, grabbed it and spun around. I hit the man in the head behind me, breaking the chair into pieces. The one named Paul came for me. I turned and threw a punch into his throat. He gasped then coughed before he fell backwards. Flinging myself forward, I grabbed the back of the wooden chair and slammed it on top of old Baldy as he lunged for me. The other one in the back came running towards me. I bolted into a run towards the exit sign I saw above the door. Someone fired a gunshot. A sharp sting in my shoulder soon turned into a burning pain as I tilted forward to the floor. I went down to the ground. I closed my eyes as I felt the excruciating pain from the gunshot blistering in my shoulder.

The one named Paul pulled me up from the floor by my hair. The next second, he promptly beat the living hell out of me. After I fell on the floor for the third time, red blood spilled out onto the floor as I heaved a cough. Yes, it would have been better if they had killed me. It felt as if every bone in my body was broken. I knew my ribs were

broken because it was difficult for me to breathe. He pulled me up from the floor. I uttered a silent prayer, a prayer that my child would live through this. The last thing I remembered was seeing the floor again as my world went black.

Somewhere in the haze of my pain, I knew I was being moved. The next thing I remember was far worse. My eyes fluttered open and closed. I saw before me a large werewolf, his eyes flaming red. The stench of him upset my stomach. He reached down and in one swift motion, grabbed my already tortured body. My feet left the floor as he brought me face to face with him. In a quick motion his head went to my neck. His teeth penetrated deeply in my flesh. He dropped me like a rag doll back on the floor.

My world continued to spin. The burning inside my body became feverish. My skin burned where he had bit me. I could feel a rush from the bite running into my veins. The werewolf venom spread through my body as my heart raced. Fire and ice fought within my body. My face burned as my body convulsed, sending me into a rage of ice-tempered madness.

The feeling of an explosion welled inside of me, where the burning began. My muscles constricted in pain and then the moment came that I hadn't expected.

The ice burned inside my chest. The newfound burning sensation sent me into an obfuscated melody of pain. My eyes flew open against the pain. My hands clutched into fists as the muscles in my arms screamed for mercy. The ice ran through every part of my body that was flesh. Opening my mouth, I released a blood-curdling scream as the fire and ice clashed against my veins. The shell of my body trembled and shook uncontrollably. I knew the werewolf venom was in my system. The only thoughts I had were of my child. Would it live through this nightmare? Would it survive? What would become of it if it did?

Spasms ran through my muscles again. Gritting my teeth together, I was determined to fight the pain. The fire and ice clashed again as my body twisted into another convulsion. Closing my eyes, I bared down against the pain. The only sound that came out was a deep menacing growl.

Fevered and exhausted, my body continued constricting and convulsing. The fire and ice continued its war, a war that raged on with no avail.

My will was strong, but the exhaustion took over. I could no longer fight against the muscles that controlled my body. My eyes opened and closed with each clash of the fire and ice. If it had not been for the pain in my muscles, I would have thought I had died.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Somewhere in the midst of my continuum of pain and high fever, I heard a faint noise. My eyes fluttered open again in a moment of slight consciousness. There were men standing around me, approximately ten men, and they were all holding what appeared to be military guns. I struggled to regain my consciousness, coming in and out

of the blackness. The war with the werewolf venom raged on inside of my body.

The men guarded the doorways and probably any other opening which my rescuers might attempt to use. Suddenly, I jumped. A series of gunshots fired. Blackness took me over again. The smell of blood emanated from somewhere nearby. It was my blood I smelled.

I felt as if I was drifting into a dark hole. The fire and ice clashed through my veins, and death would not come fast enough for me. A familiar scent I recognized, the scent of lilies and carnations surrounded my senses. I knew I must have died. Then the thought hit me; I couldn't have died! I was still in pain.

"Julie? Julie? Can you hear me?" The voice whispered as I felt his cool breath on my face. It was Richard.

The voice broke off as my eyes fluttered open. I could hear voices, but I was in too much pain to understand what they were saying. I vaguely saw the body moving away from me. The man named Paul and someone who I'm pretty sure was Richard were fighting. I heard gunshots again. Then blurs flashed before me, and there was a loud cracking and ripping noise. The stench of werewolf blood filled the air.

My body was lifted and the earth fell from behind me. The coolness of his cold, hard chest pressed against my flesh, and the wind blew into my face as I drifted out of consciousness once again.

The next thing I knew, I could hear voices around me. And there was a familiar smell, a spicy scent, the scent of Lycans. And I could smell the scent of vampires. My body was laid on something soft. A sharp sting in my arm caused me to cry out in pain that was soon to be followed by another dull pain as I heard something snap. The pain in my arm was gone.

Voices spoke loudly around me. They were arguing.

"Daniel, it's not good." I heard Jason's voice beside me. "Her fever. The venom, I'm sorry."

"Just do the damn test again!" Daniel roared.

"We've done it! It doesn't work on her! She doesn't have the same DNA as Casey did!" Jason shot out.

"Tell me what to do!" Daniel's voice roared loudly. "I'M NOT LOSING HER!"

"There is one other option." Richard spoke out softly.

Richard's voice was the last thing I heard before my world spiraled into a black hole again. The arguing grew louder as I diminished; falling away until no more sound was heard.

Suddenly, I was scooped up again. The coolness felt good against my fevered skin. Softly I heard three words that etched themselves in my heart. "Julie, *I love you.*" Soon after that, I felt a sharp sensation in my neck. My body trembled as I felt a coolness rush through my fevered body. Blackness again took me over.

The fire and ice clashed harder again as it ran through my veins. A scream erupted as my muscles tensed again. My body convulsed violently beyond my control. My eyes flickered open and I saw it was night. I closed them tightly as I bore down against the pain shooting through my body again. Gritting my teeth, I growled again suffering

through the agony I felt.

Brief glimpses of Jason, faded in and out, as he stood over me with what appeared to be an IV bag. I glanced down and noticed it was attached to me. He was giving me a blood transfusion. What in the world has happening?

Then the room was silent. For what felt like a few moments, I had a little rest. My breathing was back to normal, and my heart slowed down to a normal beat. The tremors slowed to match the rhythm of my heart.

Funny, I thought, I could smell him. The spicy scent, it must be Daniel. I could feel something cold against my body. The familiar fragrant floral scent...Richard. His scent was very relaxing to me as I inhaled it deeply.

I wasn't sure how long I rested in this newfound peace. It seemed like only a few minutes. The first thing I noticed was that my fingers were cold. I moved them trying to circulate a blood flow to them. It made it worse. As soon as I moved, I felt the ice running through my veins. I opened my eyes to see Daniel as he stood over me with a horrified look on his face.

"Julie? Can you hear me?" he asked softly.

My mouth opened, but no words came out. I wondered if I really had tried to speak or was it my imagination.

"Do it then," I heard him speak clearly.

I felt coolness against my neck. A sharp pain followed, and my eyes flew open. I couldn't see anything but the darkness surrounding me. Then a second later, I felt the dull sensation of pressure in my neck. It felt as though my blood was being pulled through my veins. I could feel the fire being pulled from me.

Suddenly, as the fire yielded against the ice, I felt something change. It was the most horrible pain I ever felt. The ice burned through the fire quenching it. At least now, my body was cooling down. The tremors still continued as I could feel someone wiping my forehead again.

Here we go again, I thought as my body started trembling. The feeling of ice was far greater than the fire I had felt. Chilled to the bone was not a statement I would ever use lightly again. I felt the ice as it bore down into the depth of my bones. The ice ran through my muscles, and they constricted again feeling the coldness taking over. Not being prepared for what happened next, my body shook uncontrollably.

There it was. The pain I had expected. The ice felt like a cold blade as it cut into my flesh. I was afraid to open my eyes. My heartbeat slowed again as the ice ran into the large muscle. My leg muscles tightened into cramps as I clinched my teeth together. Next came the muscles in my arms, my stomach and my neck. I trembled and shook violently again under the constriction of my muscles. Soon the convulsions slowed down as the ice moved back up to my heart again.

I opened my eyes again as I felt my chest constrict. It felt as though someone had reached inside my body and squeezed my heart. I gasped. Dear Fate, I'm dying! This was my last plea as I felt the ice burst out through my body again. My heartbeat slowed as it pushed the ice through my veins. The shock was more like falling into freezing water. My lips trembled as I felt the convulsions return.

In the next few moments, I thought I had died. I heard the ghostly drums as they beat all around me, voices chanting loudly, singing a song I didn't recognize, but which soothed my soul.

Visions played before my eyes of an ancient past. Warriors, Indian warriors dressed in their grand headdress were camped around me, beside them stood their spirit wolves. In the distance of my vision, I could hear my grandfather. The proud Chieftain chanted loudly his song and the warriors stood without moving, watching and joining in with their own song.

The battle raged on inside of me as the battle of the Dark Wolves played before my eyes. I saw men. I saw wolves. I saw a great battle, a legend of long ago. I could still hear the chanting voices of the ancients in my ears. Deeply I fell into another vision.

This time I was in the snow. I could feel the cold in the air as it brushed over my skin. I heard a growl behind me. Ah, my enemy again. The only difference was I was still in my human form. I turned around to face him, the demon wolf. His head lowered as he growled. The red eyes glowed as he stared at me, contemplating his move. I leaned my body forward and waited for his attack. He bolted in the air toward me. It took just one thought as I calculated his move with ease. I moved high in the air as his body went past me. Turning swiftly, I landed on my feet facing him. He turned, and with a ferocious growl he bolted toward me again, moving faster than before. I twisted to the side, grabbed him around his mid-section and with one hand around his neck I held on tightly. My muscles flexed, and I heard the snap and crack of his neck. It was over. The chanting voices stopped.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

My breath strained in my lungs, as they were chilled from the foreign substance that ran through my veins. The ice ran through my body for the last time and then rapidly diminished. My heartbeat slowed to a steady and even rhythm. I opened my eyes and saw it was night. My body stopped convulsing. The pain seized to a halt. I could feel warmth from my heart pumping something new through my veins. It felt good. I felt more alive than I had ever felt.

I glanced around the room. A faint floral scent lingered in the room. It was a vampire. My eyes were still adjusting. A silhouetted figure stood motionless in front of the window. The room was dark with the exception of the moonlight gleaming through the window. I glanced at the clock. It was three a.m. How long had I been out? I wasn't even sure what day it was.

I pushed my way up from the bed. A moan escaped my mouth. The figure turned. In a blinding flash it was by my side.

"Julie?" It was a female. The tones in the voice were almost undetectable. But it sounded like Casey.

"Casey?"

"Yes. How do you feel?" She spoke quietly in the dark.

"Like I got hit by a truck." Then it suddenly hit me. "Where's Daniel? Richard? What happened? Brendan?" I moved into a sitting position.

"Daniel is sleeping. Jason had to give him a sedative. You've been out with this for three days. This is the first night Daniel has had any sleep. Richard and Nathaniel are downstairs." Her voice was still soft and alluring.

"Casey, what happened? Please start from the beginning." I asked as I peered into the darkness at her silhouette.

Casey inhaled a deep breath then began.

"Richard received a phone call. It was Daniel. That was Thursday night. He had come home early to surprise you. You were not there, so he assumed you were with us. When Nathaniel and I arrived shortly around noon, I couldn't find you. Your car was gone, and you wouldn't answer your phone. Richard was so distraught he could barely think straight. I've never seen him that way before.

"Richard grouped all of us together. We went out looking for you at the old airport hangar. Daniel met with the other Lycans. When we arrived at the airport hangar, all hell broke loose. It was like World War III. I felt as though I was in one of those James Bond movies. Nathaniel, Raphael, Adrianna and Leona took the outside of the hangar. Lance, Richard and I made our way inside. Daniel and the rest of the Lycans took down the rest of the werewolves with the others.

"Richard, when he saw you lying on the floor next to the wall, lost it. He went on a blood lust. One of the men was bold enough to tell Richard he was the one who beat the hell out of you. Richard tore him from limb to limb. Lance and I were making our way taking out the gunmen. Shots were fired randomly through the building. Richard was the one who carried you out to safety through all the gunfire. Lance and I managed to cover him.

"Lance went after Brendan, but he got away before Lance could catch him. We regrouped with Daniel and the others here. That's when we meet your cousin Taylan and your Grandfather Willie. Anyway, you were in bad shape. Daniel was terrified as the rest of us were. He blamed himself for your untimely torture. He and Jason worked around the clock to try and stabilize you. Then try to figure out what to do about the werewolf venom.

"Daniel tried the same technique he did with me on you. Somehow, your system was not accepting it. There were complications. Jason figured your DNA was not the same as ours. The werewolf venom was still running through your system and we were running out of time. Julie, we all feared the worse. We were losing you. Richard, I had never seen him in such turmoil. He was more devastated than Daniel. He suggested he try. Well, Daniel and Richard began a heated argument. I couldn't believe it. Richard made the suggestion he bite you and try to remove the venom. Daniel blew a fuse and said he didn't trust him. He would try to turn you into one of us, a vampire.

"Jewels, I know under the conditions it was serious. But they were so mad with each other it was actually hilarious. Daniel told Richard to step outside so he could

promptly beat his ass." She laughed.

"Casey, please tell me they didn't get into a fight!"

Casey nodded then laughed softly. "Daniel and Richard went outside and tore into one another. It took Lance and Jason to split them apart. I have never seen my brother so mad before. I honestly don't think anyone won. They pretty much beat the hell out of one another.

"Anyway, Jason agreed Richard should at least try. It was the only hope we had of saving you. Your cousin Taylan offered to be the blood donor. He was the only one with your blood type. So in short, here you are."

"Casey, the baby!" I exclaimed.

"Julie," her voice was soft. "Your body went through a horrible process."

"Casey!" I shot out.

"We, all of us, are a little unsure at this point. Jason says because your body was healing so rapidly, he was sure the baby was safe. Julie, we still don't know how the vampire venom will affect the baby."

"What do you mean? The baby is fine right?" My voice trembled

"Listen to me. You were bitten by a werewolf. The venom was running through you. Jason tried the antivenom, and it wasn't working. We had to get the venom out of you. Richard had a suggestion. It was the only way."

"What did he do?"

"Daniel almost lost his mind when he thought he was going to lose you. You have no idea what he went through. Actually, you have no idea what torment Richard went through. Daniel had to make the choice to let Richard bite you. Draw the venom out. If he didn't, we would have lost you to the werewolves. Richard bit you. He allowed just enough of the vampire venom to flow in your veins creating an unstable atmosphere for the werewolf venom. Then he drew it out. You have no idea what Richard did for you. Julie, werewolf venom is toxic to a vampire. Richard almost died. After that, Jason hooked you up to the IV with the blood transfusion. Then he immediately had to begin working on Richard." Her voice filled with sadness.

I stared into her face through the darkness of the room. The sadness in her voice was the reflection I thought would be on her face. Richard saved my life. I couldn't believe it. He did risk his life to save me. Like he said he would. My heart melted.

"Is he all right?"

"Yes. He's recovered nicely. Julie, I have to tell you this. Richard is in love with you. I mean an unfathomable love. Nathaniel tells me he's never seen Richard like this before. What happened between you two while I was away? I mean are you and Daniel still getting married? What?"

"Yes, Casey. Daniel and I are still getting married. At least I think we are. I don't know what brought this on. I mean, I feel for Richard."

"Do you love him? I mean honestly."

The truth was there in my heart. Yes, I did love Richard. I loved him and Daniel. There was no doubt in my mind. A vampire should repulse me, but for some odd reason, I wasn't repulsed.

"Yes, I love him." I stated with a sigh.

Her hands wrapped around mine. The once warm hands of my best friend were now cool. A soft smile broadened on her face, and her pale cold fingers gently stroked my hand.

"Don't feel bad about it. I know he'd like to know the truth. Julie, it's not your fault. You are a Lycan. You love unconditionally. It's in your nature. But, you have to let him know. Richard, I mean, if you are marrying Daniel. I know that is really where your heart belongs."

"Yes, you are right. But how can I love them both? I mean my heart breaks for Richard. Casey, he's been through so much. I can't hurt him anymore."

"So I see he's told you about his loss." She sighed and pulled her hands away. "Honestly, I'm surprised he fought the urge to change you. I overheard a conversation he had with Nathaniel. Julie, Richard wants you. There is nothing in this world that will stop him."

I lay back against the pillows. My fingers gently went to the sore spot on my neck, the spot where he had bitten me. I realized he did have to make a choice. Again Richard showed honor. His restraint was a great one.

"Casey, what do I do?"

"I don't know. I wish I had an answer for you."

"Are you really serious? Richard is not going to let me go?"

"He's in love with you Julie. It's different for a vampire. Somewhere you have touched his heart." She smiled. "You were probably just being you."

I tried to smile. "He says it was my blood?"

"Blood or lust?" She perked up. "Julie, Richard has had a hard on for you ever since he met you. He was going to take you the first opportunity he had. But something changed."

"You knew this before you left?"

"No. I didn't. Nathaniel and I discussed it on the way back home."

"Daniel would kill him." My heart raced loudly.

"I think he and Daniel have an understanding. Daniel is truly thankful Richard saved your life. He knows Richard loves you."

"Did he say anything about it? I mean..."

"No, not really. My brother is in love with you, but Richard repulses him because he's being protective over you. And not to mention he is a vampire." She rolled her eyes. "We had quite an event here in this house while you were out." She said in a humorous tone.

"OH! I need to talk to Daniel!" My thought immediately went to the Dark Wolves.

"Julie, please let him rest. This is the first night he has slept in two days."

"But the Dark Wolves."

"He knows. Richard told him. Daniel understands. Willie and Taylan explained everything to him. He has had quite a shock these last few days."

"What is he going to do? I mean about the war against the Dark Wolves." I asked almost in fear.

"I don't know. You'll have to talk to him in the morning. Meanwhile, I'm going to get Jason. He wanted to know when you woke up."

"Casey!" I whispered.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said.

Before I could say anything, Casey disappeared. I felt for the lamp on the nightstand. Turning it on, I winced against the brightness of the light. Three days of hell. I needed a shower. I climbed out of bed. My legs were weak. I managed to stand, then make my way to the shower. Jason would have to wait.

The water ran hot in the shower. I climbed in and closed the door behind me. My thoughts ran wild. My baby. Our baby. Was it all right? There were so many things to think about. The war that loomed between the werewolves and the Lycans threatened us all. It appeared the vampires might be backing out, with the exception of Richard's coven. Then there were the Dark Wolves. My family. Which side would Daniel take? Would he go against the Dark Wolves, the only blood relatives I had left? I knew the side I would take. I was sure of it.

In the middle of my own turmoil, I heard the bathroom door open.

"Julie?" It was Casey.

"Yeah, give me a minute. I'll be out soon." I shouted to her through the glass.

"Jason is waiting. He wants to check you over." She replied a little louder. The tones in her voice stung my ears.

"Okay! Tell him just a minute," I yelled out again.

The shower was rushed, as was my dressing. When I was completely dressed, I checked the clock. It was 4:30. I could hear Jason downstairs talking softly with Casey and Nathaniel. Somewhere I wondered if Richard was still here. Slowly I moved down the stairs. Jason was sitting in the chair, while Nathaniel and Casey were sitting together on the sofa. My heart froze. Richard stood in front of the fireplace. The expression on his beautiful face was sad. His eyes lifted to me as he saw me walking down the stairs into the living room.

There were no words spoken. His gaze never left mine as I moved closer into the room. I felt my heart freeze in time. There was an overwhelming feeling of love surrounding me, a sudden rush of excitement, followed by pure love. Richard's body stiffened. It was as if no one else were in the room but the two of us. We were locked in a moment of time.

Richard moved to me. He appeared to be in slow motion. My heart fluttered inside my chest, and a feeling of pain and turmoil encamped around my heart and soul. His inhumanly beautiful form stood inches in front of me, reaching out to me. He took me in his arms and I couldn't do anything but respond to him. I wrapped my arms around his neck as he held me tight to him, his heart pounding against my chest. Slowly he pulled away from me.

The pale fingers trembled as they touched my face. His eyes peered into mine. Joy filled his face and he smiled broadly.

"Richard..." I began softly.

"Don't." He cut me off. "Please do not thank me again. Do not ever put yourself in

that position. I am not strong enough at this point to mind my manners," he stated in a firm yet commanding voice.

I understood. The feelings he had swept over me like a strong wind. I felt the very essence of his being. There was no warmth, but cold. The love, however, was true. Richard was undeniably in love with me. His love showered over me like a pouring rain. It had to be some type of connection we made when he took my blood. At least that is what I believed. I have never felt him like this before. When he took my blood, he took my very existence, the intimate life force that dwelled inside of me.

"Casey said you almost died." My eyes peered into his. I wanted to know why he did such a thing.

"Yes, well let us just say werewolf venom does not exactly work well on a vampire's stomach. I must say, your blood was rather tasty though." He let out a chuckle.

A smile crossed my face. "Food poisoning, huh? Then my blood will not be tempting you any longer?"

Richard really didn't want me to know how severe it was for him. A smile crossed my lips, and I raised my eyebrows as I peered into his beautiful face.

"I bet it's one of those things like food poisoning. You probably won't want to do that ever again." I teased.

Richard let out a laugh, then nodded. His eyebrow rose and a wicked grin crossed his lips. "I suppose you could say it was like food poisoning. And you are right. The experience has left me with being a little shy of ever biting you again. However, you can never tell. I am a slow learner," he warned as his lips twitched into a smile.

I could feel the heat on my cheeks. He was so beautiful. His eyes, those beautiful crystal blue jewels twinkled with delight.

"All right then," Jason began as he cleared his throat. "Julie, I need to give you a once over. We will need to do an ultrasound as soon as possible." He pointed to the chair for me to sit down.

I moved around Richard. His fingers brushed over mine as I moved past him, relishing the touch of my skin against his. My heart broke as I sat down in the chair. Jason opened his black bag and pulled out several items. One of which was to check my blood pressure. I waited and remained quiet while he checked my vitals. Then the pen light moved in front of my eyes. I jerked my head away as the light hit my eyes. Jason immediately stopped. He froze.

I heard Richard and Casey inhale a quick breath. My heart raced out of fear, I waited to hear the unexpected news. The light felt like a knife had been shot through my eye. It hurt all the way to the back of my head. I turned slowly back to Jason.

Jason grabbed my face with his hand. He tilted my head up and stared into my eyes. The look of shock was all over his face.

"What! What's wrong?"

"Julie, your eyes. Dear lord."

"Jason!" I growled out.

"It appears your eyes are sensitive to light." He turned immediately to Richard.

"It is the effects of the vampire venom. She will be all right. It will go away in a day or two. She will probably need to wear sunglasses for the time being," he stated firmly.

"Is that all I need to be concerned about?" Jason glared at Richard.

"Yes," Richard hissed at Jason. "It is a normal reaction. She is not turning into one of us, if that is what you are asking."

"I just want to make sure," Jason stated flatly. "I need to take a sample of your blood, just a precaution. To make sure you don't have any foreign substances crawling around in there." He motioned for me to hold out my arm.

I glanced to Richard and his eyes narrowed. I could tell he was not very pleased with Jason's doubts of his honor. I tried to force out a smile, but winced as the needle pierced my flesh. Richard's jaw tightened. He was restraining himself. From the corner of my eye, I saw Nathaniel grab Casey's arm. In a flash, the two of them were gone. The door opened and closed to the patio faster than I could have imagined. Richard however, remained. It was blood.

"Sorry," I stated flatly, while watching the patio door.

"Casey, I am afraid, is still settling in. She will be fine," Richard stated in a controlled voice.

"And you?" I reminded him.

"I will manage."

Jason was finished, and set the vial of blood in his medical bag. He stood up wearily, taking one more glance at me, then smiled. "It appears everything is all right for now. No hemorrhaging?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Then as soon as we can, we will get that ultra sound done. I want to make sure the wee one is all right. I'm sure it didn't appreciate what your body went through." He smiled.

"Jason, I didn't really appreciate it." I returned his smile.

"Well, I'm headed back to bed for a nap. I'm sure Daniel will be up in a few hours. I gave him enough sedative to knock out a horse yesterday evening. The poor lad needed some rest." He turned, then headed up the stairs.

Richard turned to me, eyeing me carefully and almost cautiously. I couldn't help the feelings I had. I could feel myself being drawn to him in the most precarious ways.

"Richard," I began. "Is there something else to this vampire venom I need to know about? Like the effects."

He released a long sigh. "Maybe." He paused. "Your eyes will adjust in a day or two. I think that is all you need to worry about."

"What about this odd feeling I'm having?" I asked.

Richard's eyebrows crinkled together briefly. "And what odd feeling would that be?" He crossed his arms over his chest.

"It's just...I well..." How could I explain it? I wondered. "It's like a connection to you."

"The connection? It is your blood. I feel it too. I feel you inside of me. Living. Breathing. I feel your heart with each beat it takes." His gaze became deeper as he

moved to me. "The longing."

"Richard, stop." I pleaded. "I can't do this."

His gaze left mine. Turning his head, his attention fell in the distance beyond the patio door. I could feel the heart inside of his body. It was breaking, pulled and torn into pieces.

"I suppose you are correct. Your heart belongs to Daniel. As does your love," he replied softly. "The sun is going to be coming up in a few hours. I think it best if I return home."

I rose to my feet as he turned and slowly walked past me to the front door. There was no way I could let him leave. Not feeling the way I was feeling. The venom was more than what he was telling me. At least in my mind, that was what I wanted to believe.

"Richard," I called out to him. He stopped as his hand touched the door handle. "I ... know what you are feeling." I moved slowly toward him.

Richard turned to face me, his eyes searching mine. Was this the answer he was seeking? Some type of answer to quench the desire in his heart? A satisfaction for all those years he waited? Standing in front of him, I could not deny at that moment that I loved him. My heart was bleeding for him. I wanted to show him how much I loved and appreciate him. In my heart, I wanted to give him the love he so longed for.

I reached out to him, touching his face softly. His eyes closed as his face pressed against my hand. The pain in his heart was overbearing. It twisted my heart even more. Yet, I couldn't help my own desire to try to soothe him.

"Julie," he began softly. "Take care of yourself." He took my hand in his. He brought it to his face. Richard pressed his lips to my fingers, allowing the kiss to linger for a moment, savoring it. Then he let go of my hand, and his fingers slid across mine slowly as he turned away. The heart inside my chest felt the closing pressure as I watched him walk away. My heart immediately dropped into the pit of my stomach.

I stood in front of the door, my arms wrapped around my body and tears forming in my eyes. The inhumanly beautiful vampire had walked out of my life. I could feel it. Richard was not ever planning on seeing me again. He knew the love I could give him wasn't enough to satisfy him. The floodgate opened as I watched Casey and Nathaniel wave goodbye. I would see Casey again. But not Richard.

The sun rose causing my eyes to sting and burn as I finally backed away from the front door. It was only then I realized I had been standing in one spot in total numbness for three hours. Where had the time gone? How could I just remain standing there like that in one thought? One heart wrenching thought. Richard.

The memory of our last moments played over in my mind. Remembering the sadness in those beautiful eyes, the crushing pain in his heart and the longing he felt and my heart finally broke. The pain gripped me, ripping my soul apart. I turned and headed back to the stairs. Hot tears fell from my eyes. The pain was intolerable. I gasped for breath as my hand slapped over my mouth. My body became weak, trembling as the waves of the oceans crashed against my wearied heart. How much more pain could I endure?

Slowly I dropped to the floor. The tears continued. The shattering pain blistered against me. No, I couldn't fight it anymore. The storm threatened to wail out of me once again.

Footsteps were heard as they stepped slowly down the staircase. Even through my own tears and stuffy nose, I could recognize Daniel's scent, the spicy masculine fragrance I so enjoyed. My watery eyes lifted to him as he sat down on the step. Gently Daniel reached for me, pulling me close into his arms. My very heart and soul were tormented. Swells of the ocean's storms beat down against me. Its winds, hurricane in strength, terrorized the very seat of my emotions, ripping and tearing me from beginning to end.

Daniel pressed a kiss on top of my head and the warmth of his body pressed close to mine. Softly, gently he whispered words into my ear. *My love. My angel.* He cooed sounds of assurance and I cried even harder. Feeling the pain once again of a broken heart. Was there no end to what my heart could endure? Was there no salvation for the brokenness that I had succumbed to? My heart broke for Richard. Fate help, but I loved Richard. Daniel, as much as I would have wanted to keep this from him, knew. The words I never expected to hear were spoken clearly as I grieved.

"Julie, my love, I know you love him," Daniel whispered softly. "I can feel that love in your heart."

Hot tears ran down my cheeks as I raised my weary head. My watery eyes barely focused on his face. His fingers wiped the tears away from my face. The remnants of my heart still ached inside. What could I say? How could I explain these feelings to the man I loved? Did he know better than I?

I opened my mouth to make some sort of comment. It was only the right thing to do. Daniel gently pressed his finger over my lips. Leaning forward he pressed his lips against mine softly. Then he pulled me closer to him, closer to his heart.

He inhaled a deep and ragged breath. "You really cannot blame Richard for falling in love with you. I mean, you are the most desirable woman I have ever met. I guess you would be considered desirable to any man. Vampires included." He chuckled softly.

"Daniel, what are you trying to say?" I couldn't bother with reading his thoughts. The thoughts in my head were enough to deal with.

"What I am trying to tell you is this; I understand. Jewels, I know you love Richard. It is only natural for you. You have the heart of a wolf. I know you are not in love with him. There is a distinct difference. A difference I can tell and feel. Your heart belongs to me. As long as I have that, I am a happy man. Besides, Richard looks like he needs a little piece. Not yours, of course. I mean I would have to kill him for sure if it came to that."

For some reason, I hesitated on Daniel's last sentence. A frown crossed my forehead. The comment would have probably been taken more seriously if Daniel's lips had not twisted into a grin. Yes, it was not a piece of my heart Daniel was implying Richard needed. My eyes widened in surprise. Daniel let out a chuckle.

"Daniel!" I snorted and pushed away from him.

Daniel roared out in laughter. "What? What did I say?"

"I really thought you were being nice to Richard," I snapped out.

Daniel continued to laugh. "Julie, I am a male wolf. What did you expect?"

"Ass!" I huffed out then stood up. My stomach growled loudly. Daniel's eyebrows rose. The twinkles in his eyes told me something was coming. I just didn't know what.

"We need to find you something to eat before that stomach of your jumps out and grabs a body or two."

For once, my feelings were soothed. I shook my head as Daniel's arm went around my waist. He guided me in a little more hurried motion than I would have liked to the kitchen. My heart was so full. There was no way I could explain how much I loved Daniel. For once, I was beginning to believe we really did understand one another. Daniel understood the compassion and capacity of my heart. He understood how I could love someone so deeply and unconditionally. I didn't have to "fall in love". Love was just a factor of life for me.

Foremost, I was finally beginning to see Daniel's point of view. Daniel wasn't just a male. He was an Alpha Male, providing protection and leadership. These were the things Daniel regarded as his duty. His odd sense of humor had grown on me, and I knew this was just a part of him. Even if it did appear he was being asinine, I was learning how to enjoy his humor.

Everyday our bond was growing. We were developing a beautiful relationship. The closer we became, the more love and understanding we shared. Even now, I understood how I could love them both.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The rest of the day went smoothly and quietly. Heather and Jason spent the most part on a run. Daniel and I spent a comfortable day just relaxing. We both needed it. Mainly, we stayed cuddled up on the sofa watching movies. Which after two of them, we decided we needed to get out of the house for a while.

Daniel and I decided to visit Gramps and John. I admit, it was Daniel's idea, but I really wanted to see my family again. As the evening approached, we headed out to the Qualla Reservation. He knew Gramps and Aunt Tess would be excited to see me. Especially to know I was doing well.

We arrived around four p.m. John was outside in the driveway working on an old car he purchased. Daniel and I pulled up into the driveway, and he looked very excited to see us. I could honestly say I was glad to see him too.

It was not the kind of excitement I had expected. We soon found out everyone was meeting in the heart of the reservation, the same place where the family gathering took place. He didn't mention why, just that it was important.

Daniel and I went directly to the site. When we arrived, we found everyone standing in the field. Most of those gathered were men. I immediately recognized Gramps and Taylan. We hurried out of the car and went to meet them.

"Well, there she is!" Gramps said with a smile on his face. "How ya doing?"

"Better," I said as a smile crossed my face.

"Good. Good. You look a little peaked. After what you've been through, I would say you might need a little more rest," his strong voice filled with concern.

"Yes, well, she is pretty stubborn," Daniel said slyly.

Gramps nodded and smiled. "Yep, most of the women in our line are. They have to be in the middle of everything." He shot me a wink.

"John said everyone was meeting out here. Is there something wrong?" Daniel asked as his arm slipped around me.

Gramps expression suddenly changed. He glanced at the others a moment, then turned his attention back to Daniel. It was evident his concern was strong. The anxiety was written all over his face. He moved toward us and placed his hand on Daniel's shoulder, he led us away from the others.

"This is not good. Daniel, you need to take Julie back home immediately." Gramps voice was firm.

Daniel's spine straightened. I could feel the immediate anxiety build inside of him. His dark eyebrows met in a frown. "Why? What is wrong?"

"It's a matter we need to take care of. One of which will be handled by our tribe." His voice was still firm. The urgency for Daniel and I to leave was more prevalent.

"Gramps, what's going on? Is there something we can do to help?" I spoke out.

Gramps looked lovingly into my face. He knew I would help. A soft smile crossed his lips.

"I know you will. But you, my granddaughter, need to be safe. This is not a place for you in your condition."

My next words were distracted as I saw twelve men dressed in robes come out from the forest. Daniel's body shifted closer to mine. His arm went around mine and pulled me closer to him. Gramps turned slowly to see the approaching men. One I recognized clearly, Clayton Powers. What were they doing here?

"Daniel. I must say I'm surprised to see you here." Clayton announced as he moved closer.

"Clayton, I could say the same thing." Daniel replied.

"Well, I came to put an end to all of this," Clayton stated, moving within a few feet from us.

Taylan had drawn closer his grandfather's side. Daniel took a step forward, shifting his body between Clayton and me. It suddenly hit me; these were the other Council members. They had come to confront the Dark Wolves. My heart suddenly started racing loudly.

"Clayton, I think you have things a little out of order." Daniel voice was low and controlled.

"Oh, on the contrary. These are the Dark Wolves we were searching for. It seems that you have made some acquaintances of your own." Clayton eyed Daniel carefully. "I hope you know which side you are on."

"I believe there are some questions I have for you, Clayton. If you know these are

the Dark Wolves, then you should know they are the originators of our line." Daniel replied not taking his eyes off Clayton.

"Yes, I am well aware of this. However, Daniel these people are the ones which have caused our clans to come to war against us."

"For a good reason as I hear it. Tell me Clayton, how is it the Council has grown to such strength over these long years? Could you also explain to me how we have drifted so far away from our responsibilities?"

Clayton's eyes narrowed slightly. "Are you challenging me?"

"From what I understand, the Council has become a little more than a high priced organization. Too controlling in corporate America. How much money did you think you would obtain from the work of Dr. Miller?" Daniel shot out at him.

Money? Corporate America? Dr. Miller? What on earth was Daniel talking about? Eyes widened with surprise. I listened carefully. Indeed, Daniel had learned more information than I was aware of.

"Lies!" Clayton spat out. "Lies these heathens have been telling the clans! You above all people should be able to see through this! Daniel, let's not forget who we are here."

"Forget who we are?" Daniel sneered. "Clayton, I believe you forgot who you were when you began your tyranny with Dr. Miller! You used the clans to protect you. Hide behind them. Control them. Now look where it has gotten you! How long did you think it would take before the truth came out?"

"Truth?" Clayton snapped. "Truth? You want the truth? Without me, our little organization of wolf hybrids would have died out years ago, suffering from the growth and change in this world. Standing behind quietly while the humans live it up in the lap of luxury. And Martin Knight!" His harsh glare shifted to me. "You spit your accusations at me, what about him. He used the Lycan DNA to repair skin cells to the point of no scarring. You have the audacity to accuse me of tyranny? He was the one with the idea to save the world!"

"My father only did what he felt was necessary to help humans! He wanted to save lives! Not kill people!" I spat out angrily.

"Your father was not the saint you make him out to be!" Clayton sneered.

The hair bristled against the back of my neck. How dare he talk about my father that way? The blood boiled in my veins. Daniel's arm slid around mine, gripping me tightly.

"What Martin did was not for his own benefit. There is a difference!" Daniel snapped out. "What you and Dr. Miller were doing was changing the course of human life, the very existence of mankind. You have lost your way, Clayton. Lycans have always been hidden away from humans. What you were planning was to convert every human into a freak! Combining Lycans and werewolves together. Selling your prototypes to the Government?"

"YES! Millions would have been made. Daniel, I thought you could see this. You and your father are opportunists. You are an adventurer of science. I thought you would understand the money to be made here." Clayton looked behind Daniel, sizing up the

others as they approached silently.

"You are wrong, Clayton. I see something evil in this. We are meant to protect humans. That is what I stand for."

"So be it then. You will die with everyone else here." Clayton said sharply.

Before I had the chance to even consider the options, the twelve Lycan Council members changed. It was not Lycans I saw standing in front of me, but something different. Not a wolf. Not a werewolf. But what appeared to be a combination of the two. They were much larger than the Lycans in form, big, strong and bristled with the spiky wirehair of the werewolves. Their heads were larger than wolves and their jaws more muscled and their teeth larger. The same red eyes of the werewolves glowed within them.

This night was the nightmare I feared. These animals were an abomination to our kind. They were the evil creation of man and science. Daniel pushed me behind him. Daniel and I hadn't come here prepared for a war. We didn't know that a war was taking place tonight between the Council and the Dark Wolves. Tonight was the war to end all wars between our clans. The Council was not at all what we thought it to be. I took a deep breath and tightly held it.

"Julie! Go to the car!" Daniel growled out.

"NO! I'm not leaving you!" I snapped out behind him.

"Taylan?" Daniel sneered out.

"It's too late. We would never make it." Taylan was right beside Daniel and me.

"Then let the war begin." Gramps sounded out in a thunderous voice.

Whether or not Gramps had some type of mystical power, I may never know. But the words that left his mouth sounded like thunder rumbling into the night, and the atmosphere in the air even changed. I could feel an energy surrounding me, a force so powerful the ground shook beneath our feet. The Dark Wolves changed.

Daniel and I shifted into our wolf forms under the control of the mighty force. Our clothes ripped from around our bodies and fell into shreds upon the ground. My body tingled with the excessive energy that now flowed over and through me. There was something different about me, different about Daniel. Daniel was larger than his normal regular wolf size. He was bigger bodied, more muscular and well defined. What happened to us? Daniel looked like Taylan, a Dark Wolf. How was this possible? What really happened in those three days I was out?

Daniel was not the only one who changed. I braced my paw on the ground, looking down I saw my massive black paws. With each breath I took I could feel the electricity charging my body. My muscles were stronger. I opened my mouth to adjust my jaws as the muscles flexed around the bones. Even my eyesight was clearer. The newfound energy swept over my body, into every muscle. The muscles in my hindquarters flinched as I took another step forward. I felt strong, stronger than I ever felt before. This was a new side of the wolf I never knew. Yes, I, too, was a Dark Wolf.

Daniel stood beside me and lowered his head into an attack position. Taylan moved on the other side of Daniel and Gramps moved to the left of me. Behind us, the rest of the tribal elders and Taylan's pack closed in. We were the first line of attack.

The creatures who stood before us were intimidating enough. It was easy to kill a werewolf. This was what we were built for. We stared into the eyes of our enemies and showed no fear. These creatures appeared stronger than what we expected. Would our death come swiftly? We didn't know, but the lives of thousands depended on the few of us this night. If we failed, not only the lives of other Lycans would be at stake, but also humankind as we knew it would soon become threatened.

Daniel's thoughts were clear in my mind. He wanted me at the back of the pack. I remained still, not moving an inch. His head turned to the side slightly, still keeping his eyes on the creatures before us. A low growl released from his throat, meant for me of course. It was his way of letting me know his anger at my disobedience to him.

Before I had the chance to convey my own thoughts, the pack in front of us charged. It was too late to argue. We were under attack. The darkness of the night couldn't hide the red illuminated eyes that charged towards us. It was time. Fight or die. There was no other choice.

The sound of wolf feet pounding and the huffs from our breaths filled the night as we moved forward into the wildness of the pack in front of us, determined to win. The instinct of over a thousand years flowed through us as the ten of us moved swiftly into the night toward those abominations of mankind.

At first, I tried to calculate a quick plan of attack. Daniel's thoughts were not clear. He couldn't determine which way they would move. Then it was too late. We were already confronting the attack. The first of the creatures met Daniel head on and the second met me. I couldn't keep track of the others. My only focus was on defending myself and killing my prey.

I met my prey airborne. Our bodies clashed together in a hard thump that sounded like two boulders slamming together. We both fell to the ground with a thud. Gathering my stance, I turned. He was already on his feet and began circling me. His lips curled back over his teeth. Low growls rumbled from him, intimidating warnings rolled loudly from his mouth. I rolled back my lips, my teeth revealed. The low growls I sent him were not warnings. They were clearly telling him that tonight his life would end.

Our dance of death started. Cautiously we moved around one another, sizing up our prey. Suddenly he charged me again. Swiftly I moved to the side. The adrenaline pulsated through my body. I pivoted on my front feet, snapping at his rear hindquarters when he flew past me. My teeth hit flesh and his rear went down. He pivoted as fast as he could. He turned to me, aiming for the back of my neck. My heart pounded. My senses were wild. I jerked away, backing down onto my front paws and turning my rear to unsettle his balance. His teeth caught my shoulder then bore down. I felt the pressure of large teeth as they pierced into my flesh, causing me to yelp in pain. Furiously I growled. Moving swiftly, I came underneath his ribcage with my opened mouth. Blood poured into my mouth as I pierced his flesh. The bones cracked loudly as he roared in pain. He fell backwards, losing his balance. Immediately I moved. I grabbed the neck of the creature before it hit the ground. A huff of air escaped me as I sank my teeth into its neck. It was over. My prey ceased to live a moment longer. Raising my head, I scouted out another prey.

The battle continued as the blood of Lycans and these werewolf hybrids filled the air. Roars of hatred and pain took over the darkness of the night. Several of the Dark Wolves were severely wounded, but they continued to fight. But only three of the Council were dead, recapturing their human forms, one by my hand and two by Daniel and Taylan.

Gramps appeared to be holding his own. He and the larger of the creatures were still fighting. I heard a yelp in the distance. It was Taylan. His roar thundered into the night. He regained his position, fresh blood now spilling down his sides as he continued to fight.

Daniel called me. He was now in a two on one fight. Two of the creatures teamed him. My breath froze in my chest and my muscles tensed. A burning killing rage flew through me as I pounded the earth to his side. I came up behind one of them. No warning. No growls. I leaped into the air. My mouth opened, preparing to clamp down on his neck as soon as my feet hit the ground.

My eyes closed tightly as I held on to his throat. I could hear the screeching cry it let loose, but I wouldn't let go. It wheezed and coughed. I applied more pressure, my teeth sinking deeper into his skin. Blood poured over my bottom jaw as the creature coughed its last suffocated breath. My paws pressed tightly against the creature as I jerked my head back, taking with me a large portion of his skin.

I heard another roar behind me, but I dared not look until I knew the creature I had was dead. I could hear it. Suddenly the lifeless body dropped to the ground. I snapped my head around. Daniel had taken his creature down. Blood was pouring from a wound in Daniel's shoulder, but he had dismembered the creature and had it by the neck.

Anxiously, I looked around, as the sounds of fighting faded. Taylan had joined with Gramps and finished off the last of these creatures. The rest of us stood back. Only a few remained alive. My brothers lay on the ground before me. Aside from the three of us, two others remained. The heart inside of me ached. This had been a horrible night that I would never forget.

Daniel slowly moved to my side, he was in tremendous pain. He sniffed the wound on my shoulder. It was already healing, but I wondered if my heart would ever recover from this night. I raised my head in sorrow as a high-pitched howl poured from my lips as I sang the song of mourning. The others joined in song with me, pouring their mourning into the night. Our songs rang out loudly, letting all who could hear us know we had lost love ones. We had lost family, our brothers, our fellow warriors. Yes, our hearts mourned.

Our song was heard over many miles. Soon other wolves in the distance heard our cry and joined in. Whether it was only a few moments or hours I couldn't tell. When our howls stopped, I heard in a distance what appeared to be thousands of wolves singing, spreading the news of our losses.

Gramps and Taylan shifted back into their human forms, clothing themselves and bringing the robes of our enemies to Daniel and me. Daniel shifted first and I followed. Once clothed, we watched the remaining two warriors shift. They were the two remaining tribal leaders. Taylan's group was completely annihilated.

Taylan moved to the one closest to him, glancing down at the body that lay at his feet. Gramps moved over to Taylan and placed a hand on his shoulder. I wanted to say something to him, some word to let him know how much I felt his pain. But I didn't really know how much pain he was really experiencing.

Gramps looked up to me and then to Daniel. He left Taylan's side and walked toward us. The closer he came, the more sorrow I could see in his eyes. My heart was tied in a knot, and pain filled me even further.

"It was Joshua. Taylan's first born." Gramps stated grimly.

Tears welled inside my eyes. Daniel looked to Taylan. I knew he wanted to say something. He took a step and Gramps caught Daniel by the arm.

"Leave him be," he stated firmly. "You should go back home now. We have much work to be done here this night."

Gramps turned his head upward, looking at the full moon. "It's sacred ground the blood of our warriors has been spilled on. But," he paused. "I wish to thank you, Daniel. For your courage and faith in the truth."

"Tonight, old man, the lines will be reunited with their true ancestors. No longer shall we be ruled by the arrogance of these type of men," Daniel stated firmly.

"Tonight, I call you my brother. I call you my son. For you are a true Aniwayah. I give to you the truth. I give to you the Great Spirit. The blood of my people shall flow through your veins. For you have become one with us...forever," Gramps stated.

Gramps reached down by his side he pulled out a knife. With his hand held around the knife, he raised it into the air and belted out words in an unknown tongue. It sounded as if he was speaking or perhaps praying in the language of our people. He brought the knife down across the palm of his hand, and his blood poured. He motioned to Daniel. Daniel offered Gramps his hand, and I watched as the palm of Daniel's hand ran red with blood. Gramps clasped his hand around Daniel's. The air around us became electrified. At that moment, we stood in the middle of a powerful and mystical force.

"I call unto you the great Aniwayah!" Gramps voice thundered.

Chills ran down my arms. The wind stirred around us, as if it obeyed the call of this mighty warrior. A whirlwind surrounded us, softly the wind howled, much like a wolf. Blistering heat and cold ran through my body. Something more powerful than I had imagined happened. I could feel a change in Daniel, even sense it and smell it. He changed before my very eyes; it was astonishing. His smell was different. Something earthier mixed with his spicy scent.

"For you are a true ruler, a true leader. The spirit of the Aniwayah lives in you. Call to him when you need him. Teach the others the true way of the Aniwayah. Live in peace. Love in peace. Forever honor your heart and let it guide you. Now go. Go back to your home and may peace be with you." Gramps stated. He turned away from us. Gramps walked back to where Taylan stood over his son.

Daniel turned to me, his eyes searched mine. Yes, I was all right. I stood in wonderment of the event I had just witnessed and a little in awe. Daniel was truly my family now. He was a part of my bloodline. Joy filled my saddened heart. Daniel was officially a Dark Wolf. The bloodline of my ancestors flowed through him. Much more,

he would lead the Lycans into a new life, the true life of the Aniwayahs. Who would have ever known what Fate had in store for us? There was no way I would have ever guessed the man I loved so dearly would become a great leader.

"We shall do this together." He spoke softly pulling me into his arms. "If I am to be the new leader, you are going to lead with me. By my side."

"We shall do a great thing." I spoke with a smile on my face.

"Yes we shall." His words were softly spoken.

Daniel and I drove back home to Georgia without speaking. Quietly, we drove back lost in our own thoughts, considering the events of the night. Daniel and I knew this was a new dawn for the Lycans. A new leadership had risen and there would be no more lies, no more hideous attempts at research. We could all live in peace amongst ourselves.

When we reached the house, Jason and Heather were already there. They were curled up on the sofa watching a movie when we walked in. The shocked look on their faces told us they knew something had taken place. Daniel immediately called Thomas and told him to come over. He and Charlotte both made it there in record time.

Daniel and I sat down and explained the horrible events, watching them intently as the truth of the Council was revealed. They were utterly horrified as the truth came out.

Daniel also told every one of his new plans. He wanted to call together all Lycans and settle the order, so to speak. I, of course, had my own ideas of what I wanted to do. My announcement would come later as I was more prepared to put together some organizational concepts with Daniel. We would join the clans together to live in peace. To help them further their way into the society of humans. To protect them in the shadows while they coexisted within this human race. To protect humans from the darkness of evil that lurked around them while they slept. Yes, this was a new dawn for all Lycans.

Thomas and Charlotte agreed. Thomas would make all the arrangements for contacting all the Lycans. Charlotte would make the arrangements for a place to hold the function. Since there were going to be a thousand or so of us out there, it would have to be a place where it was safe to speak freely.

All these things were going to take place tomorrow, Friday, the day before our wedding. I knew the morning was going to be a busy one, but I didn't mind. We had also planned on the meeting to take place sometime next week, after we came back from our honeymoon, which Daniel and I still had not discussed. But he promised me he would make the arrangements and surprise me.

And so our new life began together. And it would be a life that held purpose and meaning. Now more than ever, I began to see what Thomas meant when he said Fate did indeed have a great purpose for us.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The morning broke early through the window, and the beams of sunlight drizzled through the window. The soft morning breeze stirred, and my eyes fluttered opened. I realized at once that I had overslept. A glance at my clock, I saw that it was eight a.m. I thought I might end up sleeping through my entire pregnancy!

Today of course was not a day I wanted to sleep through. Within seven hours, I would be pronounced Mrs. Daniel James Maxwell. I rolled off the bed, still in a sleepy daze and found my way to the shower. Daniel had spent the night with his parents. Jason, his best man, of course, was with him. Heather stayed behind and Casey, bless her heart, came over yesterday evening to help prepare me for today.

I must say, seeing Casey as a vampire was quite astonishing. Casey was beautiful before, but there was something about being a vampire that really made her look even more beautiful. Her once golden tanned skin was now a pearlescent pale color. She wore tinted brown contacts that hid and protected her now blue diamond-like eyes. Her body was much cooler to the touch than I had expected. But, she was still Casey.

It was still hard for me to believe that she had trouble hunting. When I asked her why, she only shrugged her shoulders. She told me Nathaniel thought she should choose something other than cougars or bears for her meals. Casey rolled her eyes and stated firmly it was just her taste buds and she couldn't deny herself.

At least she had better control of herself around humans, which to me was a relief. Nathaniel would be with her at my wedding, but I warned her ahead of time to make sure she was in control. She laughed and told me she was completely satisfied for the day.

As the hour drew near, Charlotte busied herself with the last minute preparations. Casey, Heather and I met in the dressing area set aside for us at the Grand Hotel, the only place large enough to handle a wedding of this size. An hour I sat through hair and makeup; I was already in a state of exhaustion. By the time everyone was finished, we all looked wonderful. Heather was absolutely beautiful and Casey, simply put in one word, astonishing.

It was finally time. Charlotte met with us briefly, then Thomas. Both of them gave me words of encouragement and love. It helped, but suddenly I was nervous. It wasn't the fact that I was going to marry my one true love. No, it was knowing that I was about to walk into a room filled with nearly a thousand people. Was I ready for this? I inhaled a deep breath and marched out the door with Casey by my side.

There was beautiful music playing, a soft medley of wedding songs. The music stopped abruptly as I came to a halt in front of the large double doors. In front of me, Gramps stood proudly in his tuxedo. I hadn't seen this one coming! He smiled as he extended his arm to me. To walk me down the aisle and give me to Daniel was a proud moment for him and for me. A smile crossed my lips as I reached for him.

The wedding march played; it was time for a new life to begin. I inhaled a slow steady breath, and then released it. Was I really ready for this? I wondered as I turned to Gramps. I had to admit, he looked quite handsome for his age in his formal attire. It was the type of attire that was traditional for his people, our people at wedding ceremonies. He patted my hand and gave me a smile of encouragement. The large doors opened in

front of me. The sound of movement, people shuffling from their seats, immediately filled the room as the guests rose to their feet.

The large room was decorated in white, red, and gold. Beautiful mixtures of flower scents filled the air. White rose petals adorned the carpet in front of me. Together Gramps and I walked down the aisle. I looked forward; a smile crossed my lips as I saw the man I loved. Daniel stood at the end of the aisle in a white tux. He looked more handsome than I had ever imagined. My heart fluttered again the closer I came to him. His hair was tossed slightly and he was clean-shaven. His lips firmly fixed in a brilliant smile as he watched me moving slowly toward him.

Gramps stopped in front of Daniel. Leaning over, he gave me a hug, then he seated himself in a chair reserved for my family. He sat down beside Taylan, John and Aunt Tess. A quick glance told me most of the family from the reservation was there. Daniel took my hand as I moved closer to him.

The wedding was normal, but seemed to last forever. As the last song was sung, I started becoming impatient. Daniel chuckled softly as his eyes glinted with the humor of the moment. The Minister read the ceremonial text. The vows were recited and rings exchanged. Dear Fate, was it officially over? Finally, I heard the words, "I now present to you Mr. and Mrs. Daniel James Maxwell." I wanted to throw the bouquet in the air! Yes, it was finally over!

Everyone stood, clapping cheerfully and joyfully. The music played a soft piano melody as Daniel and I walked down the aisle in a shower of rice. Balloons from the ceiling floated down to the floor. With one hand around Daniel's arm, the other holding my dress, it was all I could do to keep from tripping over the balloons.

The reception was next. The other ballroom was filled with our guests. Food was laid out in abundance and there was an elaborate champagne tower. Wedding gifts, of course, were made in the form of donations to various non-profit organizations, with the exception of one very large gift. When I opened it, my heart sank into the pit of my stomach. It was a Monet. An original. I knew without a doubt that it was from Richard. It was the painting I had adored in his home. The painting alone was priceless, but the gesture was more valuable than any gift.

Daniel strolled with me to the center of the floor for our first dance. And I was not surprised when a few moments later everyone joined. Gramps soon cut-in, followed by Thomas. I glanced over to see Daniel dancing with Casey. It did my heart good to see they remained brother and sister. Another surprise, John. John appeared to be dancing with a pretty young girl around the same age as he. And the young lady appeared to be as shy as John.

After all the food and dancing, it was time for our departure. Daniel and I made the way through the rice again to the limousine that awaited us. This time we were heading to a surprise destination, which Daniel had hinted might be in Scotland.

We stopped by the house first, changed our clothes and then loaded the luggage into the limo. Now we were truly on our way to the airport. I was ready to rest and relax. The flight itself would be a long one with two changes, and then a direct flight into the airport in Edinburg, Scotland.

Once we arrived in Edinburg, we picked up the car Daniel had reserved for us a car to drive. When we arrived, it wasn't what I had expected. It was a small cottage, high in the Scotland hills, the Highlands, Daniel called it. Daniel had purchased it some time ago. He said it was a place he often went to relax and fish. My only concern was whether it had running water and electricity. Daniel laughed and said that, of course, it did. He had made arrangements some weeks prior to have it fully stocked and ready for us when we arrived.

The rain showered down when we pulled in front of the little cottage. After making a mad dash to the door, I realized I had left Daniel behind to collect the luggage. He urged me inside, while holding two handfuls of luggage. It was a darling little place, very cozy and small. The fireplace looked very inviting as I shivered slightly from the cold. Daniel dropped the luggage; his attention was on the fireplace. Within a few minutes, he had the wood stacked and ready to burn. In the meantime, I went to check out the rest of the cottage.

There were two small bedrooms off to the side of the living room and one bathroom. The kitchen was adjoining the living room. It was a comfortable retreat. When I returned to the living room, Daniel had a nice fire glowing in the fireplace. The little house was warmed comfortably.

One thing I was thankful for was that I had packed accordingly. With Daniel's expert advice, I brought sweaters and a heavy coat. My choice of shoes however might be lacking. Daniel promised me we would go shopping in a couple of days to buy more suitable shoes to wear. He, of course, packed with such expertise that I ended up borrowing a pair of his socks to keep my feet warm.

The smell of freshly burning wood filled the air as I padded into the living room. I folded my arms around myself and strolled to the window. The soft melody of rain poured down outside. Such a soothing sound, listening to rain as it fell. Well, more at an angle than straight down. No thunder. No lightning. This was my favorite kind of evening. The soft sound of the rain beating against the roof gave me a lazy feeling.

"So Mrs. Daniel James Maxwell, what do you think of the Scottish weather?" Daniel had moved. He was stood directly behind me as I peered through the window.

"I love it," I purred softly.

"Mmm..." he growled lowly against my ear. "Wait until you see the rest of Scotland." His body pressed closer against mine.

"Intent on moving me here are you?" I murmured, feeling the heat emanating from his hard taut body.

With each breath he took, he became more aroused. The temperature in his body increased as well as the spicy scent. Each beat of his heart forced the scent to stronger levels, intoxicating my senses.

"Maybe." Daniel's voice was deep and throaty. His lips pressed against my neck.

The deep vibrations in his voice sent my senses soaring. Chills ran down my neck to my arms. I wondered if the feelings I had for him would last forever. One could only hope so. My heart pounded and the pulse in my veins raced against my flesh. His lips left a trail of soft kisses down the length of my neck. He stopped only a brief moment at

the edge of my sweater. He gently, with one finger, pulled it back, revealing that spot on my neck he so enjoyed. The warmth of his lips was on that sweet spot and a breath escaped me. The world I knew swirled around me.

Ever so gently, he kissed and nibbled on the erogenous spot. My eyes closed as his tongue traced the outlined area. How could one spot on a person's body create so much tension?

The taunting stopped. Daniel's hands gripped the sides of my shoulders. He turned me to him slowly. His tall statuesque muscular figure now towered over me. The warmth from his body soothed me, and I felt warm and safe. For a long moment, he looked deep and longingly into my eyes. His spicy scent became full of rich and intoxicating tones with each breath he took. The beautiful hazel eyes melted into a mixture of warm brown tones. Hungry tones. It was the type of tones that I recognized as desire.

The rain continued to pour as we stood in front of the small window. Electricity filled the room around us. Desires swelled inside us both. There was more than the fireplace providing heat in that tiny room. Daniel shifted his body closer to mine. His hands slid around my waist then trailed downward. The beautiful, perfectly formed lips of his twitched as he pulled my hips closer to him. Tightly, he pressed my body against his. His thoughts were clear. He wanted me to know how much he desired me at that moment. The hardness I felt was enough for me to know, and my desire burned hotter for him. Ever so gently, his lips grazed over mine. My heart pounded with excitement, forcing a new level of fire through my veins. All I wanted at that moment was Daniel, every precious piece of him.

Daniel's lips pressed harder against mine, parting my lips to his. His tongue slowly teased me, penetrating, probing the inside of my mouth until a soft moan escaped my throat. My hands left his arms, trailing upward to the back of his neck and encircled the black tendrils on his head. The spicy scent grew heavier as I inhaled a deep breath and allowed the fragrance to encamp my soul. I drank in his scent like a glass of fine wine. I wanted to savor the flavor he provided for me. Daniel pulled me tighter to his body, pressing me against him with such force it was difficult to breathe. Deeper he searched with his tongue, creating a more heated and passionate kiss than ever before.

Suddenly the kiss broke. His gaze met mine. Daniel's strong chest heaved against mine. For an instant, we both held our breaths, our gaze momentarily locked on one another. I could hear his thoughts. I could feel the tension, and the desire within him. The love this man had for me was undeniable. Even if I couldn't hear his thoughts, I would have known my life was his. Dear Fate, I believed at that moment I wanted him more than he did me. Then suddenly we both went into a frenzy. My fingers grabbed at the zipper of his jeans. Daniel tugged my sweater over my head. Clothes went in directions from left then to the right. My fingers gently and softly found Daniel's hardness and clasped him hungrily. His mouth found mine again. Urgency was felt as a moan rumbled from deep inside his chest. The vibrations tingled all of my senses, sending me into a hot matted mess. My body ached more than ever for him.

Backwards he moved us, stumbling, tripping and even laughing as we tried to find

our way somewhere, anywhere. It didn't matter at that point where we landed. We had to have one another. With a heavy growl, Daniel finally gave up. The muscles in his arms flexed once. In one easy motion, he lifted me up to him, sliding my body across his long torso. My arms wrapped tightly around his neck. His hands grabbed my legs as they locked around his waist.

The intoxicating spicy scent swirled around my senses. I softly nipped at his neck, savoring the spicy scent and sweet taste of his skin. My teeth suddenly ached. The canines inside of my mouth emerged ever so slightly. I wanted to taste more of him in my fevered state. Closing my teeth down into his skin the rush of sweetness ran from my teeth. Daniel's body stiffened. He let out a deep and throaty growl. He took two strides and slammed my body against the kitchen counter. A gasp of air escaped me as my exhilarated senses drew to higher levels. His fingers dug into my hips as he pulled me down onto him. In one long and stealthy motion, he entered me completely.

The hot rush of excitement ran through me. My breath ran in short pants. Fever consumed my soul. I wanted more. Dear Fate, how could I be so greedy and selfish when it came to Daniel. Deeply my fingernails dug into his hot flesh. My knees pressed tightly against his chest. The muscles in his arms tightened and flexed as he held me tightly against him. Deeper and harder he drove inside me, taking me to the edge of an eternity I had never known existed until now. My dear lover had been holding back. The wolf instinct was released inside both of us; a hot untamed and wild beast was set free.

Cries of pleasure echoed through the room. Uncontrollable whimpers and moans escaped me. My voice shivered as my body quivered in pleasure. I cried out a series of pleas to my lover. Daniel continued in a rhythm only I could understand. It was our song. It was our rage. It was our passion. It was our need. I cried out, begged him as my world swirled and shook around me. The earth finally fell away. Existence as I knew it disappeared. Higher and higher I soared. My body exploded inside. Tremors threatened my mind. Daniel grabbed my legs, sliding his arms underneath them and pushing them apart. Harder he drove. Deeper into the very existence that he held so sacred, like the Alpha male he was, strong and demanding.

All dignity I had was lost in that moment. The muscles in my arms trembled as I braced myself against the countertop. Daniel grabbed my waist as my hips moved wildly against him. The tremors took over me as I took every inch of him I could possibly contain inside my body. Harder he drove me until an explosion erupted out of me like a volcano. My mouth opened. My canines fully exposed. My eyes locked onto his now dark brown eyes. The feeling kept coming. He wasn't going to stop. The feeling grew deeper, uncontrollable as I threw my head back. A scream of undeniable pleasure erupted from my throat. Cries, moans, whimpers and deep growls of pleasure continued to trail out of me. Daniel's deep, throaty groans and growls were now as loud as mine. Dear Fate, he had been holding back! His body shook and trembled as we came dangerously and violently together.

We both were exhausted. Our bodies glistened with the tiny beads of sweat. As soon as we could move, I climbed down off the counter. My legs were still shaking. My body was still reacting to him. There was no denying Daniel and I were made for each

other. We finally made it to the sofa. I reached over and pulled a blanket over us. Never mind the bedroom. We didn't have enough strength left to make it. I snuggled close to him as my eyes closed; the soft sound of his heartbeat drummed a slow and steady pace. Slowly I drifted into the realm of soft sleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY

The darkness of the night settled around me. I was in the midst of a dream. I was walking through an open meadow with low-lying clouds pressing against the brilliant green grass. The air of the night was clean and pure. The scents of wildflowers and pasture grass were abundant.

Stopping only to sniff the air, I recognized another scent. Vampire. Turning, I saw one standing behind me. This was not the same vampire I had come to know. The vampire who stood before me was darker. Deadly. His pale skin seemed to glow under the light of the moon. He was beautiful in the same way as Richard. This vampire had long black hair down to his waist. His eyes were the same blue diamond like jewels that pierced into my very soul. He was tall and elegant, like a statue of a Greek God. His face was a chiseled work of art with well-defined cheek and jawbones. The black shirt he wore didn't hide the broadness of his shoulders. When he moved, he moved with such fluidity it appeared he walked on air.

Bells of fear tolled in my heart. I slowly stepped backwards. Tremors ran through me. My heart screamed warnings loudly inside me. This vampire was not friendly. There was an evil lurking inside him, an evil far more deadly than I had ever seen before. This time I had no choice but to flee. Was I fast enough to avoid contact between this creature and me? I did not know, but I would find out.

The muscles twitched in my hindquarters as I pivoted and broke into a run. Moving faster than I had ever moved before, I ran. The wind was in my face, plummeting through the depth of the forest. I could hear his laughter behind me. He was a shadow of a figure following me, chasing me without ceasing. I was his target. His prey.

For miles I ran, searching for the safety I needed. I came to a clearing. I was exhausted and fell to ground, my breath heaving and the muscles inside my body aching from the extra strain. If it was my death he sought after, then I had no other choice. I turned my head and saw him standing at the edge of what appeared to be rocks. He laughed again. His laughter, eerie as it was, rang out into the night. Then I realized something, he could not cross over the rocks. I was inside the wall of Fort Mountain.

I heard the sound of rustling leaves beside me. Jumping to my feet, I turned around. My ears flattened against my head as I watched the leaves. The hair on my back prickled to their ends. There was something wrong, terribly wrong. Suddenly a hand shot out from beneath the ground and grabbed my paw. I yelped out loudly. Pulling my

front foot back with all my strength, the pale hand wouldn't let go. Loud growls rumbled from my chest. There was no way out. Hands were now on my shoulders. My breath caught in my chest. It was over for me this time. I knew it.

"Julie!" I heard a voice fading into my dream. "Julie! Wake up!"

Slowly I came to my senses. I opened my eyes to find Daniel hovering over me, his eyes wide with terror. What on earth? My breathing was erratic as I tried to calm down. I looked around and noticed it was daylight and the rain had stopped. Daniel and I must have slept through the night soundly.

"Julie?" he began. "Are you awake?"

I nodded slowly without speaking. I was still numb from my dream, and my heart was still racing. My eyes were wide and fear consumed me.

"Dear Fate!" His eyes peered into mine. "I can see the images of your dream!" Daniel was as shocked as I was.

I looked into his eyes as the images flashed before him, replays of my meeting with the dark and dangerous vampire. Richard was by no means as dangerous as this vampire; this one was the most dangerous of them all.

"Who is he?" Daniel shifted against the pillow under his head.

I dropped my gaze for a moment. In the back of my mind, I tried to come up with some answer. From my own experiences, my dreams always had some meaning to them. If in fact this was a premonition then I was in danger. My eyes widened as my eyes darted back to his.

"Mithras." I whispered.

Even saying his name sent chills down my arms. I glanced at my arms as Daniel's hand settled on them and looked at me in confusion. He searched me for answers.

"Who is this Mithras?"

"Mithras is one of the oldest living vampires. Richard said he was the only one who may know what was hidden inside of Fort Mountain. I think he left to go find him."

"Why would he come to Fort Mountain?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. Maybe the item or whatever this evil thing is...it has something to do with him."

"He is someone we all should fear then?" Daniel asked. The uneasiness in his voice confirmed what I already knew. Yes. Mithras was a vampire we all should fear. I nodded slowly.

"Great." His head fell back on the pillow.

"Daniel, we can make it through this." I managed to strain out.

He raised his head. His eyes saw the hope that I clung to so desperately. He knew in my heart I had faith that we would make it.

"Yes, we will. I will not let anything happen to you." His hand went to my face.

For the first time, I truly believed him. Daniel was stronger. He was more confident in himself. I knew he would kill for me if he had to. It was his nature, the instinct of the Alpha male wolf inside of him. His words were as true as any I had ever heard. I gave him a gentle smile.

"Well, let's see if we can't leave those thoughts behind. I think..." he paused shifted

me slightly off him. "We need to start this honeymoon off with a bang."

"I thought we did that last night?" I chuckled softly.

Daniel's mouth twisted into a grin. His hazel eyes sparkled with delight. He knew all too well it was more than a bang. It was an incredible explosion of cosmic proportions.

"Yes, well, I have a day planned for us. Then when we return home tonight, we'll see if we can top last night." He kissed my forehead as he stood up.

A warm heat crossed my cheeks. We had a great night and if he wanted to improve upon it, then I would have no objections. Although any dignity I had had been lost last night. There was nothing else left to embarrass me.

Daniel padded away from me. His naked body was absolutely beautiful. Even from behind, he had the type of body that sculptors in ancient times longed to carve into statues. He had long, lean, muscular legs and wide shoulders that tapered into a narrow waist. And then there were those tight yet powerful buttocks. I inhaled a deep breath then released a long sigh. He was breathtaking. The best thing, he was all mine.

"So exactly what do you have in mind for us today? Shopping?" I was excited.

"Nope. Highland games." His voice trailed off as he disappeared around the corner of the bedroom.

Highland games, I wondered. Feeling somewhat aroused by Daniel's appearance, I considered joining him in the shower. The coldness of the room shook me over and I pulled the warm blanket over me. Highland games? The only thing I knew about Highland games were Cabot tossing and tug of war. Music, food and dancing accompanied such festivals. Indeed, this would be a good day. But then, any day spent with Daniel was a good day.

The water in the shower stopped. Any minute the bathroom door would open and Daniel would appear. Since I was already awake, I wanted to move to the bathroom, grabbing the warmth of the room before the cold air entered it. The bathroom door squeaked on its hinges. Now was my chance. I slipped passed him, escaping the cold of the cottage.

After my shower, I opened the bathroom door. Daniel had already built a roaring fire to warm the little cottage. The mixture of wood burning and coffee filled the air. With a towel wrapped around me, I walked toward the bedroom.

When I stepped out of the bathroom I froze. Daniel stood in the living room holding a cup of coffee. His eyes lifted to me as he saw my approach. I was speechless. There he stood; tall, handsome, strong and ever so virile. I had never dreamed he could look so appealing in a kilt. The dark blue, greens, yellows and tiny red colors intertwined in the woolen attire. The broad and muscular chest was covered slightly by the drape of the fabric that hung over his left shoulder. The colors enhanced the hazel tones within his eyes. I felt a twitch inside of me. My gaze fell to the kilt. What exactly was he wearing underneath it?

Daniel's eyebrow rose slightly. A soft chuckle escaped him as he turned the cup to his lips. Slowly he took a sip of the hot coffee. His eyes glinted with humor. Yes, his thoughts were clear to me. He loved that he excited me. It brought him great joy to know

I desired him.

"Would you like to find out?" A wicked grin now formed on his lips. "I mean, right now, if I am wearing anything under this kilt?" He teased.

"No." I let the word linger a moment. "I'd rather not." The sudden heat of blood rushing to my cheeks gave me away. Not to mention the thoughts that ran through my mind.

I turned fleeing toward the bedroom. The desire I had for Daniel ran deep. Dear Fate, I couldn't stand it any longer. My body trembled as I took a step toward the dresser. My hand reached out to brace myself. Blood boiled inside my veins. The hot passion swept over me, taking the very breath of my existence. The slight movement from my peripheral vision forced my full attention to his approach. Daniel stood in the doorway. The muscled arms flexed as he crossed them against his chest. He leaned against the doorframe. My heart pounded loudly. The only sound I could hear was the blood pounding in my ears. My face flushed. Every nerve in my body had become alive. Electricity surged through me. A soft growl erupted from my throat as I fought hard to regain my senses.

Daniel took one step toward me. I raised my hand to him and my other hand firmly braced myself against the dresser. A chill ran over me and I trembled. In my current condition, I shuddered to think of what would happen if Daniel so much as touched me. My breath was in a pant. Dear Fate, if he took one more step I felt as if I was going to lose my mind.

Daniel's lips twisted into a grin. My eyelids fluttered. Not on purpose. My legs were trembling. How could Daniel have such an effect on me? He moved. My legs went limp. In two strides, he was behind me. His strong muscular body pressed against me. Oh, Dear Fate, he *didn't* have anything on under that kilt! A heated breath of air escaped me as he tore the towel from me. His left arm held me firmly as he tossed the towel to the side. Weakness overtook me. Daniel braced my body against his hot frame. He slipped his leg through mine. His strong hand trailed gently over my breasts, teasing the hard points until I growled softly again. Slowly his fingers traced the centerline of my stomach further down. My skin burned against his touch. The intoxicating smell of his spicy scent sent my mind in a rush. Just one touch from him and I exploded inside.

"*How about we try some Highland games?*" he growled. His voice was deep and sultry. The vibrations from his growl sent shivers over my entire body. I melted.

Daniel's lips pressed against my neck. His fingers sank into the warmth and moist desire I had for him. Slowly and gently, he moved his hand. I reached around behind him and dug my fingernails into his thighs. A growl rumbled from his chest. My body rocked slowly against his. I panted and gasped in joyful delight. His teeth bore down on my skin as he increased his taunting. From that point, a violent urge took over me. It took us both over. Daniel was going to drive me out of my mind. I just knew it!

In one quick motion, Daniel swept me off my feet and carried me to the bed. An aggression took me over. Daniel didn't have much of a chance after that. I grabbed him violently then climbed on top of him. He didn't seem surprised by my reaction. He knew my thoughts. I wanted him. There was no point in waiting. His hands locked onto mine

as I slid down on his hardness. My breath panted with each hard stroke I made. Daniel's eyebrows met into a frown. The veins in his neck tensed. It was my turn to blow his mind. Just like the man he was to me, I knew what he wanted. Hard, long and even strokes.

For the rest of the day, we never left the bedroom. The fire completely burned out in the living room, but Daniel and I were well heated and warm. It never occurred to me that the Highland games were in May. This was what Daniel meant when he said Highland games. He just wanted to have me all to himself for once. No distractions, just a marathon of hot and rough sex. So this was what he had in mind for Highland games. Well, we were on our honeymoon. We had a full seven days to do...whatever we wanted.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The evening was cool. A gentle wind stirred from the north and with it came fresh reminders of home, the smell of the woodland area that surrounded me. It was good to be home. The short trip was nice, but home is always nicer.

We had stayed one more day in Scotland and then left the following day. Today was Tuesday. Daniel's need to call a meeting of the clans was our highest priority. Thomas had called together some of the local clans to meet at his home. With loads of laundry to do, I decided I wanted to stay at home this time. Daniel agreed and left.

I made a few phone calls, checking on Gramps and Aunt Tess. I let everyone know we had arrived back safe and sound. I also explained the extra danger of the werewolves to my family. Taylan's group would take extra care to watch out for any unwelcome and invading werewolves.

The next phone call I made was to Casey. She was elated Daniel and I were back in town. Casey explained to me that Richard had also returned. The news was not good. Richard was planning to meet with us tomorrow. In my heart, I was glad to see he made it back alive. For whatever reason, I still felt a part of me connected to him. I couldn't understand it. There was just something odd that I felt had to do with more than just his venom.

It was only a few hours; at least that is what I thought. The sudden opening of the front door woke me up from a sound nap. Apparently, I had fallen asleep in front of the television. Daniel moved into the living room. The expression on his face was pure worry. Rising up on my elbows, I tried to make some sense of the words that rambled out of his mouth.

"...tonight!" Was the only word I heard before he rushed up the stairs.

"What?" I called after him. The time on my watch said it was 8:30 p.m.

"Get dressed!" He called back to me.

What on earth for? Where were we going this time of night? A couple of minutes

passed before I managed to make my way up the stairs. Daniel was already dressed. He had on a pair of black jeans. The black Lycra shirt he wore strained against the muscles in his chest. He slipped on a black leather jacket. Daniel was a handsome sight before my eyes.

"Julie?" Turning, he opened my closet and pulled out clothes.

"Where are we going?" My mind was still trying to wake.

"We are going to a club. Didn't you hear me?" His voice was in a rush.

"Why?"

"We are meeting Richard and this guy named Mithras." He stated. He tossed an outfit on the bed.

Mithras. That name sent chills down my spine. Was Daniel out of his mind? Fear shot through me. After the dream I had of Mithras, I really didn't want to meet him. Why on earth did Richard bring this man back here? Casey said the news wasn't good. So where did this leave us?

"But..." I began when Daniel shot a firm look to me.

"But nothing. We have to meet him tonight. Jewels, this is important. Mithras wants to meet us in person. He knows what is hidden in Fort Mountain."

I shook my head and began to dress. This was not my idea of fun. Daniel stood behind me like a football coach as he pushed me. My choice of dress was different than his. After I managed to pull up my black tights, I grabbed a turtleneck sweater dress from the closet. I topped it off with a wide black belt and a pair of black thigh high boots. Tossing my hair a couple of times, I rushed through my makeup. Finally, I was ready to go.

We made it to the club safe and sound. Daniel's driving, of course, left something to be desired along the way. Inside the club, it was dark. It took a second or two for my eyes to adjust. The smell of mixed drinks and beer filled the air. Also another scent caught my attention, the floral scent of lilies and carnations. Vampires. There was more than one in the midst of the tiny club. The club was packed with them. There were humans scattered about. My attention to this newfound mystery came to an abrupt halt. Daniel's hand grabbed mine and pulled me through the crowded room. The scent became stronger as we moved through the crowd. My eyes darted around the room. So many of them. Vampires that lived around us who we never knew existed. There was such a distinction between the clear blue glistening eyes and the eyes of the humans. Here Daniel and I were in the middle of a club for vampires, the only two Lycans within the whole crowded area. I was sure our scent would attract more attention than needed. Most were curious, others...such as the one who's attention was now focused on me...dangerous.

Daniel stopped. The scent was stronger than I had ever encountered. Moving alongside him, I froze in my step. Richard sat in a booth with another man. Richard lifted his eyes to me. He wasn't wearing contacts. Those blue diamond like gems shot straight through me. My heart fluttered to an absolute stand still. Waves of emotions and feelings swept over me. Just feeling his presence evoked familiar feelings. A calling. A wanting. A will almost beyond my control.

"Julie." His voice was normal and controlled.

"Please sit. Join us." Mithras motioned to the empty side of the booth.

It was odd that I never noticed the man sitting in the shadows. Daniel sat down and slid closer to Richard. To my relief, I was happy. I moved in closer to Daniel. The shadow hidden body suddenly moved into sight, leaning closer to the table.

Mithras. He was every bit as breathtaking as he had been in my dream. His black hair, long and silky, flowed down his back. He wore a black silk shirt that only enhanced his pale appearance. His cheekbones were high and well defined. The eyes were the same jeweled blue eyes as Richard's. The scent however, was almost overpowering, strong to the point of being almost breathtaking.

"My name is Mithras," he began. His hand slowly wrapped around a tall glass in front of him. "I am honored you have decided to meet with me under these circumstances."

"Daniel Maxwell," Daniel stated firmly, "and my wife Julie."

Mithras caught my gaze. Chills immediately ran down my spine. Goose pimples prickled my arms. The hair on the back of my neck stood on its ends. He studied me for a long moment. A look of confusion swept over his face. He glanced to Daniel then to me and my heart fluttered. What did he see? Did he know something I didn't? Maybe.

"We should discuss this matter in private," Mithras said glancing toward me.

"What you have to say can be said in front of my wife," Daniel growled.

"I see." He paused, eyeing Daniel cautiously. "You regard your women with a sense of nobility," he scoffed. "Yes, I see this could be something of a distraction to you."

"Mithras," Richard interrupted. "The Lycans do view their women with high authority. They are warriors the same as the men."

"A woman warrior?" he mocked. "Is this true, Julie? Are you a true warrior?" Mithras asked. The words purred from his lips in the most intoxicating manner.

"Yes." The words had to be forced from my lips.

Mithras chuckled softly. "Many years ago women were high consorts to the kings of ancient times, and some even considered to be Goddesses. There were some who would betray a man, given the right circumstances, of course."

"I assure you..." I began.

"Never the less!" Mithras hissed. He inhaled a deep breath. "Richard, would you please escort Julie to the dance floor? I would like to discuss this matter in private with Mr. Maxwell."

"She can be trusted," Richard sharply returned.

Mithras immediately turned to Richard. His hand slammed down on the table. His sudden movement jolted me out of my chair. I rose with my heart pounding loudly. Richard eyed Mithras. The tension between the two was thick. Thicker than what I could stand. Whatever happened in their previous lives I didn't know, but what I did know was that they were not the best of friends. For that matter, I doubted if Mithras had any friends.

Richard glanced to Daniel, a firm and controlled look on his face. Daniel was furious. Richard stood and then moved around Mithras. Mithras eyed Daniel carefully.

Daniel bristled as Richard's hand touched my arm.

"Remember our agreement," Daniel sneered to Richard.

Richard's attention went to Daniel. "Yes, of course. How could I forget?" His voice was sarcastic.

Daniel burned with rage. He absolutely despised Mithras and vampires in general. He inhaled a deep and controlled breath. Mithras turned to Daniel immediately. His crystal blue diamond-like eyes flared.

"Come on," Richard whispered softly against my ear, directing me toward the dance floor. "Leave them be."

Despite my attempts, Richard's hand gripped tightly under my arm leading me away from them. I couldn't help but watch as Daniel's eyes blackened with anger. He hated to see me with Richard. Mithras spoke softly to Daniel, pulling his attention away from me. Richard's hand slid around my waist pulling me closer as he moved to the slow music that started to play.

"Daniel will be fine." Richard stated. His hand pulled mine around his neck. "At least look like you are enjoying this."

My gaze fell upon Richard. His eyes were soft and his lips formed a gentle smile. The soft sounds of the music flowed over me. Richard's body felt like steel next to mine. There was something odd about him, something different. I couldn't help wonder. He even smelled differently.

"You smell different." I shot out.

Richard shook his head. A soft chuckle followed. His eyebrows rose. "Exactly what do I smell like to you?"

My body moved in a slow movement with his. He pulled me closer and pressed my body against his. His face was only a few inches from mine. The coolness of his breath swept over my face and the scent lingered in my senses. My mind swirled. The world twisted around me, spinning wildly out of control.

"Must you always do this to me?" My heart raced out of control.

His lips twitched into a smile. "Julie, what am I doing to you?"

His breath feathered my skin again. "Make me ...you..." I couldn't even say it.

The beautiful face came closer. "*Make you what? What would you like me to do?*" His lips pressed against the side of my face. His voice was no more than a deep and sultry breath.

A breath escaped me. I trembled. His body ... Dear Fate ... his body felt like it was molding itself to mine. Or was it my body that fit so perfectly with his. With each beat of the music, Richard moved in a provoking manner.

"What?" I could barely think. My body moved with his in the perfect rhythm he set for the dance, flowing to the slow sultry beat of the music. Another gasp of air and I was panting.

"Tell me, Julie." He whispered again. "*What would you have me do?*"

"You ... are ... not being ... fair." I pressed.

"Vampires never are," he seethed.

"Our ... friendship." My breath strained in my throat.

"Ah yes..." He hissed. "I tell you what, since you decline to tell me what you would have me to do. I will tell you what I will do."

"OH no!" I choked as his hand slid down to the small of my back.

My skin was burned. His fingers moved smoothly up my back pressing my chest to his. My breast swelled and ached. He moved, grinding his body against mine. Oh Dear Fate! I needed to be away from him. Every part of my body was on fire. I wanted him. I couldn't help it. I couldn't fight the urge. I wanted to know what he would feel like.

"Mmm...yes," he growled against my ear. *"I would ravish your body. Send you into a world of bliss you never experienced before. Make you cry out in pleasures you never imagined. Make you cry out my name until you were breathless. Oh yes, my lovely, I would make you sing a beautiful song."*

"Richard...No..." I begged.

"Yes," he hissed softly. *"I would take you places you never imagined. Tell me Julie. Tell me you want me. Tell me you want me to do those things to you."*

"No!" I whispered but my thoughts betrayed me. I could envision every moment; every touch; every moan. Every cry of pleasure he described.

Richard inhaled a deep breath. His chest rose against mine, sending me into another wave of heat flustered madness. Why me? Dear Fate! Why me? I buried my head into his shoulder.

"Your body betrays you, my lovely," he cooed softly. His breath cursed my skin.

"Please...stop." He was right; my body had betrayed me, so had my words.

"You want to know what it would be like with me. I told you. I told you exactly what I would do to you. And you alone. Tell me yes."

"N-o."

"Yes, Julie. Tell me yes and I will end this burning inside your body. The desire you need to be satisfied. The desire that makes your body aches for me to be inside of you. Tell me yes, and I will put an end to all of this."

Another pant escaped me.

"N-o...I..."

His lips pressed against my ear. He inhaled a soft breath. *"Just tell me yes. I want to hear you say my name. Say it like you did when I first kissed you."*

My breath shuddered. Overwhelming feelings of desire rose inside me. Dear Fate, was I going to take him right here on the dance floor? Did he have any idea what he had put me through? Of course, he did. It was his seduction. I was a fly. A fly caught in his web! I was powerless. A helpless victim caught in his web of seduction. How could any woman resist him? He was a vampire, an inhumanly beautiful vampire skilled in the art of seduction.

"Just one more time." The sultry tones of his voice shook me. *"Let me hear you say it."* His lips trailed down my jaw, lingering lightly against my lips.

The soft floral fragrance consumed me. Yes, I was his, my will was no longer my own. The woman who desired him had won. I was without a doubt, under his spell. I was intoxicated with his wine called desire. The wine that tempted and challenged my very soul.

His head moved to the side of my face, inhaling another breath. A soft growl rumbled in his throat. The hot fevered blood pulsated through my veins. The woman who desired to be unleashed, she called to him, arching herself to his lips. Satisfied, he responded. The coolness of his lips pressed against hers. My body trembled with excitement. My eyes closed tightly.

Our bodies moved together, swaying in a soft and sensual dance. He took every bit of resistance I had, tossing all cares aside. At that moment, there was nothing left of me. The only thing on my mind was Richard.

"I know you want me, Julie." His voice filled with lust. *"I can smell the desire within your veins."*

"Richard..."

"Ahh- it sounds so good to my ears. Tell me what you want me to do."

My lips trembled against his wanting more of him, wanting to taste him, to reenact our first kiss.

"I..."

Before I had the chance to answer, I was suddenly ripped away from him. Swaying wearily, I felt my body hit something hard and hot. It was Daniel. Mithras moved beside Richard. Richard's eyes flared toward Daniel. A menacing growl, deep and throaty rumbled loudly from Richard.

"We had an agreement!" Daniel roared between clinched teeth.

"Come now, Daniel," Mithras cooed. *"A vampire is a vampire. You don't expect Richard to give up that easily. Do you?"* He coughed out a laugh.

"She is mine. Not his!" Daniel's eyes darted to Mithras.

"Yes, that may be true enough," Mithras touched Richard's shoulder with his hand. *"But, you see, there is one distinct difference between us. When a vampire sets his sights on something...there is nothing any one can do. They are powerless against the will of a vampire."* He laughed again. *"If I heard correctly, your agreement with Richard was to take care of her in the event of your death? Is that not correct?"*

"So I survived," Daniel growled.

Mithras released a haunting laugh. His eyes twinkled. *"Your ignorance amuses me. She is marked. There is nothing you can do about it. I assure you, killing Richard is the last thing you will want to do."*

Daniel's eyes narrowed. *"Marked?"* His gaze immediately went to Richard. *"You told me the effects would wear off!! How can this be? You lied!"*

Mithras slithered between the two of them, his eyes still twinkling with delight. *"Daniel, I think you should understand where you are. You are in the middle of a club filled with vampires. Now, take a moment to digest it. You wouldn't make it out alive. Then she would be Richard's ... forever. Do yourself a favor and let it go."*

Turning to Richard, Mithras' hand rested on his shoulder again. *"Come now, Richard. Let us leave. I have much to prepare for."*

Richard gave Daniel one last growl before turning swiftly. Daniel's body pressed against mine as he returned the growl. Daniel's thoughts were raging. He was going to kill Richard at the first opportunity he had. Richard's life would end. Daniel planned on

killing him when they met at the mountain.

Daniel grabbed my arm. His fingers tightly gripping me as he pulled my vampire intoxicated body out of the club. He dragged me to the car. I couldn't speak. I barely could walk. Daniel was furious. He knew how very dangerous Richard was to me. He saw firsthand what this had come to. A series of curses streamed from his lips as he started the car.

There was nothing I could say to him. My mind was still drug intoxicated. My drug...Richard. I felt the overwhelming need to be with him. Dear Fate...I could even feel him calling to me. Drawing me to him. I had to go.

Daniel hit the interstate, his driving erratic. He rolled the windows down on the car. The fresh air did not help. The smell of Richard still lingered in my senses. My thoughts were irrational. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew I was with Daniel. But I felt dreamy, like I was walking on a cloud, living in a dream world. I knew I was married to Daniel. I knew Daniel was my one true love. But...I also knew I longed for Richard.

As my muddled state of mind continued, I could feel Richard's pull. I could almost sense him; feel him calling to me, willing me to come back to him. Totally consumed in my own thoughts, I realized something else. I couldn't hear Daniel's thoughts.

Daniel drove fast. The car's tires squealed as he turned off the interstate onto the secondary road to our driveway. The engine whined as he pressed the accelerator to the floor. I didn't care. I was in a state of euphoria. I longed for Richard.

The night air blew into the car, chilling me to the bone. The air was cold enough to freeze me. I sniffled a couple of times, shivering against the cold night air. It still didn't matter. My thoughts drifted again.

We arrived in front of my house, but I sat motionless in the car. Daniel huffed a deep breath as he slammed the car door. The car rocked for a moment. I supposed I should move. Where would I find the strength? My hand moved toward the car door. It was snatched away from me. Suddenly, my body was jerked from the seat, lifted into the arms of this madman.

"Put me down!" I growled.

Daniel ignored me. His strides were long as we entered the front door of the house. He promptly placed me on the sofa, then left for the kitchen. I heard footsteps moving down the staircase behind me, Heather and Jason.

Jason paused as Daniel came from the kitchen. His eyes remained black as night. Wearily, I looked toward Jason and Heather.

"What happened?" Heather shrilled.

"That damn vampire! I am going to kill him!" Daniel roared.

Heather moved to me. Her petite figure knelt down in front of me?

"What's wrong with her? Why does she look like this?" Her eyes were wide. "Julie, can you hear me?"

I nodded. "Yes" My voice was still weak. I couldn't believe everyone was so alarmed. I just wanted to sleep.

"He will die!" Daniel roared again.

"Daniel? What exactly happened?" Jason asked. He pushed Heather aside and carefully examined me.

Daniel paced back and forth. He had the cell phone against his head.

"Richard! That's what happened!"

"Did he bite her or something?" Jason moved my head from side to side, looking for bite marks I presumed. I pushed his hand away.

"No. But he may as well have bitten her. Look at her!" Daniel snapped.

"What happened with Mithras?" Heather turned to Daniel.

"That arrogant...." he shot out.

For the next few minutes, I listened. My mind was cognizant; I just couldn't shake the effects of Richard from me. I remained silent while Daniel explained the conversation he had with Mithras to Heather and Jason.

Mithras knew about the item hidden somewhere in Fort Mountain. It turned out that he was the one who sent it over to the New World. America. Mithras would not divulge the identity of the item itself. Mithras himself would go to collect this secret item because he didn't want the werewolves to have it. He said the evil it contained could destroy all of us.

A pact was made between Mithras and Daniel. For one night, together, the vampires and Lycans would go to Fort Mountain. They would find the item and Mithras would return to his home with it. Daniel mentioned he had pressed the issue of having the item destroyed.

Mithras claimed, "You can't destroy evil. Evil in itself lives in many forms."

The plans were set forth to meet under the next full moon. The Lycans would keep the werewolves busy, distracting their attention from Mithras. The vampires would also play their part in killing off a few of the stinky creatures.

I listened further as Daniel told Heather and Jason of his plan. He didn't trust the vampires. According to Daniel, if this item was pure evil then it needed to be destroyed. He would make sure the item was annihilated. Then together the Lycans would finish off the vampires.

The next full moon there was going to be a war like no other. I knew it. The war that brewed was not one I wanted to be a part of. Killing all the vampires? Daniel had lost his mind. Something had changed inside of him. Death and killing had become more a part of him than I had ever imagined.

Worse yet, he was going to lead an entire group of Lycans against a pack of deadly werewolves. Becoming a Dark Wolf had changed Daniel. It had changed him into something deadly, far worse than a vampire. He was not evil but his thoughts of killing evil were precise and calculated.

Thomas and Charlotte showed up for the final debate. Why did everyone look at me with such sympathy? The debate continued for another hour or two, I'm not sure. I rested my head against the pillow on the sofa and slowly I drifted off to sleep. The sound of voices continued to rise and fall as I sank deeper into my slumber.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The room was dark when I opened my eyes. I was in my bed, restless and couldn't sleep. Daniel slept quietly. Thoughts ran wild through my mind. Visions played before my eyes. Richard. Mithras. The chill of their blue eyes played over and over again. Someone had dressed me in my nightgown. Carefully, I moved and grabbed my silk robe. A breath of fresh air might do me good. The replays of Richard lingered on my mind, the longing, the need and the desire.

Quietly, I padded down the staircase and outside to the patio. The air was cooler, but not to the point I couldn't stand it. The sky was a dark essence of blue hues. The clouds, silver toned cotton balls floated slowly in front of the half moon. My instincts were higher than normal. Richard flooded my mind again. I closed my eyes. What had he done to me? This wasn't just the venom. There had to be more of a reason than that. I could feel him. Feel his presence somewhere nearby. Feel the longing that stirred inside his immortal heart. The wind stirred slightly, bringing to me the mysterious scent of a vampire.

"Out for a breath of fresh air?" His voice broke through my thoughts.

My eyes widened as I saw him standing in the backyard. I couldn't speak. My thoughts soon faded. Through the dark night, the inhumanly beautiful creature looked even more appealing than in the day. Richard stepped lightly up the stairs of the patio. I froze. My breath seized.

"I..." he began. His gaze dropped to my trembling hands. Slowly, he took a step closer to me.

"Stop." My lips quivered.

The brown eyebrows met in a frown. "Julie," he began, "I cannot live this way any longer."

"Richard...no...please." I begged again.

"You *haunt* me. I cannot stop thinking about you. Everywhere I go, I cannot escape you. Your eyes. Your lips." He moved closer still. "*Your kiss.*" He whispered.

I turned my head to the side. In that moment, I couldn't bear to look into his eyes. Worse yet, I didn't want him to see the pain I felt for him in my own eyes. The closer he came, the stronger the essence of his being pulled me to him. It drew me to him like a magnet. My eyes closed tightly as I felt his body only inches from mine.

"Only you can release me." The coolness of his breath fanned across my face.

My eyes lifted to see the tortured look on his face. I could see the mental anguish he had been dealing with and pain swelled inside my heart. He was locked inside a living hell. There was no release for him and no relief in sight. Casey was right. Richard was unfathomably in love with me. His cool fingers slipped around my hand and brought it gently to rest over his heart. The slow beating heart of this vampire now raced against the palm of my hand.

"This is yours. It is all that I have to offer you." His voice broke in a whisper. "*Take*

it and do with it what you will. I no longer have the need to live, if I cannot have you."

Tears formed in my eyes. Pain burned inside my heart, piercing through the walls and barriers that shielded me from him. This beautiful creation stood before me, willing to die. I could feel it. Deep down in my heart I knew. Richard wanted to die. He truly didn't have the will to live. No, I couldn't bear the thought of it. Not Richard.

"Richard," I choked out. A single tear fell from my eye. *"I..."*

His finger gently removed the tear from my cheek. Blinking slowly, his hand slid around my neck and pulled me closer to him. The coolness of his body pressed against mine. The smell of his aromatic floral fragrance filled my senses, rendering me helpless under his control.

"I can't go on living without you. You are the very thing I have wanted all these lonely and terrifying years. You have no idea the pain I have suffered. Julie, the moments I am with you...I truly live. You bring a light into my life that I have not felt in over 300 years. It is not the memory of Juliet that haunts me. It is you and you alone. I am tortured by every moment I am not near you. Knowing I could never have you, have your love. I would never hurt you. I promise you this; I would rather die than continue to live this way." The softness of his breath lingered against my face.

"Richard, you can't die..." I breathed out in a fainted whisper. My heart ripped at the sound of his voice, which spoke of a love forbidden.

His lips pressed lightly against mine. *"Then give me a reason to live,"* He spoke softly against my lips.

My heart raced. My breath froze. Tenderly, his lips parted mine with a gentle graze. The softness of his tongue traced the curve of my lip. The faintness of his floral scent drew into my mouth. Leisurely, he slid it further inside searching for the everlasting kiss that was never meant to be. The taste of him weakened me. Breathless and wanting more of the delightful taste, this sweet taste was the very thing I had been craving, his kiss. The taste of his mouth against mine, the flavor of his tongue as it caressed mine. Tears streamed down my face. He pulled my helpless body closer as I gave in to the kiss. The will I had no longer existed. Softly, he stroked my tongue wrapping his around mine. He drew a deep breath and pulled it into his mouth. A groan rumbled in his throat as I took over the kiss.

The intoxicating feeling increased. I wanted more. My hand went to his face holding him close to me. His fingers ran through my hair to the back of my head, pressing me harder against his lips. I inhaled the sweet scent deeper into my lungs, allowing the wonderful sweetness to intoxicate me even further. Richard's body pressed harder against mine, molding me to him. I felt every inch of his cool body. The swelling of his manhood pressed against the womanhood that wept for him.

Fire flamed in my veins. My heart pounded hard against his chest. Without any warning, my body quivered. He instinctively caught the small of my back with his left hand to steady me. In turn, he controlled the kiss again. Stroking. Teasing. Taunting. My breath held. My body trembled. My mind went numb. My legs tingled and weakened. The earth felt like it moved underneath my feet. My mind swirled. That's when I felt it, a slow coursing through my body. The ache...the pain...suddenly I came. Trembling

underneath his spell, my body betrayed me underneath his kiss. I went limp in his arms. Richard's lips left mine.

"Richard." I breathed out.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

There are things in my life I could never explain. Never understand. Even if I had a life span of eternity, I may not ever hold the answers. My heart and mind were confused, torn between two men.

Daniel was my love. My life. My mate. According to our laws, we only had one mate. I was a Lycan, a female wolf. Never in a million years would I have expected my life to be in such turmoil. I loved Daniel.

Richard was my torture. My heart broke for him. I was not supposed to love him the way I did. I knew due to my nature as a Lycan, we loved deeply. Richard was a vampire, a very dangerous and seductive vampire. A vampire who had fallen in deeply love with me. I know now, his seduction methods were as dangerous as his killing methods. I was almost certain it was because Richard was a vampire that I was drawn to him, pulled to him. I was his obsession. With one kiss, Richard opened me to another world, a world that desired him.

Daniel had taken control of the Lycan Council. We had killed the former Council in defense of our lives and my family. My family who called themselves the Dark Wolves, another surprise for me, a family I never knew existed. They accepted me with open arms and accepted Daniel as a part of them. Gramps even accepted Daniel as a Dark Wolf.

With this new venture, Daniel reconciled the clans with their originators, once again bringing the rule over the Lycans to their rightful bloodline, the Aniwayahs.

Gramps was more than just a leader to his people. He was a great man of spiritual power. A Shaman of the most powerful magic I had ever witnessed. This was my bloodline.

I finally understood why my father kept the secret of who my mother was from the Lycan Council. The Council itself was wicked. My father knew this. For this reason, I believe he lost his life. It was my theory that the Council knew the power behind my mother's lines, what she was capable of. They knew the great strength of Gramps was in her blood. Would this be my Fate as well?

A war was on the horizon, set forth by Daniel as the new leader of the Lycan clans. Fear grew in my heart for Daniel. There was something that had taken him over that night he changed into a Dark Wolf. I feared becoming the leader of the Lycan Clans would change him as well. My fear was becoming stronger.

Daniel's plan to wage war against the vampires was terrifying. How many more lives would we lose? The vampires helped save my life. It was his rage against Richard

that set this into motion. Richard was not the only one with an obsession. Richard was, in fact, Daniel's obsession. Almost every day, he contemplated ways to kill Richard and save me from the clutches of this vampire.

The future was not certain. Unlike Daniel, I couldn't see that far ahead of me. There was one thing I did know. Whenever I was around Richard, my bond with Daniel was broken. The mere presence of Richard voided any mental ability I had with Daniel, leaving me to be consumed totally by the inhumanly beautiful vampire.

What did the future hold for us? War? Greed? Obsession? Desire? In the midst of all the warmongering, where was the love? Where was the love we were willing to die for?

With my heart broken into thousands of pieces, I dared not contemplate the answers. There was one gift I treasured; my child, the child that grew inside my body. What would it become? What would Fate have in store for it? I could only hope my unborn child's life would be better than mine. Is this the way my father felt for me?

In my heart, I knew there was a death to come. Whose, I did not know. I could feel it. Sense it on the horizon. If Daniel managed to bring war against the vampires, then we would lose. How many of us would lose our lives? I knew in my heart, Richard would never let another vampire kill me. With this knowledge, it only made me wonder if he would take personal satisfaction in killing Daniel. To fulfill Daniel's agreement, upon his death I would belong to Richard. Did Daniel realize he had set his own death sentence? At least in the eyes of Mithras he did.

Then again, there was Mithras. The thought of his name sent chills down my spine. Dangerous. Haunting. Controlling. Absolute power. Those were the words that came to my mind. Mithras was not the type of man who would make peace offerings, which is why I wondered if he had ulterior motives. His words to Daniel, "A vampire is a vampire," what did he mean? Did this mean we couldn't trust the vampires?

My life was not what it had seemed. Day by day, it changed. The people around me changed. War tends to change people, myself included. Every day my thoughts changed. My heart was pulled in different directions. My will was changing. I could no longer fight the power of this vampire who now had control over me. This vampire who had willed me to be his and whose kiss drew a deep passion from me that I had never before experienced. This inhumanly beautiful vampire - Richard.

Even in my dreams, he haunted me. That night I had one of the most interesting dreams, it was actually terrifying.

I stood outside in a grape vineyard. It was almost dawn. Richard stood beside me. He took my hand and we moved swiftly through the vineyard to a spot high on a hillside. Richard stopped and sat down on the edge of the hill. He held his hand out for me, pulling me down to sit between his legs. I eased down on the ground, his arms wrapped around me, pulling me closer to him. His face nestled in my neck, kissing me then resting his head on my shoulder, pressing his face against mine.

We sat together only for a few minutes, when I noticed the sun rise, peeking through the low lying clouds. The brighter it became, I could see the sun's rays piercing through the break in the clouds. The gentle rays of sunlight flowed in a sparkling radiance down on the grapevines. Yes, as Richard had painted the story, it was just like

he said. The land came alive, with the brilliant colors of greens and browns, accented by the beauty of the blue sky. The sun's golden rays glistened on the dew left on the grapes from last night's fog, giving the appearance of sparkling diamonds. It was the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. I exhaled softly, nestling my head against his chest.

"It is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen," I whispered softly.

"It used to be for me, once," he whispered.

My heart melted. His arms wrapped around me tighter as his lips pressed to my neck again, and then his face nestled against mine. Feeling the smoothness of his skin so close to mine, I nestled my cheek against his as a soft moan escaped my throat.

An immense love crashed down inside my heart as I looked into those beautiful eyes hidden behind the tinted contacts. Richard's beautiful face was at peace. He actually glowed from the love that was inside of him.

I turned my head, resting my body against his again, my eyes glancing over the huge vineyard below.

For a moment, within the dream, an odd sense of reality hit me. I realized as I sat with Richard on this picturesque hillside. There was something more to this dream. Immortality was something I had never dreamed of or imagined, but here I faced it. I wondered what it would be like to spend years, who knew how long, hundreds or even thousands of years walking on the face of this old earth. To watch the earth change before my eyes, to see buildings come and go. How could I measure the time? Captivated by one moment in time like this.

My eyes traveled upward to the sky, so blue and so brilliant was the morning, sitting here on a little countryside in France with Richard. I shifted against his chest again, the feeling of an odd stirring rang in my soul. Little did I realize what I had truly become.

Enjoy
Fall of kNight
By
T.L. Mitchell

Take a sneak at the exciting
Sequel
Dawn of kNight
Book 3 in the kNight Series

The following preview is unedited.

Prologue

The sun gallantly rose over the mountains, separating the night from the new day.

A new dawn waited, bringing with it our fate. No one knew for sure what destiny held for us. Our lives changed with each day. Every day brought to us a new decision, a new choice and a new hope.

Who was I to fight against Fate? Her will was predetermined even before the existence of time. It was her decision as to the course my life had taken. She had taken from me love, my will and my hope. Never had I felt as hopeless as my life began to spiral into another wave of destiny. Yes, I feared this new destiny.

I fought like the warrior that I was. Strong, determined and fearless I fought against my foe. If I were to live in the time of Achilles, I would have been considered a goddess. Since I lived in this time, would anyone know the battle I endured? Would anyone remember my name? Or would my battle be long forgotten in the sands of time?

My battle waged, as the fight for my life continued, a fight with the will to survive and to live. I was much more than a Lycan. Another part of my life that I never knew dwelled deep inside my soul. A Dark Wolf had emerged from within me. The blood of the ancient tribe of wolf shape shifters ran through my veins. I was destined for war. It was in my blood. The war waged on as the battle came to a climax.

With my sword held high, I charged. The blades collided. The sound of steel against steel sang loudly into midnight's cold air. My hand was not as strong as my opponent's, but it was not my hand that failed me. In that one dreadful moment, it was my heart that weakened. The dreadful moment that took my life.

The sharp silvery sword of my enemy fell upon me, cutting into my flesh, penetrating deeply into my heart. My eyes suddenly widened from the shock of my defeat. Slowly, I dropped to my knees, clutching to my chest as the crimson red blood stained my hands. With heavy death laden eyes lifted to my opponent, I waited in agony. A glimpse was what I wanted, just to look into the eyes of my foe before my eyes closed forever.

My world faded, slipping from the world of the living. Darkness and death came for me on a swift horse. The feet of horses galloped loudly as they pulled the chariot of death near. For the first time, I thought, I would stare into the eyes of the one whom so ruled my life. The one I battled against daily. Yes, life and death are certain. We live. We die. This is life. To know life and love is what drives us forward. The very force that makes us fight harder for what we believe.

"Show me." I hissed a ragged blood filled breath.

On my command, the veil of my opponent lifted. The soulless eyes fell upon me. Death came closer as I heard the pounding feet of the horses thundered against the ground. I was satisfied; I knew the face of my opponent. In a small way, it was my own victory. Even in death, I had would have victory. My death would not be in vein.

The sword of my opponent rose high above my head. Yes, this was the end. For the new dawn of my life brought with it the end. The sword wielded against me. It was the final strike. It mattered no more, for I was at peace. For once, I knew my opponent; her name was Fate.

CHAPTER 1

Dreams sometimes reflect a part of reality, especially in my life. A dream, they say, is a part of reality that sets itself firmly in your mind. Most of the time, it is those parts that I wish to forget. Mainly, it was the part of my life where Richard was concerned. He was the inhumanly beautiful vampire that haunted my dreams and my heart.

Where the dream began, I can't really say, if it was a dream at all. My dreams were not always one hundred percent correct. I was still having problems with the premonition thing. Most of the time the dreams were fifty percent correct. But which fifty percent of this dream was true, I would soon come to find out. Nevertheless, this dream was different. It appeared to be in the middle of the day, the sun was blocked by the grayish blue clouds. The winter weather was quiet soothing, at least for me. I enjoyed the snow. And snow it did, a blizzard more or less.

I was stood in front of the fireplace. To my right, Casey and Nathaniel stood nearby the bar and to my left was Richard. He handed me a beautiful sword. My fingers grasped the ivory dragon head handle as I held tightly to the sheath. As I pulled out the sword from its black and gold inlaid sheath, the sound of metal against metal filled the air. I couldn't help from admire the craftsmanship of the Katana. The handcrafted dragon head handle, carved meticulously as well as the blade which had been folded over six hundred times. It was truly a magnificent weapon. Sleek, sharp and very powerful. The sword was truly a mastered item of an ancient warrior.

A call stirred inside of my soul, singing out my name as I heard thousands of souls crying out in my blood. The bloodline of a thousand Lycans, the protectors of mankind were ready for battle. A powerful force, almost magical rose within me. It was a type of strength I hadn't known before. A will more powerful than I had ever imagined. From my belly it pulled on a call so deep I trembled slightly as I could feel myself becoming one with the sword.

The dream soon shifted. The day turned into night. I found myself deep inside the walls of Fort Mountain. The bright silvery full moon lingered high in the sky. The air, chilled from the wintry snow, blistered against my human skin.

Brendan Phillips stood before me as I gripped tightly to my new found treasure. He wasn't a werewolf, but remained in his human form. Still, his dark and evil body reeked the stench of werewolf blood. Was it the time he met his death? Or mine?

"So you come here thinking you could defeat us? A sheep in wolves clothing." He mocked lowly.

My back stiffened as I dared not to turn and face him. The sword firmly in my grasp, I raised my free hand to wipe my mouth. Blood, I thought. My lip had been cut. As my eyes darted around my surroundings, I realized I was in the middle of a war. The sound of swords cutting flesh, the sound my people yelping in pain and the menacing loud roars from the werewolves filled the night air.

"No." I said earnestly still with my back to him. "I didn't come here thinking I

could defeat you."

"Then what?" He roared, and then released a sinister laugh. "What could you have possibly thought by coming here? What could you have imagined to accomplish with a few vampires and Lycans? Do you think you can protect what this land has for us? Who are you but a woman, not human nor vampire?" He spat. "You think you can defeat me? I have lived, counting the moments when I would collect what is rightfully owed to me!"

"I'm a Lycan." I stated flatly. The fire that burned in my veins ignited against my flesh. With fevered skin and a taste for blood, I wanted to kill him. I wet my lips with the tip of my tongue, anticipating my chance.

He snorted mockingly. "Why tell me this? I don't need to know my victims before I kill them."

"No?" I challenged. I could feel the blood inside my body rise. "It is something you should know." My fingers tightened their grip around the sword. "Because," I said as I slowly turned to face him. "It is the last thing you will hear before you die!" I swiftly raised the sword and in one expeditious moment that was faster than the speed of light the sword touched the skin of his neck. There was no resistance as the sword moved easily through the tissue and bones and remained in my hand as I moved aside.

Slowly, I turned to see his face as he was unaware of what had just happened. His eyes were fixated on the sword I held, watching as the blood ran down the length of the blade. I watched, anticipating his death as the rest of his body gave away. The knees that held him buckled, leaving his body to drop to the ground. My eyes stared toward the three men who stood a few feet away. Did they want some of this as well? If so, I would surely not want to disappoint them. I supposed they were surprised by the sudden attack they turned and fled in different directions.

In the distance, the vampires moved fast behind the treacherous beasts. The vampires would end this final battle. Quickly I ran to the spot where I last heard Jason and Heather.

I passed by Adrianna who had killed one of the werewolves. Her head snapped toward me as I approached. Even in the darkness, I could see the wildness in her blue diamond-like eyes as she dropped the stinky creature to the ground. I lifted up my chin quickly, she gave me a quick nod and joined my side. As we neared the top of the hill I saw three other Lycans then Jason, Heather and Daniel locked into a deadly battle with five werewolves. The werewolves had circled around them.

Adrianna quickly moved to the right side and killed of the werewolves. Her precision in killing was as flawless and deadly as Richard's. Jason and Heather waged their attacked on another one of the werewolves. I focused on the larger one and headed straight for it. I held the sword down as I ran. As I leaped into the air, I raised the sword in attack position as the werewolf turned toward me. A quick twist of my body and the sword came down just underneath its jawbone, severing the head from the body. Quickly, I left my kill and headed toward Daniel. There were only three werewolves left. Jason and Heather were working on one of them together. Adrianna had taken on the other, which left the one Daniel battled. I glanced around and saw Richard on the way to help us. Behind him Casey and Nathaniel were approached.

My attention quickly changed as I heard Daniel yelp out in pain. Fear and horror gripped my heart as I watched his body go airborne. My heart froze when he landed on the ground with a loud thud. The stinky creature moved in to finish his kill. To kill my beloved. Fire flamed in my veins as I ran toward the wiry haired beast as fast as humanly possible. My warning growl was transformed into a scream as its attention turned toward me. Again the sword rose in my hand and my arm moved with great strength. It was a flawless kill as the blade struck the creature. I glanced back to Daniel as he was in his human form lying on his back.

My heart beat wildly, pounding fear in my ears. Fear and pain mingled my mind and heart. I rushed toward him, dropping the blade at my side as fell to my knees. My eyes widened in horror as I saw the red blood running down the corners of his mouth. As my eyes traveled further down that is when I noticed it; a piece of wood that was pierced through his chest.

"Daniel!" I screamed. Hot tears threatened my eyes.

His eyes lifted to mine, and then slowly drifted to his chest. With trembling fingers I reached for the wood. My heart pounded so loudly I could barely hear him speak.

"NO!" He breathed out in a cough. "DON'T! It's too close to my heart!"

"No! No! No! You can heal! You will be alright!" I screamed hysterically.

"Julie... listen... to me." He paused in agony as his eyes fixed on something behind my shoulder.

Casey, Nathaniel, Adrianna and Richard had formed a circle around us.

Tears streamed from my eyes. "Daniel, you can't die! You can't leave me! You just can't!" I cried loudly.

He forced out a weary smile. "Julie," He began. "I have.... always loved you...will always... love you ...forever." He held his hand up and pressed it against my cheek.

Richard moved closer to Daniel and fell down on one knee. Daniel grabbed his hand and looked him sternly in the eye. I watched in horror as Daniel inhaled a deep and ragged breath.

"She means the world to me. She is all I have left in this world to give." He coughed and more blood ran from his lips. "Protect her. Love and honor her. Promise me... brother."

Richard nodded.

"NO!" I screamed. "NO! YOU CAN'T DO THIS! Daniel PLEASE!" My heart had shattered. Oh dear Fate! My world had just ended. "PLEASE!" I whined as the tears flowed from my eyes in quantities that made it difficult to see.

Mortified, I watched as Daniel's eyes began to roll upward. "Promise me!" He strained to Richard. "She will be your life!" Daniel said firmly through gritted teeth.

"I promise." Richard said firmly.

"NO!" I screamed again. "DO SOMETHING! SOMEONE!" I cried out pleading for anyone to help. It was as if no one heard my cry. No one heard my plea. I couldn't understand why they didn't know he was dying. Nor could I understand why anyone wouldn't stop him for leaving this world.

"Julie...it's.... all right." Daniel forced out as his death filled eyes turned back to

me. "My purpose... has been fulfilled. You have made ...me the happiest ...man." He paused gathering the last will of his life. "Not even in death shall my love die for you."

It was then that I heard the most horrifying sound I have ever heard before in my life. The last breath as it left his body. My breath froze. My thoughts were mingled as I stared down at his lifeless body. Panic took over. I couldn't live without him. I knew I wouldn't survive.

About The Author

T.L. Mitchell now lives in Florida. Her love of reading paranormal romances has led her to begin her own series of wolf shape-shifter romance novels. In October 2009, Mitchell's website won the P&E Award of Excellence. Her works include *Dark of kNight* and *Fall of kNight*(Book 2 in the kNight Series) and *The NightMan*. Her future releases include a fantasy novel and a sci-fi romantic action novel.

In July 2010, Mitchell won her first writing contest with *Silver Moon*, a short horror story to be published in the *Undead Nation Anthology* by Zilyon Publishing. The net proceeds from the anthology are donated for cancer research.

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